

How do you know? The centrality of Bion's container/contained concept in developing the capacity to think and to know

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Abstract

This article examines the ideas that led Bion to his concept of the container/contained, and highlights its centrality in his theory of thinking. It focuses particularly on the question of how one comes to 'know' something, either about oneself or about an object outside of oneself and, with this in mind, investigates the best and worst-case scenarios for the mental development of the infant. Three case vignettes are provided as examples of how varied the dynamics of the container/contained can be, portraying some of the more disturbing elements, but also underlining that the container/contained is a space where meaning is made, creative thinking becomes possible, and where the root of growth and consciousness takes hold.