Providing the means for thinking: The seeds of a Bionian theory of education

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Abstract

The purpose of the present paper is to shed light on Bion's conception of education, a conception which has never been discussed by other researchers. The reason for that resides in the fact that Bion did not address this topic in a specific work. This does not however mean that he was not interested in education. On the contrary this topic is reflected in most of his theoretical and clinical works. Bion's legacy includes numerous "seeds" or, to use his terminology, "wild thoughts" pertaining to the problem of education. Therefore, I have tried here to search for these thoughts to finally integrate them into a Bionian theory of education. One of the fundamental premises of this theory is that, unlike what the Freudian drive theory has suggests, the aim of education is not freeing the infant from his/her self destructive self-part (narcissistic omnipotence, egoistic instincts) in order to transform him/her into a mature social being. But, the educational objective is rather to provide him/her with the thinking means, or alpha-function, to help him/her grow further.

Key Words: Education, containment, alpha-function, valency theory, Bion

"La réponse est le malheur de la question" (Maurice Blanchot).

To my knowledge, there is no work discussing Bion's ideas about education. As can be noticed, neither Lopez-Canov's (2003) "The Dictionary of the Work of Bion" nor Sandle's (2005) "The Language of Bion," has an entry for education. The reason behind this omission may be the fact that Bion has not addressed directly this topic, in spite of the fact that he spent a large part of his life teaching seminars around the world. Nevertheless, Bion's legacy includes numerous indirect references to and suggestions about how he regards education. These ideas are spread all over his work, like "wild thoughts" waiting for a thinker to contain and think them.

In the present study, I have therefore undertaken the task of exploring Bion's work searching for these wild thoughts. The main purpose is to gather and integrate them hoping to be able to unearth a Bionian educational theory. However, before starting on this task, I will first, for the sake of comparison, try to introduce briefly the psychoanalytical view about education, focusing principally on Freud's ideas.

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I. Freud and Education

Freud himself recognized that in spite of its importance, education is not a subject that psychoanalysis has sufficiently addressed. In his few attempts to tackle the question of education, he compared it to psychoanalysis, arguing that the two have a common denominator. That is, both, psychoanalysis as well as education recognize the importance of infancy for adult development. To put it differently, both believe that it is the infant that makes the man, or that the child is the father of the grown man. That is why psychoanalysis, like education, attaches particular importance to infancy. For psychoanalysis, infancy is the source of both future mental stability and disorder. Likewise, from the educational point of view, infancy is the field where the seeds of knowledge and social adaptation and stability are first spread by society.

Although he did not put it clearly, Freud seems to support the idea that unlike other animals, man is born physically and psychically incomplete and immature. It is a human characteristic that man's physical and psychic transformation and completion process will continue after birth, and may last until the person's death. In his famous *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud (1905) described the infant as a polymorphous pervert, dominated by the pleasure principle. Freud referred to this early condition as "narcissistic omnipotence." When under this primitive condition the infant's psyche is characterized by an omnipotent desire to satisfy one's instinctual (libidinal and aggressive) desires. The infant's commences its postnatal life as, explains Freud, an egoistic and savage instinctual being. Therefore, it has to be educated, domesticated and transformed in order to become a civilized being.

Freud did not present any clear educational *manifesto*, confining himself to some general prescriptions. To repeat, he suggested that since the infant's is born incomplete with an immature psyche, he has to be completed through education. The educator's task would consist in determining, through intuition and guessing, the infant's constitutional characteristics, what is happening in his psyche, and then providing him with enough love without losing one's necessary authority. That is, the educator, argued Freud, has to help the infant renounce partially his egoistic or narcissistic demands for instinctual (libidinal and aggressive) satisfaction characterizing primary narcissism following birth, and accept the necessary frustrations inherent in the reality principle. However, this is not an easy task, recognized Freud. The problem the educator is faced with in this case is how to help the infant move from the initial stage of narcissistic omnipotence to the one of *anthropos*, or from a stage governed by the pleasure principle to a stage where the reality principle reigns.

In other words, Freud believed that the task of the education, institutional and culturo-parental, is to free the infant from his own instincts, by regulating them, and orienting and helping him to defend against them within a stable institutional frame. Freud (1933) also reminds us that this task must involve a minimum of authority and constraint if it is to succeed.
The infant has to be constrained to learn controlling his instincts, until he/she has internalized the external authority and acquired thus a super-ego. However, Freud warns his readers that constraining the infant does not mean suppressing, annihilating or neutralizing the infant's primitive instincts. On the contrary, the infant should be made free to express and seek satisfaction of these instincts but not directly. That is, since these instincts are indispensable to the infant's survival, they should be satisfied through means accepted, valued, and promoted by society. In other words, Freud's work suggests that society does not only suppress the infant's pervert and asocial instinct; it has also to encourage and provide opportunities and outlets for a civilized instinctual satisfaction.

As an example of these means that allows this satisfaction, Freudian psychoanalysis favors the defense process called sublimation. Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) define sublimation as

\textit{a process postulated by Freud to account for human activities which have no apparent connection with sexuality but which are assumed to be motivated by the force of the sexual instinct. The main types of activity described by Freud as sublimated are artistic creation and intellectual inquiry. The instinct is said to be sublimated in so far as it is diverted towards a new, non-sexual aim and in so far as its objects are socially valued ones} (p. 431).

However it is useless to say that, as Freud himself pessimistically concludes, this mission can not always be accomplished, but it deserves to be carried out for the benefit of both the individual and the whole society.

Hence, to summarize, Freud compares education to psychoanalysis, arguing that both aim at the same objective: transforming the infant into a mature social being. This is done by freeing him/her from his self-destructive self-part (narcissistic omnipotence, egoistic instincts), and providing him/her with means to adapt to reality. Education involves thus a minimum of necessary authority and coercion. Although it is still criticized by some thinkers from different philosophical perspectives, this Freudian (Freud, 1930; 1933) conception of education has been echoed by a large number of other thinkers (see for instance, Ricoeur, 1965; Lyotard, 1988; Harendt, 1961; Castoriadis, 1990; Lebovici & Soule, 1970).

\section*{II. Bion the Educator}

Bion's work has been approached from various verticles. In some introductory works (Bléandonu, 1994; Symington & Symington, 1996, Eigen, 1998; Hafsi, 2001, Hafsi, 2003, Mawson, 2010) the reader is introduced to Bion the man, the psychiatrist, the psychoanalyst, the clinician, the mystic, the soldier, the writer, the artist, however, one Bion is still missing: the educator.
That Bion was not presented as an educator is due to the fact that his theoretical legacy does not include, like in the case of Freud, a distinct educational theory or *manifesto*. Bion also had only a relatively brief teaching experience at his old school at Bishop's Stortford. In spite of the good results he obtained through teaching and training of the swimming team, Bion was not satisfied of himself as a schoolteacher. This brief teaching experience was interrupted after he was asked to resign, because one of his student's mother notified the headmaster "that her son has been the victim of sexual advance from [him]" (Bléandonu, 1994; p. 37). Following this event, he left his teaching job to start a medical training to become a psychoanalyst. Since then he has never returned to an educational establishment. However, this does not imply that he was not interested in education. On the contrary, Bion devoted a large part of his life to education and training of psychoanalysts in individual and group supervision, analysis, group psychotherapy, and seminars. As revealed by a close reading of his clinical, and theoretical works, and his lectures during these seminars, there are numerous seeds, or suggestions, ideas and "wild thoughts" related to education. I have, in the following, gathered these wild thoughts, revealing a Bionian theory of education which was lying dormant within Bion's theoretical edifice.

**The aim of education: acquisition of an apparatus for thinking**

Each educational theory reflects a specific conception of Man, the object of education. As a Kleinian Bion believes that Man is not, as described by the Freudian drive theory, a voracious being in search of unconditional satisfaction of his instinctual needs and desires. On the contrary, Man is an object-seeking being. In other words, the aim of psychic activity is object relatedness. Man needs and seeks therefore the object, because he is born physically and psychically unfinished, and immature. Bion (1963) believes that the only mental equipment, or, metaphorically speaking, compass the neonate has to adapt to its new environment and deal with its early external objects is its arsenal of pre-conceptions. In *Element of Psychoanalysis*, he (Bion, 1963), distinguishes between "pre-conception" and "preconception." He defined the former as the analyst's theoretical preconceptions, beliefs, and presentiment, and regarded the latter as "a state of mind adapted to receive a restricted range of phenomena. An early occurrence might be an infant's expectation of the breast" (p. 23).

As suggested by Bion (1963), the neonate's intellectual equipment consists in the belief in and expectancy that there is an object on which it can rely. Due to its reduced equipment, the newly born infant is not only unable to manage its body and satisfy its needs, but it also lacks the means to attribute meanings to its sensuous and emotional experience. At birth the infant is projected in a world of, what Bion calls, sense impressions. At this stage, the infant's intellectual capability allows it to only sense, or feel the surrounding world without apprehending its meaning. This, suggests Bion (1962a), is due to the fact that it is not equipped with the right psychic equipment for that task. That is, it lacks what he calls a "thinking apparatus." Guided
by its pre-conception, the infant will search for the expected object to perform on its behalf the task of giving meaning to its sensuous impression. And the first object the infant would encounter is the breast.

In his *A Theory on Thinking*, Bion (1962a) postulated that thinking depends on two important factors: 1) the development of thoughts, and 2) the development of a thinking apparatus to process or think these thoughts. Mental disturbances may be linked to a lack of thoughts, lack of a thinking apparatus, or to both. Under favorable conditions, that is if the caretaker (mother, etc.) is physically and psychological available, the infant will in fact meet with the expected object (breast), experiencing thus what was predicted by its pre-conception. The experience, or realization of the existence of the expected breast will be translated into a "conception" of the breast which represents a higher level in the thinking process, and will lead to the development of a thinking apparatus. However, as discussed by Bion, the acquisition of a thinking apparatus is not as easy as it may seem. For even when the object is available, the infant can never avoid disappointment and frustration due to momentary absence of the object. An absent object is experienced and internalized by the infant as non-existing, or "no-breast," and therefore as a "bad" object which he has to deal with or think vainly due to the fact that he lack a thinking apparatus. This will increase the infant's frustration. However, if the latter's frustration tolerance capacity is sufficient enough this internal "no-breast" will become a "thought," and a thinking apparatus for thinking it follows. Thanks to this apparatus frustration will become more bearable, and the thinking apparatus will further develop. But, if the infant's capacity to bear frustration is not sufficient enough, the infant's primitive ego will have to defend itself by resorting to "projective identification" (Klein, 1946) to evacuate the internal "no-breast"—which has become indistinguishable from a "thing-in-itself"—and evade frustration. As a result no development of thinking apparatus will take place.

Bion's theory suggests that relationship between the infant and its early part-object is the prototype of future object-relationships and interpersonal relationships. The encounter between a teacher and his/her pupil and their educational relationship is an example of these relationships. Like the infant, the pupil enters the world of education with no other means than his pre-conception or expectancy of a good teaching object, the teacher. Due to a lack of an apparatus suited for learning and thinking the problems characterizing learning, the pupil is also unable to process and give meaning to his/her educational experience. He/she has therefore to rely on the expected educator-object for that.

Moreover, the pupil-educator educational encounter resembles also the infant-breast one. For in the case of the educational encounter too, the aim is to acquire an apparatus for thinking one's experience and adapt to society, for the child, and provide it, for the teacher. This is different from Freud's unilateral suggestion that education aims at civilizing the child by domesticating his/her instincts. What Bion's theory suggests is that the educational encounter is an
interactional process, which involves both teacher and pupil. The pupil must have a pre-
conception of the object, the need to validate it, and a sufficient capacity for tolerance of
frustration which is a factor inherent in any educational act. That is, the acquirement of an
apparatus for thinking does not depend on only the educator (object)’s will and ability, but also
on the pupil’s ego-capacity. Like the infant’s ego, the pupil’s ego should be not only able to
tolerate frustration, but also modify it into a more tolerable one. This implied, furthermore,
that the cause of any disturbance or breakdown observed in the educational relationship should
be sought in the pupil, the educator, or in both; this will be discussed later.

**Education and containment: Educator as a container**

In order to shed light on the interaction between the infant and his early object, Bion (1962b,
1963, 1967, 1970) proposed what is known as the "container-contained model" which he,
represented respectively by the symbols ℘ and ℋ. He suggested that the mother-infant
relationship can be understood in terms of a "container" (℘) containing a "contained" (ℋ), and
that this applies to any kind of symmetrical and asymmetrical interpersonal relationship. That
is, it can be used also to understand the dynamics of the educational interaction between the
educator and his/her pupil. For, like child-rearing, education also takes place between an
animate subject and object (infant-mother, educator-pupil, group-individual, analyst-analysand,
etc.), involving them in a containment relationship. The educator contains the pupils and may
reciprocally be contained by the latter.

Containment involves being ready to accept lodging parts (emotions, feelings, experiences,
ideas) of another’s self which that person could not tolerate or processed within his/her own
psyche, or psychic space. This implies that the host, or container is able to tolerate the presence
of these foreign self-parts, or beta-elements projected onto/into him/her by means of projective
identification, and go beyond that.

As summarized by Grotstein (2009a, 2009b), the ℘ must also be able to experience the content
of what the projector has trusted him/her with, then digest it. That is, the container must
digest and transform the projected content (ℋ) into a less painful and more tolerable one or, as
Bion (1962b) puts it, into alpha-elements (visual images, auditory and olfactory patterns), before
feeding it back to its owner, the projector. This kind of relationship between ℘ and ℋ
corresponds to a normal or positive one.

Bion (1962a) postulates also the existence of another kind of relationship between ℘ and ℋ,
namely a "negative" relationship. In this kind of ℘/ℋ relationship which is at the roots the
infant's inability to acquire a thinking apparatus and its consequent psychic disorder, the ℘ can
not bear and transform the ℋ entrusted with. The ℘ returns back the ℋ to its source (infant,
patient, etc.) undigested untransformed. This will prove to the source that it is really painful,
unbearable, not worth being preserved, and therefore is good only for evacuation by means of
projective identification. When repeated this kind of interaction between $\mathfrak{F}$ and $\mathfrak{f}$ will consequently lead to accumulation or agglomeration of beta-elements in a form of a "beta-screen" (characteristic of the psychotic patient and the psychotic part of the personality as discussed by Bion), saturation of the psychic space of the projector, and reinforcement of the apparatus of projective identification instead of an apparatus for thinking, or alpha-function.

If the educational relationship between an educator and his/her pupil can be understood in terms of the $\mathfrak{F} / \mathfrak{f}$ model, what are then the implications that should be retained? The most important implication is that a successful education, namely the one that has resulted in the development of an apparatus for thinking, or alpha function, is the result of a positive containment relationship between the educator and the pupil. This relationship depends on the ability of the educator to contain his/her pupil's ignorance, wondering, doubt and questions which he/she is not able to process alone. Like in the case of a mother and her infant, the educator must be able to give meaning to the pupil's emotional experience linked to not being able to think, by tolerating it sufficiently enough until he/she becomes able to understand what lies behind the pupil's difficulty to think. To put it differently, the educator should be able to tolerate uncertainty about the what he/she is being told by the pupil, what he is observing in the latter's attitude and behavior, and what he/she is experiencing in his/her relation to him/her. In a few words, he must have what Bion (1970), borrowing from the poet John Keats, calls "negative capability," or a mental state "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (p. 25). For as written by Bion (1992), the capacity of the mind depends on this unconscious-negative capability; its lack will lead the educator to saturate and therefore limit his/her as well as the pupil's mental space and the mental space between the twos with unnecessary and cumbersome explanations, interpretations, and rationalization of facts, and answers.

Of course, this negative capacity is not only a passive mental state. After having sufficiently and tolerably allowed the pupil's emotional experience to lodge inside his/her psyche or psychic space, the educator, like a positive container-mother, must transform this experience into a more tolerable and digestible before feeding it back to the pupil. The latter will then introject and identify with it in order to refer to it and be able to learn from it when confronted with similar problems or situations. However, it is noteworthy that transformation should not result into disformation of the contained, or the pupil's emotional experience. There should be "correlation" (Bion, 1962a) between the pupil's projected initial experience and the results of transformation, otherwise the pupil will not recognize, introject and identify with, and therefore will reject, or evacuate, through projective identification, what the educator has fed back to him/her.

**Education, language of achievement, and K-link**

Bion (1970) suggests that when feeding the results of one's transformation the container-
educator needs to use a "language of achievement", namely a simple and a clear language that will not saturate the pupil's psychic space, and inhibit the development of his/her thinking apparatus, or alpha function. Bion distinguishes three language types: a language that is a substitute to action, a language that is prelude to action and the language of achievement which is both "prelude to action and itself a kind of action" (p. 125). By being unsaturated, the language of achievement will lead to a feeling of frustration in the pupil, but, if the latter's toleration of frustration is sufficient enough, it will stimulate him/her to take action and complete the content that was fed back to him/her by the container-educator to resolve the problem he/she is confronted with.

Moreover, the language of achievement prevents thus the educational couple (educator and pupil) from constituting a "parasitic relationship," or a relationship where the pupil depends on the educator to create a third object (an educational setting or environment) which will be destructive to all three (the pupil, the educator, and the environment itself). This kind of relationship is opposed to the "symbiotic" and "commonsal" relationships. A symbiotic relationship, writes Bion (1970) is "a relationship in which one depends on another to mutual advantage" (p. 95). Whereas a commonsal relationship "is a relationship wherein two objects share a third to the advantage of all three" (p. 95). Since, as previously mentioned, education is basically an activity resulting from the interaction between the educator and his/her pupil, an educational relationship should be, like the one between the mother and her infant, symbiotic at the early stage, and commensal at the later stage. This implies, that to be satisfying, the educational act should also result in reciprocal learning. The educator should not only teach but also learn from the pupil, and grow further. In other words, their relationship should be based on what Bion called K (knowledge)-link.

To my view, this is possible only if the educator's educational activity is conducted in such way that he/she refrains from providing complete, ready or saturated answers which are already known to the educator and do not stimulate action for further thinking and transformation in the pupil. To put it differently the educator should avoid the urge to answer the pupil's question, and provide him/her with unsaturated information or tips to find his/her own right answer. Echoing the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot, Bion used to state that "the answer is the misfortune of the question", meaning that providing the answer puts an end to the need and attempt to ask questions, and the possibility to progress further. As shown by the seminars and lectures he gave in different places of the world, Bion (1978, 1980, 1987, 1990, 1994) himself applied what he professed. He always managed to avoid responding to his audience's questions directly and concretely; he was always evasive, but his responses were highly stimulating and evocative. Speaking the language of achievement, Bion intentionally frustrated his audience to avoid being trapped in a parasitic relationship, and therefore lead them to think by themselves. This suggests that, in Bion's terminology, a good enough educator
is a positive container; he/she does not provide the pupil with a ready-made apparatus for thinking, or alpha-function, but only alpha-elements that can be used for learning from experience and later develop one's own alpha-function.

**The group and education**

Educational relationship is not only the problem of two persons. Since it takes always place within a given socio-cultural or institutional setting, it concerns, is a function of, and is therefore dependent on the group and its dynamics. The work on groups by Bion (1961) contains important implications concerning how the group's mental state may influence the activity (including educational activity) the group members indulge in. Let me thus first try to briefly summarize Bion’s ideas (for a detailed discussion see Hafsi, 2004a).

According to Bion, when ever a group is formed, it is characterized by two diametrically opposed mental states, namely *work group* and *basic assumption group*. with the term group designating not the persons constituting the group, but the mental activity the 'group' is consciously and unconsciously engaged in. Work group characterizes a group which is reality-centered, that is, a group whose members are well trained to perform the group's basic task. When a group is operating based on the work group, it is characterized by cooperation among its members. Members cooperate, and are conscious of time, and convinced of the necessity of growth. Work group characterizes also a group dominated by the tendency to use scientific and rational means to deal and resolve the conflicts and problems they are confronted with. Organization, structure, verbal communication, capacity to tolerate frustration inherent in the task and learning from experience are other features of the work group. Bion regarded work group as the equivalent of the Freudian Ego (Hafsi, 2009a; 2009b).

Work group (WG) always coexists with the basic assumption group (baG). According to Bion (1961), baG refers to an unconscious mental state characterizing a group which has lost contact with the reality of its existence and is dominated by unconscious assumption and an "as if" mentality that influences and is reflected in its behavior and basic task. To put it differently, unlike WG which is conscious, baG is an unconscious group mental state characterized by a belief, feeling or assumption shared unconsciously by the whole group. Although this assumption is not based on reality, when operating under the influence of baG the group would behave "as if" it is obviously true. Therefore, the basic assumption will, according to Bion (1961), influence and suffuse everything the group would undertake and display: culture, rational activities, plans, leadership, and perception of in-group and out-group world. Bion adumbrated three basic assumptions, namely basic assumption of dependency (baD), basic assumption of fight/flight (baF), and basic assumption of pairing (baP).

Briefly speaking, baD consists in believing and actually behaving as if the group has met, not to perform its basic task, but to depend mentally and physically on an omnipotent and
omniscient leader. Under the influence of baD the group will thus expect the leader to be able to resolve every and any problem the group would face. Useless to say that this belief is not limited to some members of the group, but to the whole group, including the leader. The latter is unconsciously manipulated to believe in and identify with the basic assumption and enact it.

When baF prevails in the group, the dominant assumption is that they have met as if to fight or flee from an enemy present within or outside the group. Therefore, most of the group's activity and energy are devoted to the battle with this fictitious enemy. In this case the group selects or lets its most paranoid member emerge as a leader. This leader is then expected to detect the enemy, or create it if nonexistent, and then lead the battle towards destruction and stagnation.

Regarding baP, the group assumption would consist in waiting for the birth of a messianic object (messiah, leader, plan, idea, invention, law, etc.) that will save the group from mutual hatred, self-destructiveness, and madness. The task of giving birth is assigned to a couple within the group, which is then prevented from carrying it out. The messianic object should not appear; its birth will only increase the group’s fear, because of its failure to really save the group from its own madness. What the group functioning under the influence of baP unconsciously desires is not only the birth of the Messiah, but also a mental state characterized by hope which should not be fulfilled. Therefore, a large amount of the group’s energy is devoted to sharing and conserving eternally this hope. Describing in details these basic assumptions goes far beyond the present work; the author recommends thus the reader to refer, among others, some of the author's works (see for instance Hafsi, 2003, 2004a, 2004b).

As suggested by Bion (1961), and further developed by the author (Hafsi, 2000, 2002, 2003), baG comprises two fundamental aspects or components: a behavioral component and psychical component. The behavioral component corresponds to the manifest or observable activity of the baG, whereas the psychical one corresponds to the latent or the unexpressed aspect which can not be directly apprehended by our senses. This distinction between the two aspects is indispensable to understand the relationship between WG and baG.

As discussed by Bion (1961), WG coexists always with one type of baG, the one that is associated or related to the task the group is indulged in. Moreover, Bion suggests three possible types of relationship between WG and baG, the author (Hafsi, 2003, 2004b) called "integrative relationship", "obstructive relationship", and "rigid relationship." In a normal, "healthy" and well-functioning group it is the integrative relationship that prevails. In this case, WG combines with the psychical component of a given baG, the behavioral component being contained by what Bion called the "specialized work group" (SWG) which is a function of WG fulfilled by a subgroup --Bion does not distinguish between SWG function and the subgroup fulfilling it (for a detailed discussion of this concept, see op. cit.). The function of SWG consists in containing the baG so that it does no interfere with the WG, suppressing its behavioral
component and making available the psychical component for the latter. This allows the group to keep in touch with the reality of its existence, giving thus priority to its basic task.

The other two types of WG-baG relationships characterize dysfunctional or pathological groups. As discussed elsewhere (Hafsi, 2009a; 2009b), rigid relationship is characteristic of neurotic and "perverse groups" (Long, 2008). Unlike in integrative relationship, in a rigid WG-baG relationship, WG is, regardless of the nature and the task, rigidly associated with only one baG, with other being uncontained and repressed into the "protomental system" (Bion, 1961) due to a defective or failed SWG (Hafsi, 2008).

Obstructive relationship is associated with psychotic groups wherein WG has been overtaken by baG to a point where the group has almost lost contact with the reality of it very existence as a group, and has sunk into fantasy and delusion.

Bion’s group theory has important implications for the understanding of educational institutions and groups such as schools. Seen from Bion's perspective, a school is effective or functional if, as discussed above, it is able to positively contain the learning child (pupil, student, etc), and help him/her to acquire a thinking apparatus. Of course, not all schools are characterized by a positive containment capacity. This capacity depends on the school's (as a group) mental state. The mental state suggested by Bion's theory is the one where the WG and baG interact in an integrative relationship. In other terms, a school able to contain its pupils' emotional experience of learning is a group where WG has integrated the psychic component of baD. This component is indispensable for the educational task. For educational task involves two persons (educator and pupil) in an asymmetrical relationship wherein one has a certain knowledge that he/she is willing to transmit, and the other is seeking to learn it from its possessor. This educational task can not be undertaken if this "group of two", as Bion would call them, are not receptive to and unable to display a dependency mentality. The pupil has to depend on the educator who in turn has to respond to the latter's dependency demand, and the educational group-as-a-whole has to be receptive to, encourage, and promote this dependency mentality.

Of course, this does not imply that WG in an educational setting needs only baD psychic component. Education, at schools for instance, includes not only teaching, but also promoting curiosity and competition. Therefore, depending on the aspect being promoted, psychic component of baF and baP are also used to reinforce WG. When the aim of educational task is to promote curiosity in the pupil it is the baP psychic component that is integrated with WG. When the goal of the educational task evaluation of pupils and competition (through examinations, for instance) that is aimed by the educational task, then it is the psychic component of baF that will coexist with the WG in an interactive relationship.

As discussed above, this integrative relationship between WG and baG at school, implies that school, as a group, is receptive and tolerant enough of all the different baGs, and is able to
contain them, because they are indispensable to WG and the educational task in general, and therefore to the growth of the whole school including pupils and educators.

Being tolerant of all the baGs means also that the SWGs are operant at school. For it is the SWG which contains the inoperant or the latent baG of its speciality. To repeat, there are three possible SWGs; each SWG contains one baG. Containing the baG involves neutralizing its behavioral component so that it does not spread to and contaminate the whole group (school or classroom), and supplying its psychic component to the group to reinforce WG.

Every healthy school has its SWGs for undertaking this task. For instance, the school cultural clubs-circles are subgroups that fulfil the function of a SWG for the baP. The Class for Handicapped Children (CFHC or yohgogakkyuu in Japanese), the infirmary, counselling room fulfil the function of SWG for baD. The role of SWG for baF is played by the school sport circles and clubs. Therefore, if CFHC, the infirmary, or counselling room are effective as SWGs of baD, they must be able to neutralize the latter preventing it from crossing the borders of the "special" room where it is to be confined. This applies also to all other school SWGs (cultural clubs-circles and Sport clubs-circles). If these SWGs succeed in their containment function, the whole school and its WG function will be preserved, and consequently the educational task successfully undertaken. But if the SWGs fail in their containment function, the baGs will grow to a point where the whole school and its WG function is contaminated and obstructed by them. This has for consequences, among others, all those discontents that are known as school breakdown, class breakdown, decrease in motivation and interest in learning, bullying and its destructive consequences, such as school truancy, suicide, school refusal, etc.

I am not implying here that the group or the school is the only cause, denying the role played by the individual. In fact, the school's mental state represented here in terms of the relationship between WG and baG, is only one factor. As suggested by Bion's idea concerning the etiology of mental disease, the other factor is the pupil's tolerance capacity of the frustration experienced under a rigid relationship and obstructive relationship between WG and baG. Concerning rigid relationship, WG will combine with one baG to suppress the two others. For instance, when WG combine with the psychic component of baF, the baD and baP will be suppressed and confined into the protomental system. Therefore, those pupils who have a "pairing valency", or "fight valency" (see Hafsi, 2006 and 2010) will experience frustration, because they are deprived of their sole means to relate to other people around them as a result of this combination of WG with baF. However, if their toleration capacity is sufficient, they will use their secondary or "auxiliary valency" to form interpersonal bonds and adapt to school, and, even if temporarily, protect themselves from the discontents mentioned above. Those who will in this case suffer from this rigid relationship and display symptoms associated with suppressed (protomental) dependency and pairing, are those having a "minus valency structure" (op. cit.). These persons have insufficient auxiliary valencies and a low capacity of frustration tolerance frustration. The
only solution left to them to escape from this frustrating experience is to resort, for instance, to school refusal or withdrawal from school to one’s room, even if this choice is often experienced and described as painful when they have managed to meet a psychotherapist or counsellor. One wonders why do these pupils make this choice, if it is really painful? As discussed elsewhere (Hafsi, 2004b; Kurosaki, 2005), by withdrawing from school and suffering from feeling of isolation and rejection, those pupils aim unconsciously at changing the school’s mentality so that the psychic component of the repressed baGs (as a result of a rigid relationship) are allowed to be expressed. For only when the school has reintegrated these component can those pupils have the opportunity to get bound to others and the school-as-a-whole through their dependency or pairing valency. Hence seen from this perspective, those mental discontents characterizing school are the result of the attempt, made (on the behalf of and with the help of the group) by those who were determined by their valency structure to suffer, in order to restore to the group the mental state characterized by an integrative relationship between WG and baG.

Does this imply that, since the sick or maladjusted pupil is trying to help the group restore its stability, we have to encourage pupils in their pathological restorative choice? Of course, not. Because, this encouragement task does not lead to the desirable results. As suggested elsewhere (Hafsi, 2009b) any therapeutical or consultative intervention should have for object not only individual pupils but also the whole school. When it is the school that needs and seeks the intervention, the goal would be to help it be aware and understand its rigid functioning (that is, relationship between WG and baG), and develop its toleration capacity towards the repressed baGs, namely baD and baP in the example above. Since it is more frequent to have in our consulting rooms more individual pupils than the schools they belong to, a therapeutical intervention in this case would have for main goal helping the pupil to acquire a healthier valency structure, that is a structure composed of one predominant or "active valency," and secondary or "auxiliary valencies" (Hafsi, 2010). In the example cited above, the pupil will have to acquire in his/her therapeutical relationship with the therapist, fight, flight and pairing valencies, besides his/her active dependency valency. Because, only a healthy valency structure can insure him/her a better adjustment to the educational group (school) and its different mental states and their characteristic emotional turmoil, and enhance his/her toleration capacity. Hence, it is on this awareness by, and change of the school, and on the pupil’s adjustment to the latter that the success of the educational task depends.

**Conclusion**

Although psychoanalysis has not dealt directly with the problem of education, there are numerous suggestions about the meaning and the purpose of education in the work of many psychoanalysts. In the present paper, I first discussed briefly Freud’s suggestions, then I turned
to Bion's ideas and their implications for education. According to Freud, the objective of education, like for psychoanalysis, is transforming the infant into a mature social being. This transformation aims at liberating the infant from its self-destructive self-parts (narcissistic omnipotence, egoistic instincts), and protecting society from them. This does not merely mean that these parts of the infant are repressed, but are only neutralized and canalized towards different objects and aims. This canalization process is the result of sublimation. Education provides the infant with the means and the object to sublimate, or satisfy, in a way acceptable to society and the superego, his egoistic and perverse instincts. Education must involve thus a minimum of necessary authority, discipline and coercion.

Like Freud, Bion also did not have a clear educational *manifesto*. However, his theoretical legacy includes several ideas that are related to education and the educational act. By integrating these ideas, I have tried, in the present work, to unearth some fragments of a theory that was lying in the background of Bion's clinical and epistemological work.

There is no indication that Bion has accepted or rejected Freud's theoretical ideas, but this unearthed rudimentary theory shows that Bion would, had he tried, to approach education from a vertex completely different from Freud's one. Bion suggested that the mother-infant relationship can serve as a model for every kind of interpersonal relationship, including the educational one.

Using Bion's (1970) container-contained model, I have tried thus understand the educator-pupil relationship also in terms of a $\mathcal{P}$ containing a $\mathcal{S}$. Like in the case of mother-infant relationship, the goal of education is to help the pupil develop an apparatus for thinking (alpha-function) his/her experience, and, consequently, adjust to his/her socio-cultural environment. However this does not mean that the educational relationship is a unilateral but an interactional process. A growth-inducing educational relationship is a symbiotic one; it benefits both pupil and educator. It involves actively therefore both educator and pupil, requiring of both of them a sufficient capacity for toleration of ignorance. As a $\mathcal{P}$, the educator must contain and bear his/her pupil's emotional experience of ignorance ($\mathcal{S}'$), and those feelings resulting from the experience of learning which he/she could not contain and process by him/herself.

Moreover, containment consists, for the educator, in putting his/her alpha-function at the disposition of the pupil to transform the latter's undigested elements (beta-elements) into alpha-elements and then feed them back to him/her. These alpha-elements will serve as the foundation stones for his/her own apparatus for thinking or alpha-function.

What characterizes the educator, besides his willingness to put his alpha-function and his negative capability at the disposition of the pupil, is also the language of achievement which, as suggested by Bion, is an indispensable therapeutic and educational tool. The educator must be able to speak the language of achievement when feeding back the result of his/her containment activity. This includes refraining from answering the pupil's questions to avoid killing his
questions and curiosity, and consequently helping the latter develop his/her own alpha-function to be able to give meaning to his/her emotional experience in the absence of the educator, and learn from it for further learning and growth.

This does not imply that education is a matter of two persons, educator and pupil, but a matter of the whole educational and social group within which the educational task takes place. Bion (1961) suggests that the stability and growth of a group depend on the interaction between WG and baG, that is on the capacity of the WG to contain the baG with which it coexists and make use of its psychic component as a result of the SWG functioning. The success of an educational group or institution, is the results, in my own terminology (Hafsi, 2003; 2004a; 2008), of an integrative relationship between WG and the baG coexisting with it, and effective SWGs. On the other hand, the causes of the educational group’s failure to accomplish its task of helping the pupil acquire an apparatus for thinking, reside, depending on the psycho-social damages experienced by the whole group, in either a rigid or obstructive relationship. The former type of relationship is characteristic of a perverse and/or neurotic educational group, and the latter of a group that is no more in touch with the educational reality, namely a psychotic group pervaded by phantasies and illusions.

To conclude, in spite of Bion’s growing influence on the current psychoanalytic world, the implications his ideas may have outside the counselling room for other fields are still not sufficiently studied and understood. Bion’s legacy can be compared to a large stock full of “seed-ideas,” or wild and unsaturated thoughts waiting for a thinker (Bion, 1970) who would dare to think them and go beyond to stimulate other new wild thoughts-without-a-thinker. And that is what I have attempted to do in the present study.

References


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27, 99-110