



MentEd

Mentalisierungsbasierte Pädagogik

Erasmus+ Mentalization training for pedagogical  
professionals

# Module 1: Foundations of the Mentalization Approach

## Part 1



Module 1 Foundations of the Mentalization Approach

# Procedure for Module 1

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Part 1 Introduction to Module 1

Agnes Turner

Part 2 Theoretical foundations of the mentalization approach

Johannes Huber

Part 3 Concepts and development directions

Agnes Turner

Part 4 Forms of mentalizing

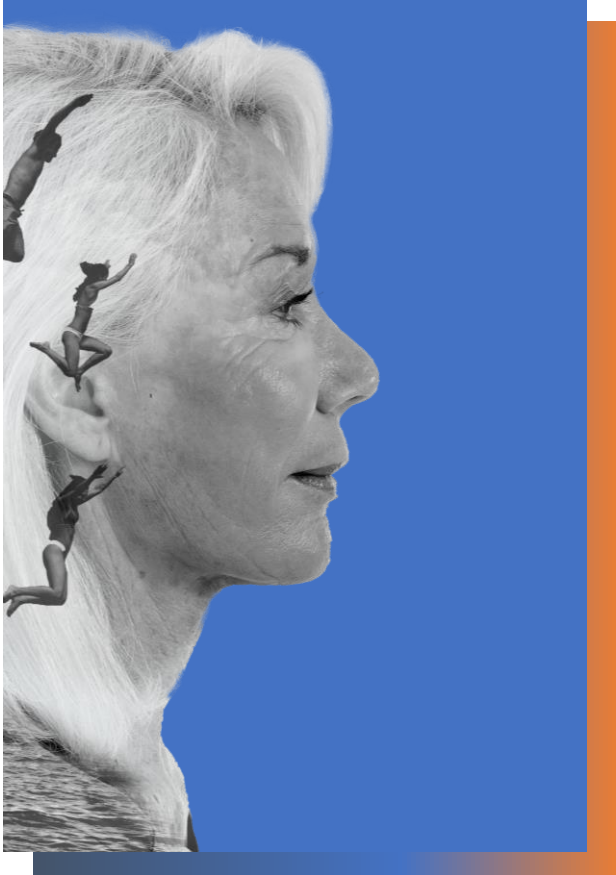
Noëlle Behringer & Larissa Schwarzwälder

## Module 1 – Part 1

# Structure

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1. Learning objectives
2. Introduction
3. Introduction to mentalization theory



Module 1: 1. Learning targets

# Learning objectives: Module 1 – Part 1

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## Theoretical foundations

- You know the developmental history of the concept of mentalization
- You can describe what mentalizing means and explain it by giving examples /referring to examples
- You know the most important aspects of mentalizing
- You know the development of the mentalizing ability
- You know the features of successful mentalizing

## An example from daily pedagogical work:

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You observe two four-year-old children while at play. The girl and the boy are playing for quite some time with those building blocks and they begin to build up a house. While one of them is building up one side of the house, the other one starts destroying it immediately and begins to build it up again with different building blocks. This procedure happens for several times. Increasingly, it comes to a wrangling over the building blocks until the girl starts throwing them. In doing so she hits the boy. He stamps his feet to the ground, his face blushes and he begins to cry....

# Practice: Mentalizing in everyday situations

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Exercise: Think on your own about examples and discuss them with your partner or in small groups.

1. What comes to mind when you are reading the given example?
2. What is going on with for children and what kind of feelings might arise in them?
3. What could happen next?

Working time: 20 min.

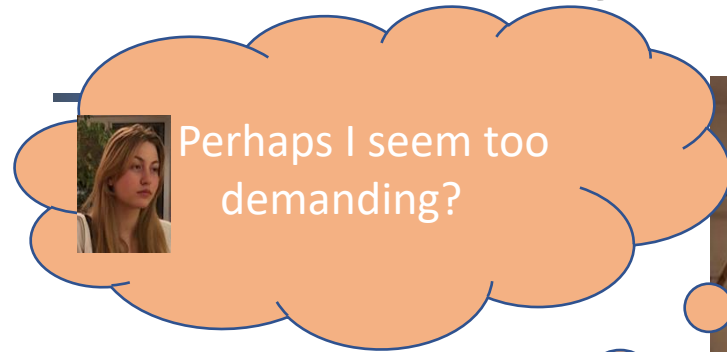
## From the ascribe ....

Oh man, he is boring!

She is always so impatient!



# To think about yourself and others ...





# ... to understand pedagogical relationships

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## **then....**

"We understand a person only by feeling with him, by reliving his emotions within us...."(Dilthey 1880/1960, S. 201)

## **and today....**

„If you can change the teacher's glasses to see learning through the eyes of their learners, that would be an excellent start.“ (Hattie, 2013, S. 298)

## ...and to understand one's own pedagogical attitude

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Therefore teachers should constantly evaluate themselves...

That's why teachers need to keep creating opportunities (repeatedly) to find out how their teaching really works. (Hattie, 2013, S. 299)

Herzog said critically about it:

*How can a teacher see and make visible a process that is not going on inside himself, but inside a pupil? (Herzog 2014, 131)*

The concept of mentalization offers a useful concept for this (case)!

Module 1



### 3. Introduction to Mentalization Theory

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## On the history of origins

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Psychoanalyst **Peter Fonagy** and psychoanalyst **Mary Hepworth** (Target) developed mentalisation theory at University College London in the early to mid-1990s.

In 1991, Peter Fonagy's article "Thinking about thinking" describes the ability to "grasp conscious and unconscious mental states of self and others." (Taubner 2015, p. 9)



Peter Fonagy

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychoanalysis/people/peter-fonagy>

Mary Hepworth (formerly Mary Target)

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/psychoanalysis/people/mary-hepworth>

## 3.3 Conceptualisation of Mentalization Theory

Foundations and theories - *exemplary*

Psychoanalytical  
foundations

Psychic reality  
**Freud (1912)**

Theory of thinking, Containment  
**Bion (1962)**

Affect reflection and false  
self  
**Winnicott (1965)**

Social cognitive theory  
foundations

Theory of Mind  
**Baron-Cohen (1995)**



Fotorecht: Turner 2021

Anthropological  
foundations

Shared intentionality  
**Tomasello (2014)**

Epistemic vigilance. Mind & Language  
**Sperber et. al. (2010)**

Attachment theory

classical attachment theory  
**Bowlby (2011)**

Observation procedure  
"strange situation "  
**Ainsworth (1985)**



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A. Turner (Responsible for the module), in cooperation with N. Behringer, St. Gingelmaier, J. Huber, H. Kirsch und T. Nolte

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# Module 1: Foundations of the Mentalization Approach

## Part 2



# Learning objectives

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- You know important precursor concepts of the mentalization approach.
- You know about central historical and theoretical foundations of (early) child development (e.g. attachment, sensitivity, etc.) and you can understand and describe in particular the developmental and interactional processes that lead to the ability to mentalize.

## Module 1: Theoretical foundations of the Mentalization Approach

# Structure

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**I. Classical studies**

**II. Developmental psychology foundations 1 (general)**

**III. Developmental psychology foundations 2 (interaction theory)**

# I. Classical studies

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## **René Spitz (1887-1974): Hospitalism studies.**

Investigation of the effects of early mother-child separations on the development of infants in infant and foundling homes (in the absence of a substitute caregiver).

→ Without an available and sensitive caregiver, infants and very young children suffer irreparable damage to their overall development, even with good medical care (nutrition, hygiene).

(Spitz, 1965/1981)

# I. Classical studies

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**John Bowlby (1907-1990):** founder of classical attachment theory

*"Attachment is the feeling-based bond that one person makes with another specific person, linking them together across space and time."* (John Bowlby)

→ Attachment has an evolutionary adaptive advantage: the proximity of the attachment figure ensures protection and security and thus increases the probability of survival.

(Bowlby, 1969/1982)



# I. Classical studies

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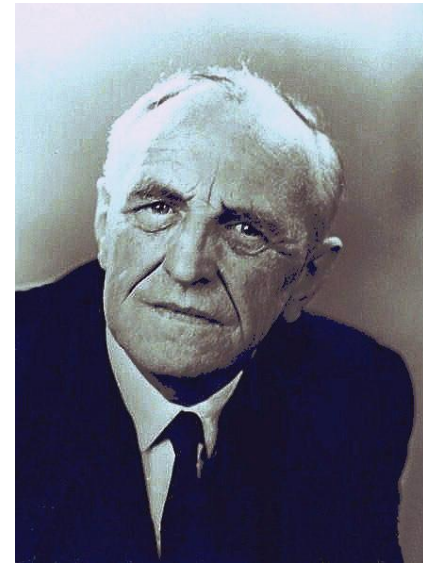


**Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999):** Canadian psychologist who developed the methods for empirical testing of attachment theory.

- „Secure base“ concept
- Concept of „Sensitivity“
- Observation procedure “Strange Situation Test”

# I. Classical studies

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**Donald Winnicott (1896-1971):** Description of the central importance of the maternal mirror function for the development of the child's self ("the gleam in the mother's eye").

→ The focus is on *primary mothering, the holding function, the concept of good enough mothering, the transitional object and the true vs. false self.*

(Winnicott, 1971)



## II. Developmental psychology foundations 1

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**Reflection exercise: approx. 10 minutes**

→ Please reflect calmly on what you intuitively feel is needed for good child development? What experiences should people have, especially in early childhood?



## II. Developmental psychology foundations 1

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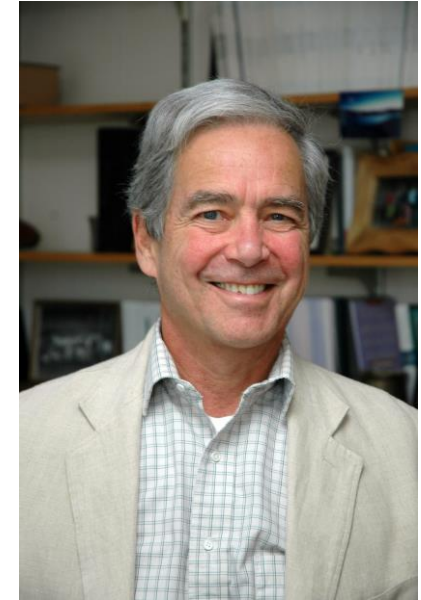


**Andrew Meltzoff & Keith Moore:** Early imitation learning ("neonatal imitation")

→ Imitation or imitation learning is a significant form of early social learning. Even newborns imitate facial expressions of adult models (e.g. sticking out the tongue or opening the mouth).

(Meltzoff & Moore, 1977)

## II. Developmental psychology foundations 1



**Edward Tronick:** "still face" paradigm

Standardised experimental paradigm for the study of children's regulatory capacity

→ The mother's "still face" violates the child's expectations of social interactions and triggers stress in the child by interrupting the process of mutual regulation.

(Tronick, 2017)

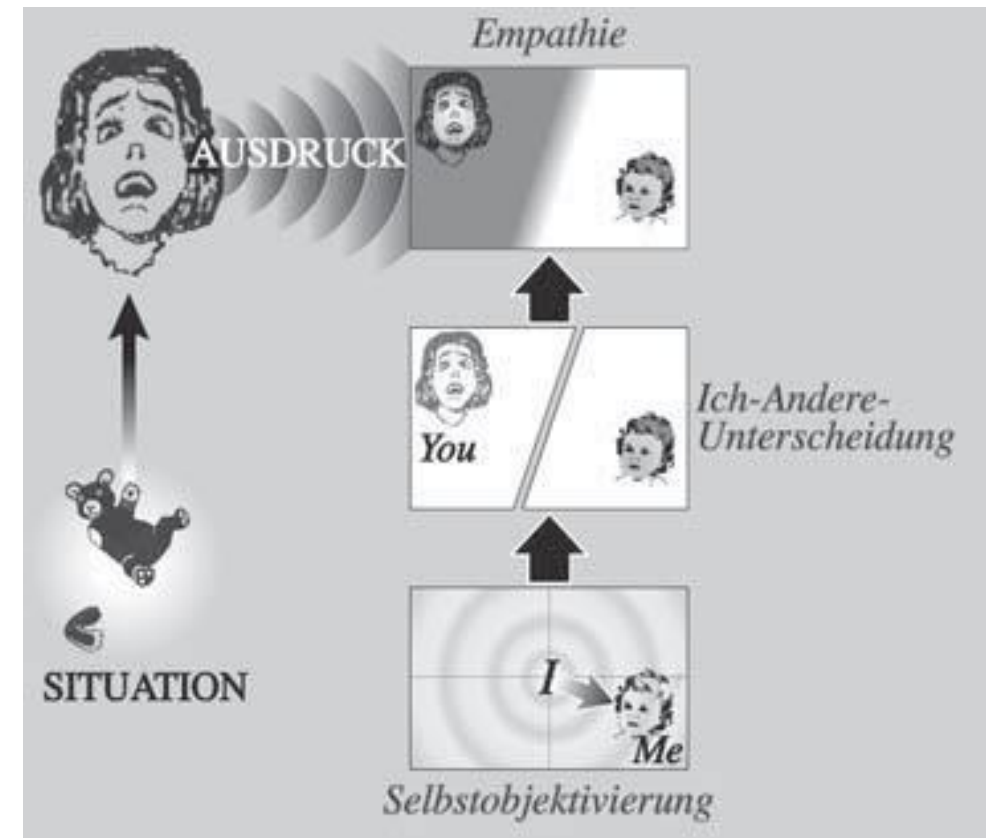
Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0>

## II. Developmental psychology foundations 1

### Developmental milestone "empathy"

The development of empathy presupposes the psychological demarcation of the I from the You (→ cognitive developmental step within the framework of the theory-of-mind).

The developmental step relevant to empathic experience takes place **around the middle of the second year of life**. It is characterised by the **onset of imaginative activity** and especially **the ability to objectify oneself**.



(Fig. from Bischof-Köhler, 2011, P. 270)

## II. Developmental psychology foundations 1

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### Attachment behaviour patterns in early childhood (in the Strange Situations Test)

**B-children (secure):** separation protest, crying, calling, active search for the attachment person, desire for physical contact; reassurance through physical contact with the attachment figure after their return, continuation of exploration after a short reassurance period.

**A-children (insecure-avoidant):** Little or no protest of separation; somewhat restricted play during separation; no desire for physical contact when the attachment figure returns; active distancing if necessary; but increased physiological stress parameters.

## II. Developmental psychology foundations 1

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**C-children (insecure-ambivalent):** Extreme protest of separation; insatiable crying, extreme agitation; no calming down after return of the attachment person despite physical contact; simultaneous proximity-seeking and aggression; no return to relaxed play.

**D-children (insecure-disorganised):** contradictory behaviours of seeking closeness and avoidance; behavioural stereotypes; freezing of movement; "absences", dissociative states.

(Grossmann & Grossmann, 2020; Strauß, 2014)

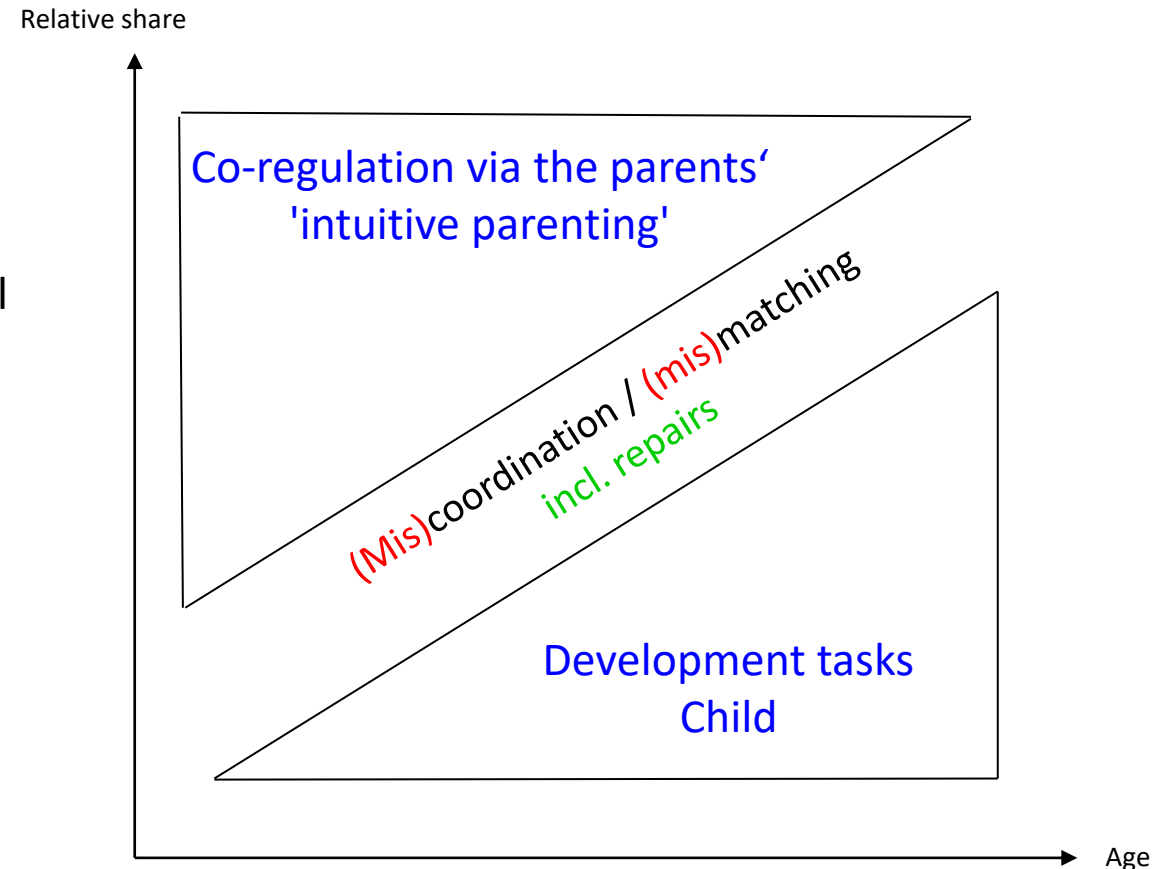
## III Developmental Psychological Foundations 2

### Attachment relationship as an interactive process

Human development takes place in relationships, in ongoing interactions between the infant with their social and material environment.

The infant actively participates in shaping these relationships and continually becomes more competent in the process.

Parents and toddler influence each other within the framework of coordination and adaptation processes.



(Fig. based on Thiel-Bonney, 2018)

## III Developmental psychological foundations 2

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### Intuitive parenting skills

Parents are not unprepared for the care challenges: intuitive parenting (Papousek & Papousek, 1987)

Implicit knowledge (innate behavioural readiness) about how to deal adequately with a child, which is activated automatically and does not have to be learned. I.e. caregivers (adults, but also older children) react immediately and according to the needs of infants, and adapt their (speech) behaviour to the still limited receptive capacity and relatively quick fatigability of infants (nurse talk, baby talk, motherese etc.).



## III Developmental psychological foundations 2

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### Attachment relationship and sensitivity:

Sensitive behaviour means listening to the signals of the child. It means that the person has to

- Perceive them**

- Interpret them correctly**

and respond to them

- promptly** (i.e. timely)

- appropriately** (i.e. adapted to the child's stage of development and temperament)

(Ainsworth, 1974/2020)

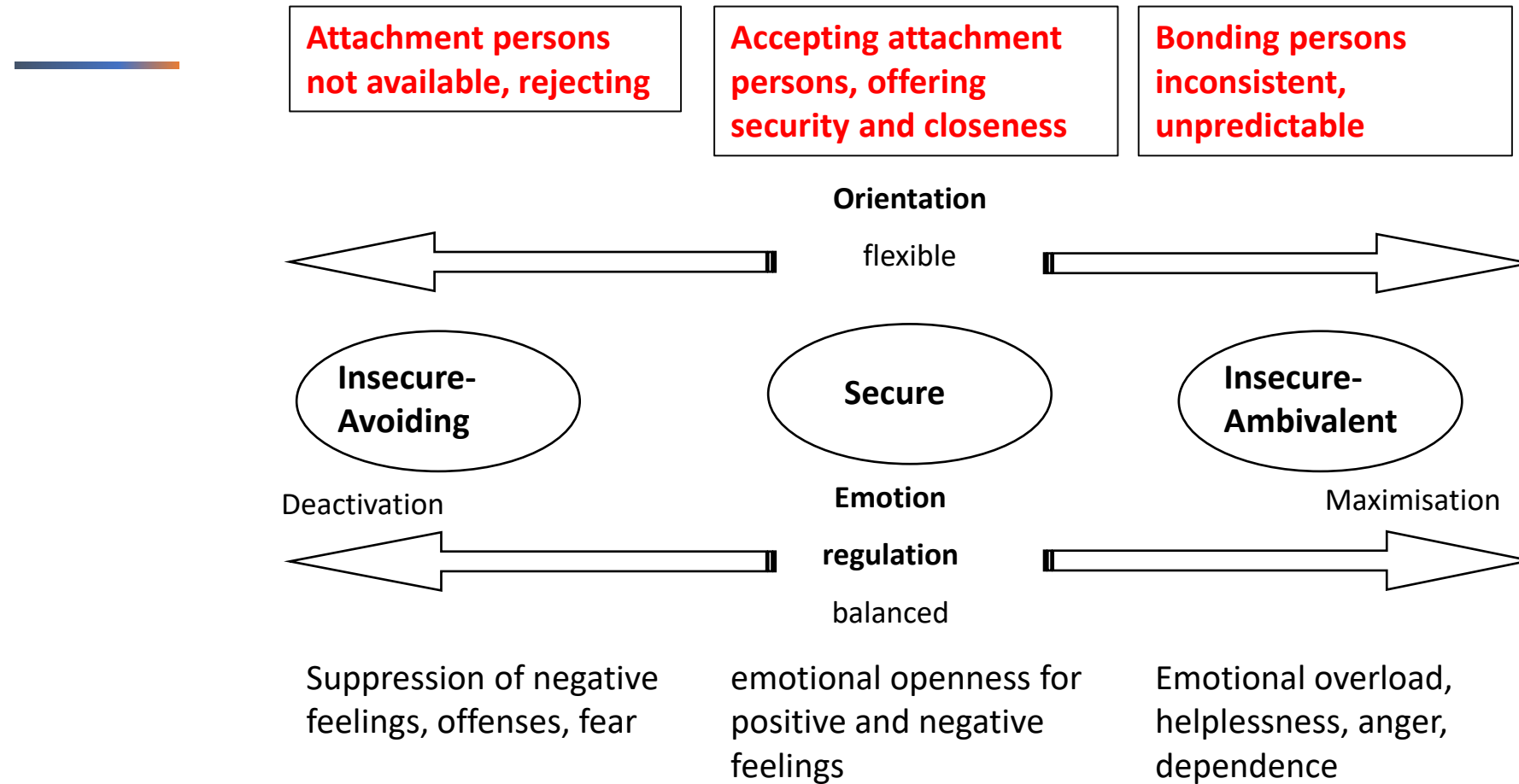
## III Developmental psychological foundations 2

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### Attachment patterns in adulthood (representations)

- Secure-autonomous binding representation (**F-classification**: "free-autonomous")
- Insecure-distant attachment representation (**D-classification**: "dismissing")
- Insecure-entangled/preoccupied attachment representation (**E-classification**: "enmeshed")
- Unprocessed attachment organisation - with unresolved trauma and/or loss (**U classification**: "unresolved")

# III Developmental Psychological Foundations 2



(Fig. after Gloger-Tippelt & König, 2016)

## III Developmental Psychological Foundations 2

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### **Theory of "containment"** (psychoanalytical concept of the Klein/Bion tradition)

The mother's ability consists of not only understanding and responding to the child's affects (especially negative ones), but at the same time of changing their response in such a way that they become bearable for the child.

→ Being understood and the vicarious coping (the "digesting") of the affect are internalised by the child.

## III Developmental Psychological Foundations 2

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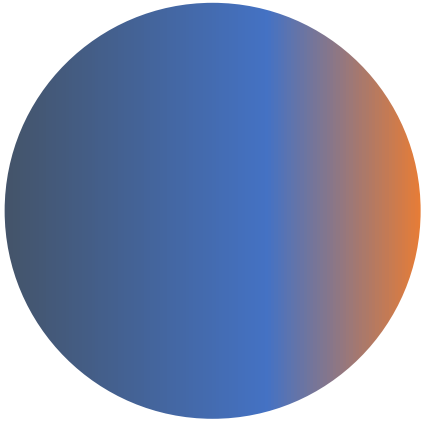
### "Affect containment" with different attachment representations of the attachment figures

- Securely attached BP: balanced mix of "mirrors" and change
- insecure-dismissive BP: distraction from negative affect ("coping") at the expense of mirroring
- Insecure-preoccupied BP: Reacting to negative affect but remaining entangled/high irritation (no coping is signalled to the child).

# Learning objective questions

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- Which attachment patterns in toddlers in the first year of life do you know, how can you recognise them in observation?
- What does displayed sensitive behaviour essentially depend on?
- How can one concretely imagine the social transmission of attachment patterns across generations?
- What psychological processes for coping with stress in young children and adults have you learned about?



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A. Turner (responsible for the module), with the collaboration of N. Behringer, St. GINGELMAIER, J. Huber, H. Kirsch and T. Nolte

Citation recommendation:

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With the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union



## Module 1: Theoretical Foundations of the Mentalization Approach

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## Module 1: Theoretical Foundations of the Mentalization Approach

# Image/Photo Sources

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### Part 1:

Slide 6, René Spitz: <https://mitfreudinberlin.jimdofree.com/gedenktafeln-mit-freud/ren%C3%A9-spitz/>

Slide 7, John Bowlby: <https://thebowlbycentre.org.uk/about-the-bowlby-centre/>

Slide 8, Mary Ainsworth: <https://psychology.tcnj.edu/ainsworth/>

Slide 9, Donald Winnicott: <https://psychoanalysis.org.uk/our-authors-and-theorists/donald-woods-winnicott>

### Part 2:

Slide 5, Figure from Meltzoff and Moore, 1977, S. 75

Slide 6, Ed Tronick: <https://thepowerofdiscord.com/>



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# Module 1: Foundations of the mentalization approach

## Part 3

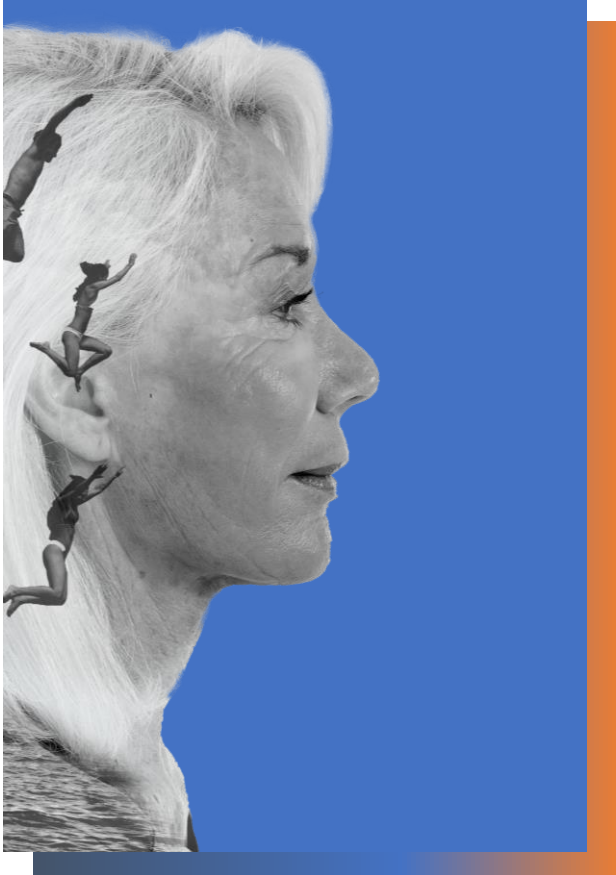


Module 1 – Part 3

# Structure

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3. Introduction to mentalization theory
4. Development of mentalizing
5. Successful mentalizing



## 3.4 What does mentalizing mean? (1)

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Mentalizing is a ...

- universal, elementary human ability
- that is shaped by early experiences with primary caregivers
- modified by later relationship experience (vgl. Michels 2009, S. 450)
- mentalizing is not a fixed skill,
- but a dynamic ability,
- that can be strengthened or impaired depending on the situation (vgl. Fonagy 2009, Schultz-Venrath 2013) 44

”

*"Mentalizing is an imaginative activity, specifically perceiving and interpreting human behaviour on the basis of intentional aspects."*

(Brockmann & Kirsch 2015, p. 13)



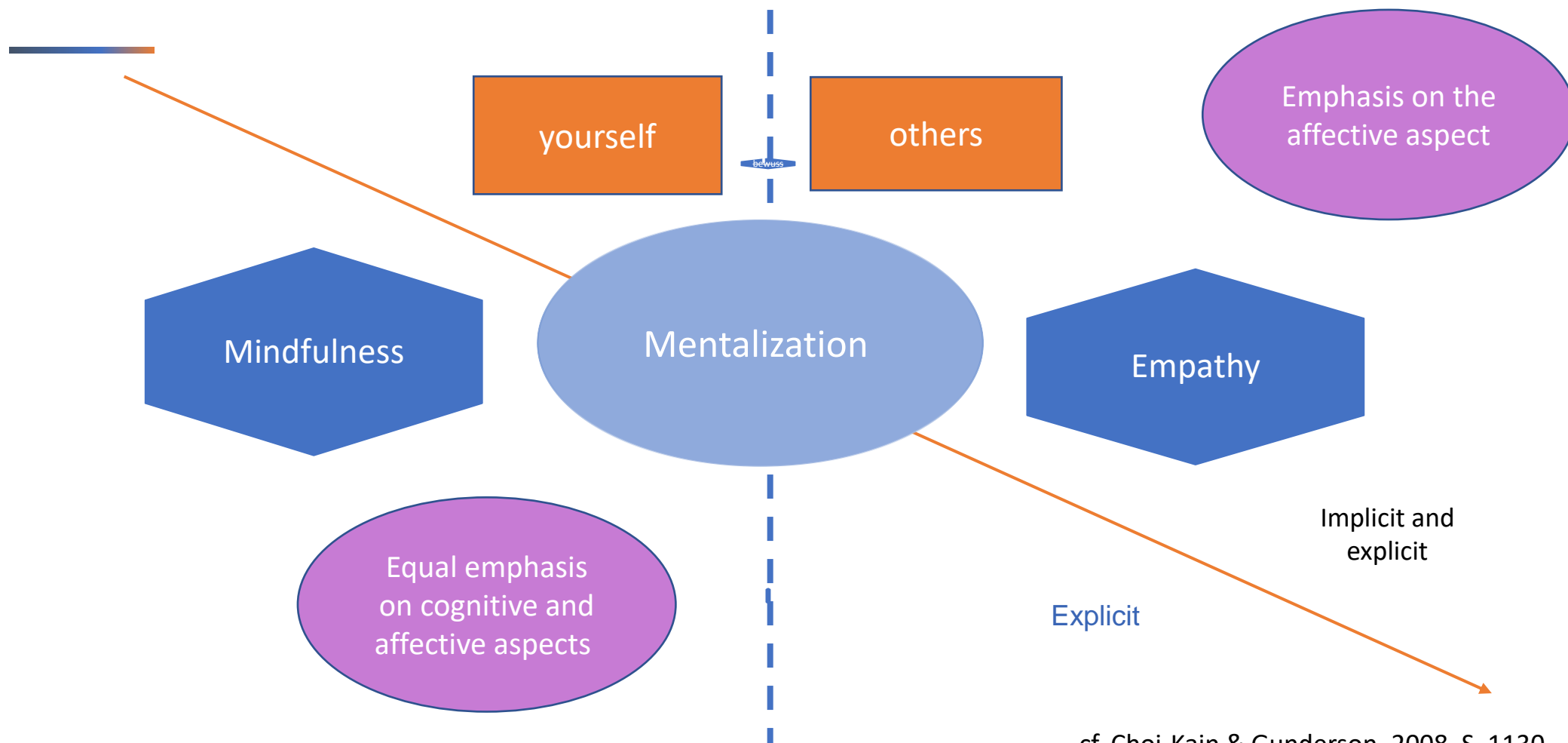
## What does mentalizing mean? (2)

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- Visualising mental processes
- Develop or maintain mindfulness of one's own mental states and of the mental states of others
- Understand misunderstandings
- Looking at oneself from the outside and looking at others from the inside
- Ascribing a mental quality or „cultivate mentally“

(Allen, Fonagy & Bateman 2011, S. 23)

# Mentalization and overlapping constructs



# Mentalization Theory as a bridge concept

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"Unlike many contemporary psychoanalytic constructs, the mentalisation theory is to be seen as a bridging concept that is also **empirically tested** and **further developed** beyond clinical aspects and yet has strong influences on the further development of psychoanalytic theoretical approaches." (Taubner 2015, p. 9)



## Exercise: *What is Mentalization?*

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Listen to Peter Fonagy: *What is Mentalization?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJ1Y9zw-n7U>

- Task:
- 1) Reflect and discuss the video in small groups.
  - 2) What questions and further thoughts arise in the group?
  - 3) Think of a pedagogical situation. How can the mental states of the participants in the situation be understood?

Working time: 25 min.

Module 1

## 4. Development of mentalizing

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# Mentalizing in *early* relationship experiences

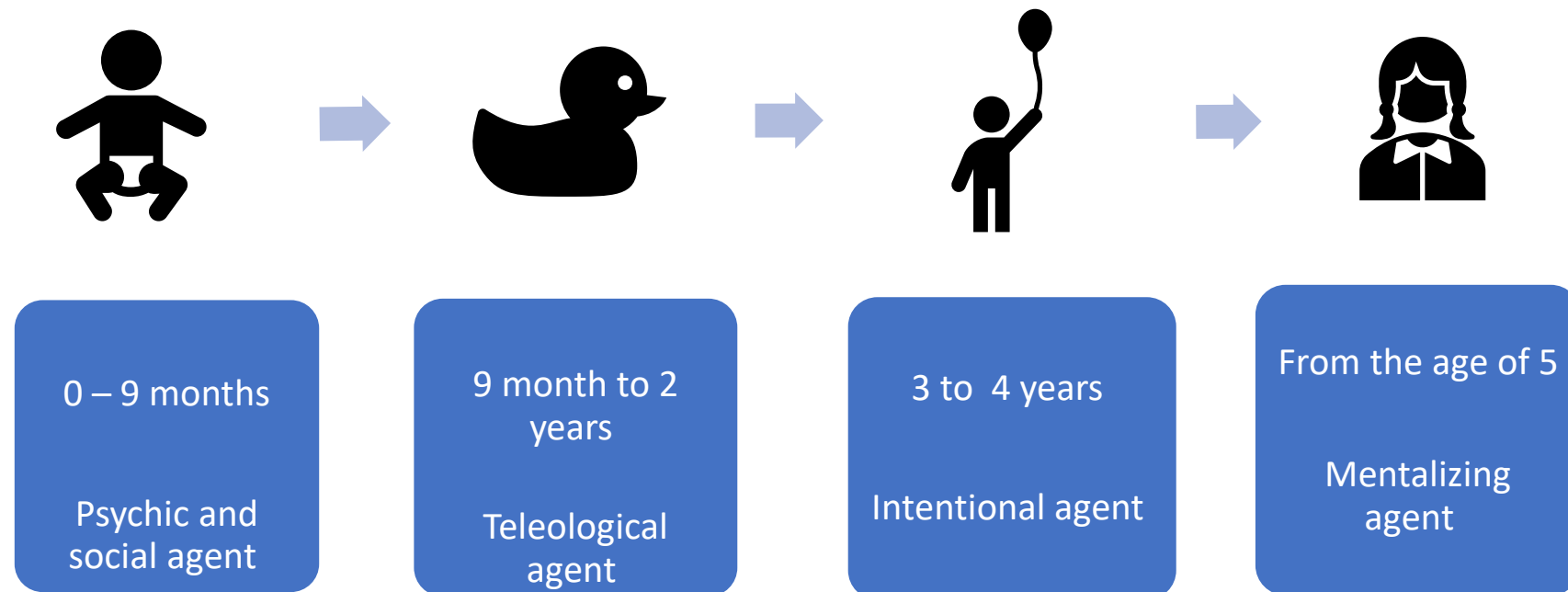
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The ability **to mentalize oneself** as well as **to mentalize others** is developed or strengthened only when a child **has been mentalized by caregivers**.

The self-reflexive and the interpersonal components enable "to distinguish inner and outer reality as well as inner mental and emotional processes from interpersonal ones".

(Fonagy & Target, 2003, p. 365)

## Developmental line of the self as an agent



(cf. Taubner, 2015, p. 38)

# Affect & self-regulation through mirroring

1. The child is scared



2. Expression of his state

3. Father mentalises the child's condition



5. The child forms secondary representations via affect reflections. They are linked to the primary states of arousal.

4. Reaction of the caregiver:

Congruence: he/she recognises the affect

Contingency: she reacts promptly

Marking: he/she takes up the affect in a weakened form and integrates opposing elements, e.g. smiling, comforting words, baby talk.

Affects can be externally regulated through markings.

6. Mental concept e.g. of fear = I experience something about myself, the self emerges.



## Teleological mode (from approx. 9th month - 2 years)

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"Children up to about 3 years of age are naïve realists, they unquestioningly hold the way the world appears to them to be true and accessible to all, they do not yet understand that their beliefs about facts are only assumptions that can meet or miss the real facts" (Bischof-Köhler, 2011, p. 330).

The toddler is able to understand his own and others' actions as being purposeful.

However, he does not yet understand the motives of the actions.

Only the observable can be understood.



Module 1: 4. Development of mentalization

# Sally and Anne Test

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<https://lehrbuch-psychologie.springer.com/videos/437>

Video »Theory of Mind«



## Psychological equivalence and As-If mode ( 3 - 4 years)

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### Psychological equivalence

Self and object are not separate.

Inner world and outer reality are perceived as identical.

Word = Thought = Reality

### As-If-mode

As-if-play as re-enactment of experiences and modification.

Externalising one's own inner states in the play.





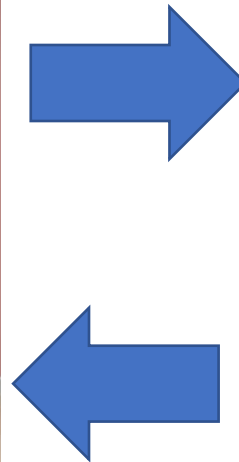
## Psychological equivalence and as-if mode ( 3 - 4 years)

### Example

Construction and collapse of  
the As-If mode

Child plays with his stuffed animals. The stuffed animals embody wild pirates and dangerous sharks. The child feels powerful and chases away the evil animals with all his might. But suddenly the imagined pirates and sharks seem to become real in his inner world. The child becomes frightened in his play, begins to cry and calls for his parents.

## Example of As-If-mode in the later play



## **Reflexive mode (from approx. 5 years of age)**

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The child explores the actions of others, increasingly understands their intentions, and increasingly understands themselves.

The child's ability to reflect has been strengthened because it has experienced being mentalized itself. In parallel, the child develops the cognitive ability to imagine thoughts and feelings of others and of themselves. The most secure possible attachment to the primary caregivers is central to this.

The ability to mentalize is a dynamic process that can and will be strengthened but also (temporarily) weakened over the course of a lifetime.

## Exercise for the development of mentalizing

Exercise:

- 1) Discuss the developmental stages in a small group.
- 2) Find examples for each developmental stage.
- 3) What is the significance of the stages for your pedagogical practice?

Working time: 25 min.





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Mentalisierungsbasierte Pädagogik

A. Turner (responsible for the module), with collaboration of N. Behringer, S. Gingelmaier, J. Huber, H. Kirsch and T. Nolte

Citation recommendation:

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Erasmus+ Mentalization training for pedagogical  
professionals

# Module 1: Foundations of the Mentalization Approach

## Part 4

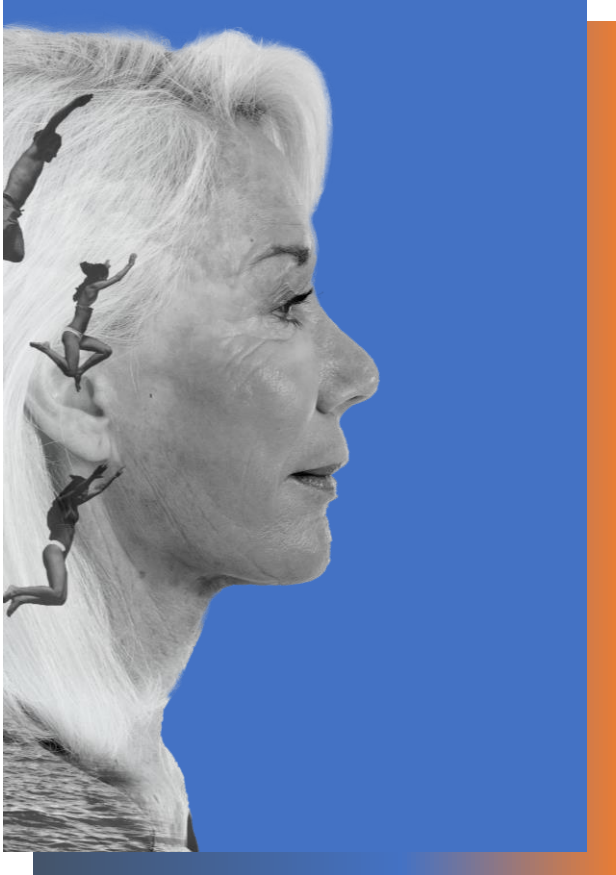
### Dimensions of Mentalizing



# Structure

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1. Effective mentalizing
2. Four dimensions of mentalizing
  - a) Automatic vs. Controlled
  - b) Other-oriented vs. self-oriented
  - c) Cognitive vs. affective
    - Excursus: Mentalized Affectivity
  - d) Internally-oriented vs. externally-oriented
3. Bibliography



# Learning targets

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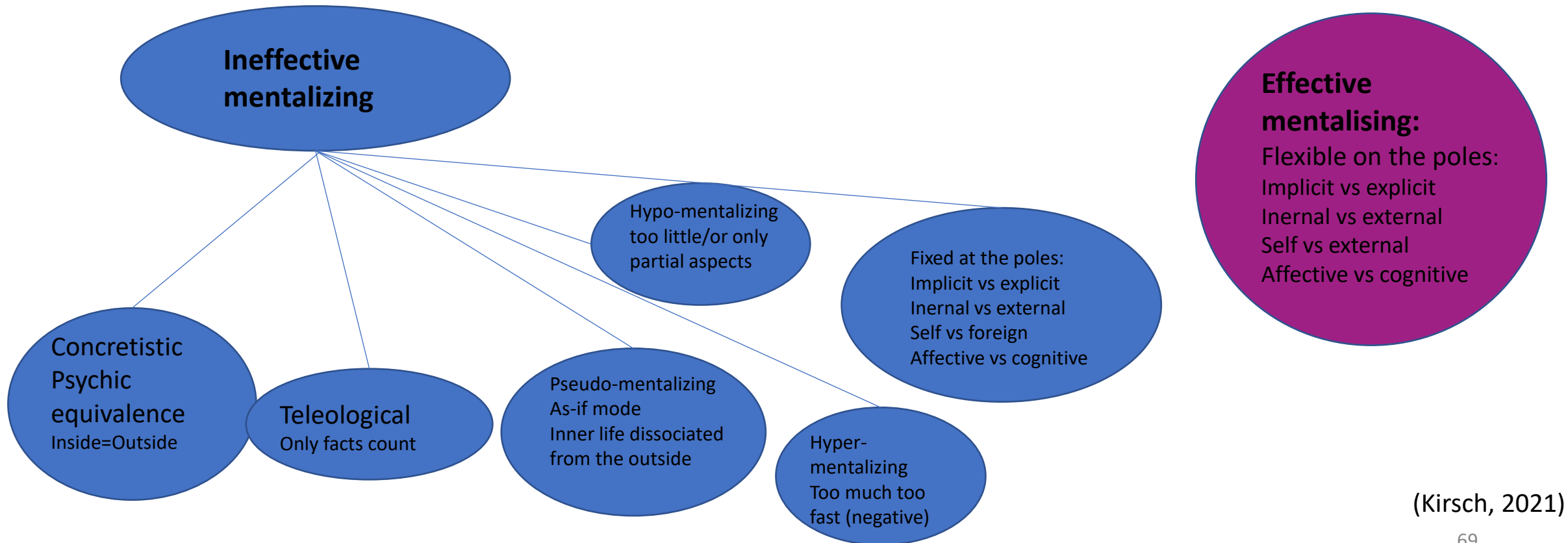
- Students can name the different forms of mentalizing
- Students can recognise the differences between effective and ineffective mentalizing
- Students can name and contrast the four dimensions of mentalizing (automatic vs. controlled, other-oriented vs. self-oriented, cognitive vs. affective, internally-oriented vs. externally-oriented)
- Students can describe mentalized affectivity

# 1. Effective mentalizing

---

- Recognising the complexity of social relationships (Taubner, 2016)
- Awareness of inner ambivalences and conflicts (Diez Grieser & Müller, 2018)
- Consideration of one's own attachment history (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998)

# Effective versus ineffective mentalizing



(Kirsch, 2021)

Forms of mentalizing

## 2. Four dimensions of mentalizing

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- Mentalizing is dynamic, intra- and interpersonal (Schultz-Venrath & Felsberger, 2016).
- 4 polar dimensions (Luyten et al., 2015):
  - Automatic vs. Controlled
  - Other-oriented vs. self-oriented
  - Cognitive vs. Affective
  - Internally oriented vs. externally oriented

# Automatic versus controlled mentalizing

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- Automatic mentalizing:
  - Quick, reflexive, direct (Taubner, 2016).
  - Comparable to intuition (Allen, Fonagy & Bateman, 2016)
  - Not consciously reflective (Fonagy et al., 2015)
  - Connection with inner working models (Knox, 2016).
  - Mental states are not consciously considered (Rottländer, 2020)



Forms of mentalizing

# Automatic versus controlled mentalizing

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- Controlled mentalizing:
  - Consciously reflective, verbalised (Sharp, 2016).
  - Requires reflection and effort (Fonagy & Bateman, 2015)
  - Conscious engagement with own and others' mental states (Fonagy, Bateman & Luyten, 2015)



## Forms of mentalizing

# Automatic versus controlled mentalizing



Example of controlled mentalizing in a social worker's reflection process on her relationship with her colleague:

"Somehow I notice that Petra is more withdrawn at the moment. I can't say exactly how or what is going on. She's still doing her work just as well as usual, but she's no longer up for a little chat. Maybe it's because of the argument with the boss the other day, I'm sure it's still working in her - it was really hard to get a kicking from him in front of the whole team."

Forms of mentalizing

# Automatic versus controlled mentalizing

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- Interplay between the dimensions = effective mentalizing (Rottländer, 2020)
- Mentalizing with increasing stress levels (Rottländer, 2020)

**Consequences for practice:**

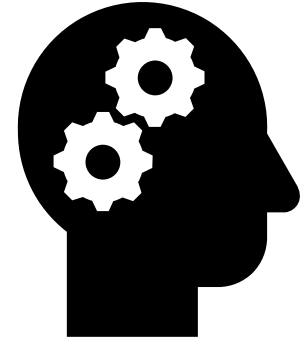
**Stimulating controlled mentalizing in conversations**

# Self- versus other-oriented mentalizing

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- Differentiation between own psychological and interpersonal processes (Fonagy & Target, 2006)
- Switching between one's own perspective and the perspective of others (Luyten et al., 2015)
- Prevents emotional contagion from other people's affects (Luyten et al., 2015)

# Self- versus other-oriented mentalizing



- Examples (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998):
  - "I thought my mother was annoyed with us, but I'm not really sure if she felt the same way."
  - "I used to give her quite a hard time, but I think I was actually just afraid she wouldn't care about me."
  - "I've been looking after my daughter for three weeks and I find it - it - eh - I find it quite exhausting. But I only find it exhausting because I'm a bit unhappy at the moment because of other things in my life, so my professional career."

Forms of mentalizing

# Self- versus other-oriented mentalizing

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- Self-exaggeration, disinterest vs. affect contagion, exploitative relationships (Taubner, Fonagy & Bateman, 2019)

## **Consequences for practice:**

Also pay attention to own mental states in and after interactions,  
to recognise the reciprocity

Forms of mentalizing

## Cognitive versus affective mentalizing

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- Integration of cognition and affect (Fonagy et al., 2015)
- Affective empathy & mentalised affectivity (Fonagy et al., 2015)
- Understanding of desires/beliefs, perspective taking vs. understanding, regulation, expression of affect (Fonagy et al., 2015; Jurist et al., 2008)

# Cognitive versus affective mentalizing



---

Example of a trainee teacher reflecting on his past teaching days:

"I now realise that I was so unfair to the class the other day and made them write something down as punishment because I was annoyed with their bad behaviour the previous day when I went to class. I'm sure they were upset, just like me. Maybe that's where my annoyance came from, which I can only now put my finger on."

# Cognitive versus affective mentalizing

---

- Theory of mind (Taubner, 2016)
- Impairment when ...
  - Affective states are cognitively comprehensible, but no access to the affective core of the experience is possible (Fonagy et al., 2015,)
  - Strongly affectively coloured mentalizing = accompanying affective overload = comparison with cognitively detectable aspects fails (Blatt, 2008)



# Inner states versus outer characteristics

---

- External and internal location (Taubner, 2016)
- Internal: object is own inner world or inner world of other people (Fonagy et al., 2015)
- External: Observable, external characteristics/special features of own or other people's behaviour (Fonagy et al., 2015)



Forms of mentalizing

## Inner states versus outer characteristics

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*"Imagine you observe a stranger on a street corner in your home town, holding a map in his hand and looking first one way and then the other with a furrowed brow and pursed lips."*

The stranger's behaviour gives rise to the assumption that he has lost his way. Furthermore, imagining the inner state of the stranger is mentalising in action (Kirsch, 2014).

## Inner states versus external characteristics

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- Prefrontal areas: Predominantly inner-psychoic mental experience (Satpute & Liebermann, 2006).
- Frontoparietal activations: More likely to process external external stimuli (Schwarzer, 2019).
- Non-stop oscillation on the poles of the four dimensions is the hallmark of effective mentalizing (Fonagy et al., 2015)

Forms of mentalizing

# Teamwork



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Watch the following excerpt from the film „Inside Out“  
(Pixar):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qpPmC28FhU>

Reflect together in the group:

When and in what form can the four dimensions of  
mentalizing be observed?

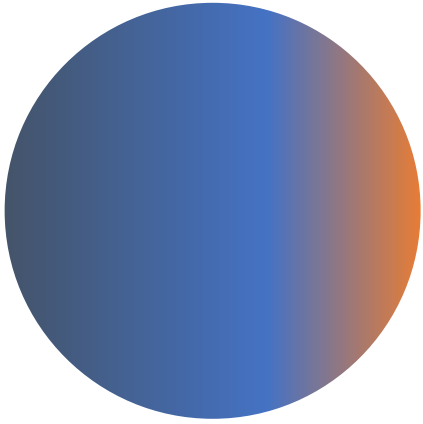
Forms of mentalizing

## Questions for revision

You can find all the contents of these questions on the slides

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- What characterises successful mentalizing?
- What are the 4 dimensions of mentalizing called?
- How are the dimensions related to successful mentalizing?
- What does mentalized affectivity mean?
- When does mentalizing fail?
- What does failing mentalizing look like?



Behringer, Noëlle & Larissa Schwarzwälder with the collaboration of A. Turner (module leader), St. Gingelmaier, J. Huber, H. Kirsch and T. Nolte

Citation recommendation:

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## Forms of mentalization

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## Forms of mentalization

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