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'Mentalisation-based pedagogy – a key to successful relationships and inclusive learning'

My name is Julia Strohmer and I am the coordinator of the 'trainer pool' at IFEN. I work on topics related to the psychosocial development of children and adolescents, as well as the field of pedagogical professionalism and professional identity. Over the next few minutes, we will be looking at an educational concept that is becoming increasingly important: mentalisation-based pedagogy. It combines psychological knowledge with practical educational work and offers teachers valuable ideas for their everyday work. The motto of this article is: 'Mentalisation-based pedagogy – a key to successful relationships and inclusive learning'.

What does "mentalising" mean?

Mentalising means understanding oneself and others as beings with thoughts, feelings and intentions. It involves **looking at oneself from the outside and others from the inside**. This ability is not innate, but develops through sensitive interactions, particularly with teachers. It is essential **for social learning, emotional regulation and successful relationships**.

Why is this important for teachers?

In our daily school life, we encounter children whose behaviour can be challenging, especially when they have special emotional and social needs or have experienced trauma. Mentalisation helps us **not only to observe behaviour**, but also to **understand the motivations and emotions behind it**. This attitude builds trust, security and open-mindedness, thereby promoting both relationships and academic success.

- ⇒ Learning can only be successful if children feel understood. Mentalisation promotes this trust, especially in children who have experienced trauma. Those who feel valued and taken seriously are willing to open up to new content and new relationships.
- ⇒ Mentalisation can be learned. Initial and continuing training must allow room for self-reflection, case studies and reflection on internal processes. Methods such as scenario-based case consultations or educational films can provide valuable insights here.

Mentalisation in the classroom – now let's move on to the practical side.

How can this be implemented?

1. **Regulating attention:** take an interest in what is on the child's mind. This creates a common basis for dialogue and learning.
2. **Emotion regulation:** ask the child about their feelings with respect and curiosity – even if they don't answer, this helps draw their attention to their inner world.
3. **Simple mentalisation:** name feelings, for example in role-playing games or during class council meetings. This creates a space conducive to taking a step back and cultivating empathy.
4. **In conflict situations:** remember the principle of 'neither too far nor too close to the fire'. Start by defusing the situation, then reflect, because mentalisation is particularly difficult in stressful situations, but it is precisely in these moments that it is most important.



Mentalisation as a protective factor – also for teachers

The ability to mentalise has a **protective effect**: it helps regulate stress, strengthens personal effectiveness and promotes mental health. Teachers with a high capacity for mentalisation report greater confidence in their actions, even in stressful situations.

In short

Mentalisation is not an additional skill, it is at the **very heart of teaching professionalism**. It helps us to understand behaviour rather than judge it, to shape relationships rather than control them, and to facilitate learning rather than force it. Particularly in times of high pressure and complex class composition, mentalisation is essential for teacher wellbeing, student development, and an inclusive and understanding school.