

*"I enjoy very much to give myself my own answers!"*

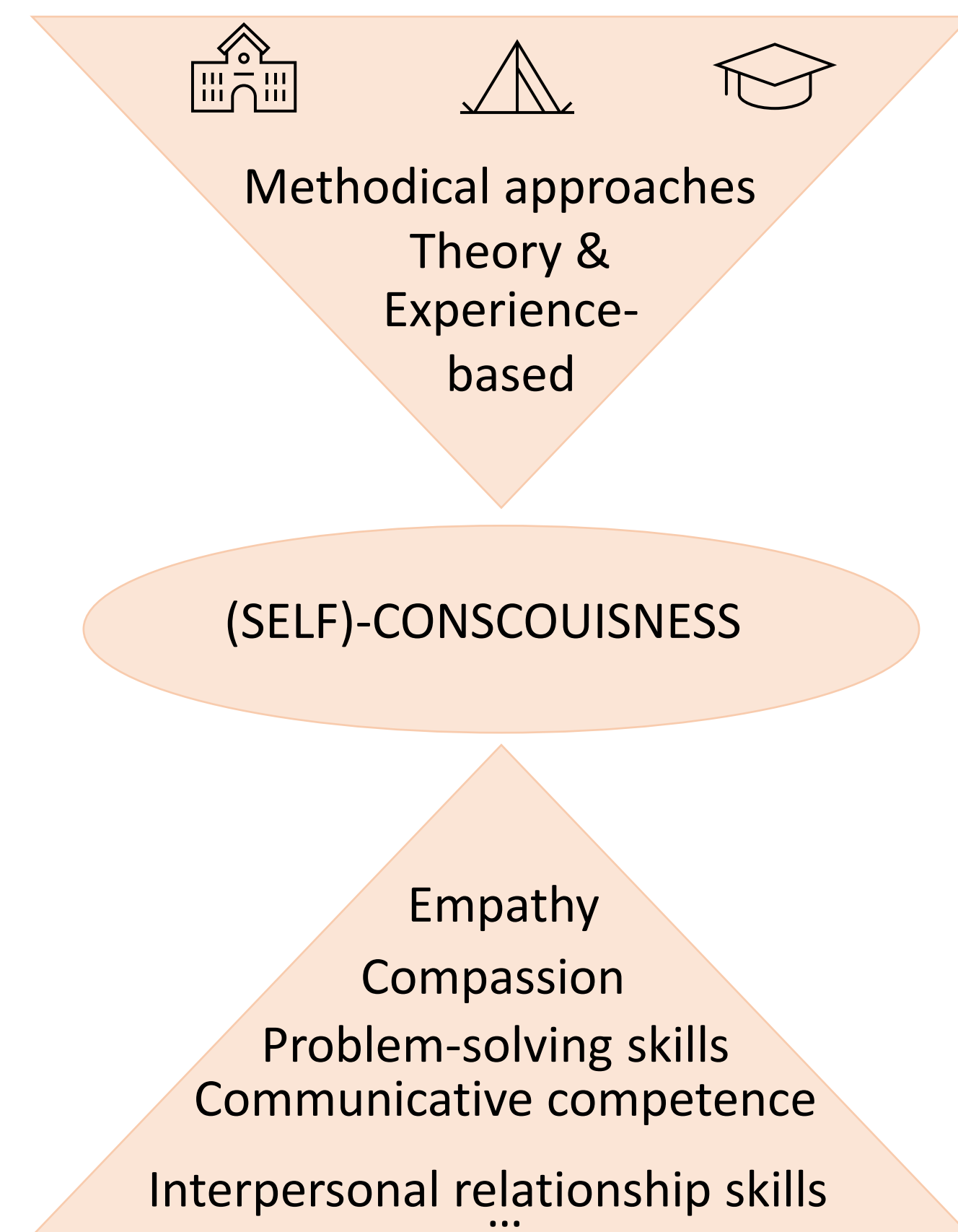
# The embodied phenomenological dialogue as research and teaching tool in mindfulness-based, non-violent and pro-democratic education

Nils Altner PhD, Ann-Kristin Krumsiek M.A., Evang. Kliniken Essen-Mitte/University of Duisburg-Essen

& Yelda Balkuv M.A., Federation of Turkish Parent Organizations in Lower Saxony

Contact: [nils.altner@uni-due.de](mailto:nils.altner@uni-due.de)

## In a nutshell



Methodical approaches:  
 • Phenomenological dialogue  
 • Nonviolent Communication  
 • Stress management (MBSR)

Experience-based:  
 • Mindfulness Meditation  
 • Pause & Breath  
 • Introspection  
 • Compassionate/Empathic inner & outer dialog (body, mind, soul)  
 • Mindful movements

In this contribution to the conference, we will introduce the "embodied phenomenological dialogue" as the first- and second-person qualitative research format as methodical approach that has also served / will serve us to evaluate the results of projects in school camp and university.

## Introduction

Lived experiences of embodied presence, relational warmth, freedom of choice and self-responsibility were identified as main qualities that contributed to the enhancement of "core life skills" like self-awareness, emotional regulation, interpersonal skills and the ability to make healthy decisions both in teachers and students.

This poster is a first approach to combine the essences of the method "phenomenological dialogue" with mindfulness-based teaching and the empathy process of Nonviolent Communication (NVC). We present it within the pro-democratic framing of the current NRW-project "Demokratiefähigkeit bilden" (building pro-democratic capacities). Experiences and results from AmSel-teacher training and the NVC project "Planting Peace Camp 2023 (PP)" are included in this poster.

Implications for our current research project for cultivating engaged participation, non-violent and pro-democratic skills through the teaching of introspective first-person mindfulness and of second-person compassionate /empathic relational competences in settings of (higher)education will also be discussed here.

Representatives of all social groups come together in universities and schools every day. Here, the discourses of society as a whole are highly condensed, because cultural segregation is reduced. For pro-democratic, co-creative and transformative participation in complex democratic negotiation processes students and, of course, teachers and professionals need embodied intra- and interpersonal skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, critical thinking and competences. These include introspective skills like mindful self-awareness, self-compassion and non-violent self-regulation. Internally educated teachers can serve here as precious role-models and facilitators. The project "Demokratiefähigkeit bilden" aims to inspire and cultivate internal, interpersonal and cultural pro-democratic competencies.

## Research Question

In the AmSel-project we hypothesized that teachers, who strengthen their life skills and personality traits, such as being attentive and compassionate towards themselves and others, will inspire their students likewise. A general suspicion of our projects has been that a cultivation of consciousness in teachers, sensu Kurt Lewin by making a person mindfully see and sense her/himself, results in changes in embodied personality- and relationship skills that then strengthen similar traits in their students (1)

A central aim of our current interdisciplinary, transcultural research project "Demokratiefähigkeit bilden" is finding and creating culturally sensitive teaching tools for emotional, relational, value-oriented, self-reflective and engagement-promoting personality development accompanied by consciousness-raising in educational settings.

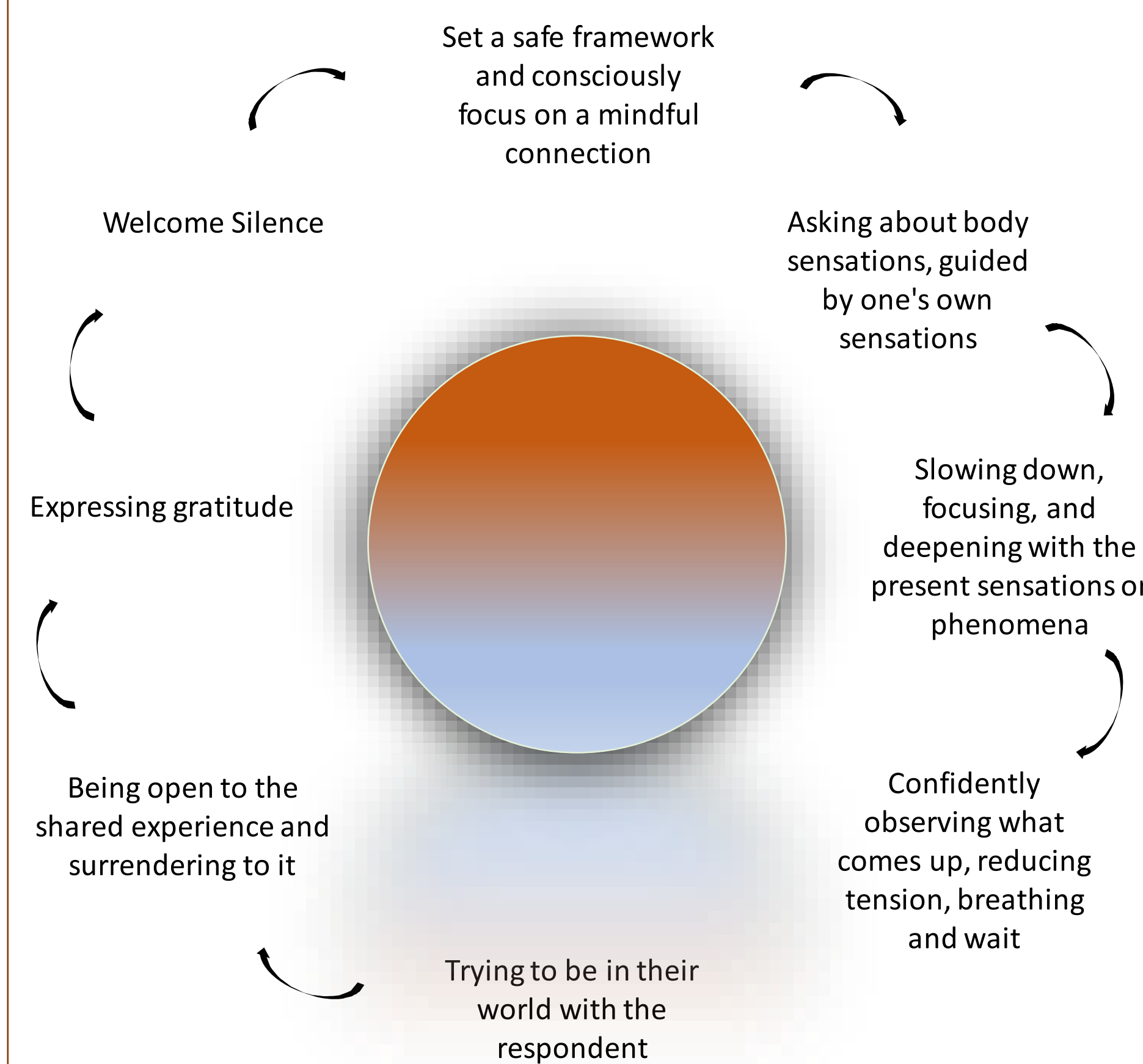
## Methods

The embodied phenomenological dialog – as a communication-, training- and evaluation tool within the mindfulness-based research and practice field – focuses on capturing embodied aspects of the lived experiences of the participants. Preconscious and preverbal notions and insights are explored and translated into language together (Mäeutics).



© AmSel

### The dialog guidelines principles:



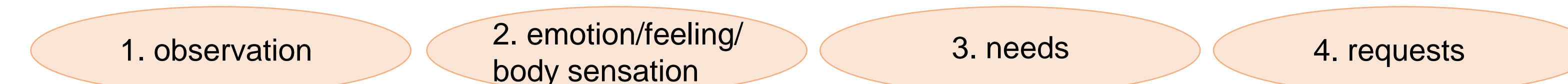
This dialogic interview might be considered to be a practice-in-action of mindfulness and compassion, as the interviewer tries to embody both while communicating and connecting with the interviewee.

Comparable to a mindful meditation, the interviewers intentionally focus their attention with "open awareness."

During this time they suspend their analytical thinking process in order to listen openly, to physically sense and empathize with and inquire into the experiences and perceptions of the students.

The project "Demokratiefähigkeit bilden" is a first attempt to integrate elements of the phenomenological dialogue into the NVC empathy process on a methodological level.

Nonviolent Communication as a method and framework construct with its 4-step model includes:



These four steps can serve as orientation and an external framework to get into empathic contact with ourselves and our environment with mindfulness/presence, appreciation/respect and authenticity and to translate everything alive in and around us into language. These four steps make it possible to precisely practice presence, self-empathy/empathy, authenticity and connection. (3)

## Results

Applying the format of embodied phenomenological dialogues (2) we conducted interviews that focused on the lived experiences expressed in the interviewee and in the interviewer. Here are two audio examples:



© Planting Peace



Feedback PP Camp (English)



© AmSel



Feedback primary school (German)

*"Listening and being listened to opened a lot of ways and a consciousness I didn't know I could have or feel. That led to more connection and safety around us. We created that safe space where everyone had the chance to express themselves in their own pace. The whole experience also made me more conscious of my own actions and thoughts. What does it really mean and how can I work with it/communicate it?"*

(Planting Peace Camp Survey, 2023)

## Discussion & Outlook

Our preliminary considerations and experience with phenomenological based, mindful, self-awareness raising and non-violent pro-democratic methods lead us to these questions

1. How introspective first-person methods can best be integrated into teaching and learning in (higher) education.
2. How first-person approaches can be combined with established qualitative and quantitative approaches in educational science and practice?
3. Which tools/elements/qualities can serve to raise consciousness and to build, cultivate, and shape relationships with ourselves and others to live and teach pro-democratic values within educational contexts?

We suggest including the following elements into teaching:

1. experience-based
2. embodiment
3. self-reflection
4. introspection
5. mindfulness practice
6. relationship enhancement
7. compassion and commitment
8. empathy and connection
9. pre-linguistic processes and creative access
10. Use of language that integrates theory and science as well as authentic embodied expressions from first- and second-person-perspective
11. phenomenological qualitative approach / Nonviolent Communication

## References

- 1) Altner N, Friedreich J. (2022). "One of the most precious experiences I have had as a teacher!" Embodied mindfulness and compassion nurture addiction-preventive and pro-democratic life skills and relationships between teachers and students – a phenomenological exploration. OBM Integrative and complementary medicine, volume 7, issue 4. doi:10.21926/obm.icm.2204049
- 2) Altner N. "Ich muss nicht mehr Recht haben, um mich sicher zu fühlen." Ergebnisse aus phänomenologischen Tiefeninterviews mit Hochschullehrenden nach fünf Tagen gemeinsamer Stille. In: Achtsame Hochschulen in der digitalen Gesellschaft. Transcript; 2022.
- 3) Rosenberg, Marshall B. (2009): Gewaltfreie Kommunikation. Eine Sprache des Lebens. Paderborn: Junfermann (8. Aufl.).