

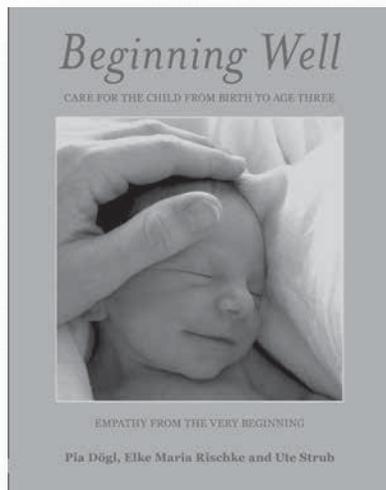
# Book Reviews

## ***Beginning Well***

**By Pia Dogel, Elke Maria Rischke  
and Ute Strub (WECAN, 2018)  
Reviewed by Magdalena Toran**

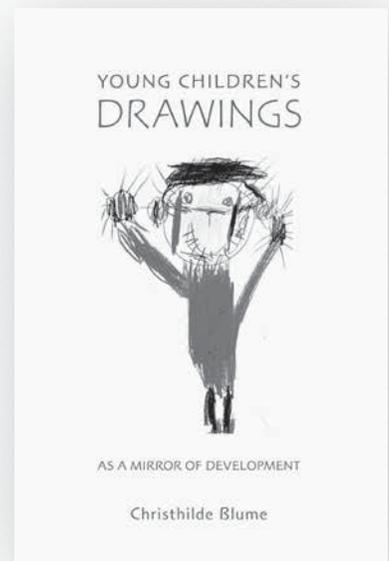
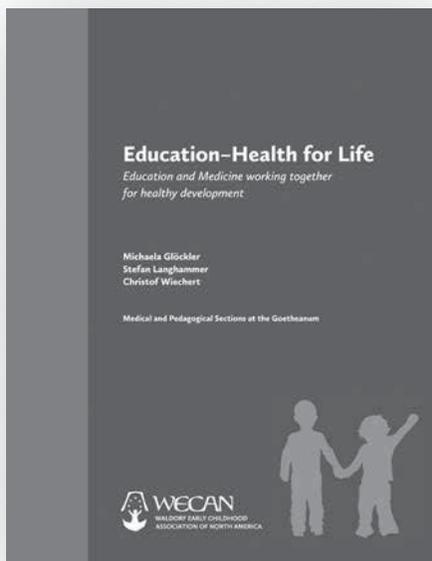
*Beginning Well* is the resource that parents and others who care for children from birth to three have long needed. With warmth and clarity, the authors give essential insights into the needs and care of the very young child. The insights they share have been gained in their practice of working with the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and the developmental theories of Dr. Emmi Pikler. The authors founded and worked together in a home for neglected children in Berlin, Germany.

*Beginning Well* begins, as all parenting resources should, with an acknowledgment that there is no one “right way” to raise a child. It goes on to say, “It is important that you feel and act authentically so you can develop a good relationship with your child.” It is well known that the most important thing you can do in working with parents is to help them feel joy and confidence in their parenting. When parents feel secure, their child thrives. Meeting adults with openness, trust,



and warmth is the first step in being able to share the insights gained as an educator.

*Beginning Well* is divided into chapters by age of the child—the newborn, the first year, second year, and third year. It covers essential topics including preparing for a baby’s arrival, developing a relationship with the baby, weaning, baby wearing, sleep, feeding baby, and self-awareness of the adult. Many topics are addressed in very clear ways: motor development, development of free-play, social behavior, development of the will, physical care as the foundation for healthy attachment, play materials, conflict with children, aggression, throwing, and talking with your child. Each chapter is full of beautiful color photographs depicting the text. These photos are very helpful in conveying the mood of the young child, the joy and confidence that emerges from freedom of movement within a loving care relationship. ♦



More new books from WECAN

***Supporting the Sense of Life: Nurturing well-being in children and the adults who care for them***

Edited by Nancy Blanning  
(WECAN, 2019)

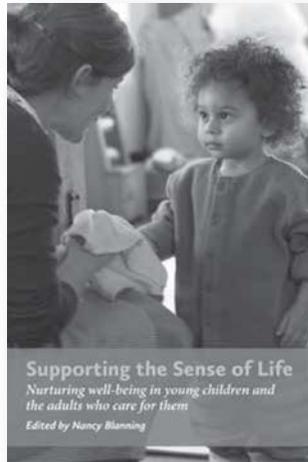
Reviewed by Laura Mason

In February 2014, WECAN began a three-year series of East Coast conferences on the sense of life (also referred to as the sense of well-being). The keynote lectures from these conferences are published here in one book. Those of us focusing on the four lower senses as we work in early childhood settings know how difficult it can be to grasp the sense of life. This compilation of lectures from five speakers, as well as Nancy Blanning's introduction tying them all together, is a gift for educators who are trying to better understand how to support children in developing a healthy life sense as we also nurture our own sense of well-being.

The book begins with Nancy Blanning's introduction, which gives a brief overview of the senses and summarizes the lectures, beautifully tying them all together in easily understandable language. We then dive into the 2014 lectures, given by three different speakers.

First, Susan Weber imagines early childhood educators to be "guardians of the elixirs of life." The four elixirs she describes are: the life forces of growth and development, the seven life processes, the life sense, and finally, the Christ impulse. Susan beautifully conveys the sacred quality of our work with very young children and the opportunity we have to humanize and spiritualize everything we do. She describes how taking deep interest in the other, being truly present, and imbuing our actions with intention, love and joy, support the child's sense of life.

The following lecture by Ruth Ker is peppered with delightful anecdotes of children in her class and family and is accompanied by photos of children at work and play. These stories and images bring the sense of well-being to life, making the topic much more accessible to practicing educators, who surely have many similar stories of their own. Ruth also provides practical examples of how to support the life sense and describes how the nervous system acts as an organ for this sense.



In the final 2014 lecture, Patricia Rubano very effectively uses humor to convey the importance of self-development. Sharing her thoughts about the fairy tale "The Donkey," she helps us to see how we can work with archetypes in stories to better understand our own biographies. Her practical thoughts on biography work and her description of Steiner's basic exercises inspire us to do our own inner work and through finding ourselves, find others.

The 2015 keynote speaker was Dr. Adam Blanning. His lectures explore how we use our other senses to tap into,

connect with, and balance the sense of life. Dr. Blanning considers the example of infants to demonstrate a progression through other senses first—taste, smell, touch, balance, and self-movement—that leads to a sense of well-being. We then see how as children grow older they develop a variety of healthy pathways through the senses to this place of security and contentment. In his final lecture, Dr. Blanning explains how we can bring this understanding into our work with children and what we can do to support them.

Finally, Barbara Baldwin's 2016 lectures help us understand the life sense through the theme of Point and Periphery. Barbara's depth of knowledge of Steiner's work on this topic is evident in her lectures. She makes clear our role as educators is to "hold" the periphery for young children as they learn how to move from themselves to the other (the world outside themselves) and back again with less support. She shares examples of children who struggle and suggests ways to help them come into balance. The resources provided with Barbara's lectures are rich and include Steiner's meditations on point and periphery, as well as diagrams of the twelve senses and the nervous system. Barbara closes emphasizing the importance of caring for ourselves as caregivers and provides a description of Raphael's masterpiece depicting the Transfiguration of Christ as a beautiful image of point and periphery to inspire us.

The sense of life is perhaps the most mysterious of the senses. This book contains several unique perspectives that together bring clarity to a complicated topic. One is sure to find something new and inspiring to work with in its pages. ♦

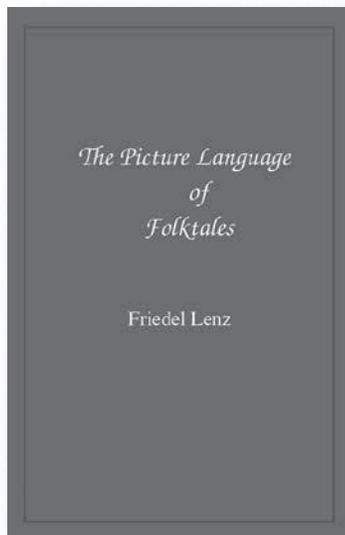
## ***The Picture Language of Folktales***

**By Friedel Lenz,  
translated from  
the German by  
Clopper Almon  
Reviewed by  
Nancy Blanning**

Many excellent resources are available to Waldorf teachers regarding folk and fairy tales. We tell these traditional stories in our classes because research (both anthroposophical and mainstream) confirms that there are important, symbolic pictures in these stories that illuminate mysteries of human development. Young children live in a picture consciousness, carried with them as they come from the spiritual world. Their souls resonate with the images these tales describe, which reassure children that their human journey upon the earth is divinely guided and purposeful. Achieving wholeness of the different aspects of their being is the task before them. The princess and prince—the soul and spirit of the single individual—will be united in marriage and will reign in the royal kingdom.

A quotation from Wilhelm Grimm, included in the preface to *The Picture Language of Folktales*, states this poetically: “All folktales have in common that they ... speak of supersensible things in pictures. These pictures are like fragments of a shattered jewel that lie strewn on the ground overgrown with grass and flowers. Only the sharpest eye can discover them. Their meaning is long lost but can still be felt and gives the folktales their substance. At the same time, these stories satisfy the natural longing for the Wonderful...” Friedel Lenz was one who was able to see the jewels and share understanding of them with others.

Who was she? Born in 1897 in Bavaria, she became part of the back-to-nature youth movement



in the first part of the century. After her marriage in 1920, she and her husband became acquainted with Waldorf education and anthroposophy. They became increasingly involved in anthroposophical endeavors, her husband becoming a Christian Community priest. The rise of Nazism and the events of the Second World War brought tragedy to Friedel with the death of her husband and two daughters. (The tender and sad details are explained in the book's introduction.) She and two sons survived, and she had to create a new life and a means of supporting herself and her children. She had a life-long love for traditional tales, from Russia all the way to Ireland. Through the insights gleaned from anthroposophy, she became a highly regarded

interpreter of European folk and fairy tales, a noted lecturer, and a teller of tales internationally. She died in 1970, working on this book up to her last days.

The book includes consideration of twenty-five traditional tales from the Grimms' collection. Many are familiar from the telling of tales in our kindergartens, such as “Little Red Cap,” “The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids,” “The Donkey,” and “Sweet Porridge.” Each tale receives separate consideration. The story is told in segments, with pauses for commentary and elucidation. Though we know these tales well on some levels, Friedel Lenz's commentary opens up new appreciation for the beauty, subtlety of the images, and the unfolding journey toward wholeness that these stories picture. After reading this book, the stories now resonate within me in an expanded way. The capacity to tell these stories with deepened conviction of their truthfulness has been made possible through Friedel Lenz's guidance.

With all the many other folktale resources that are available, this book deserves serious consideration for your research pile. Thank you to Clopper Almon for his dedication to making it available at last in English.

This self-published volume can be found by searching on the internet. ♦