

# Reclaiming Childhood

by William Crain • Owl Books, 2003



Reviewed by  
David Thaxton

“Why does she do that?” my wife asks with more than a hint of exasperation as our 6-year-old daughter, seated in the back seat of the car, repetitively intones a nonsense chant of her own creation.

“I don’t know; she must be working on something,” I reply as the repetitions climb into the hundreds and our nerves slowly disintegrate.

Indeed, it is serious work, though she is not doing it to annoy us (maybe), nor is she doing it to score better on a test, outperform her peers in schoolwork or get into an Ivy League school.

In his book *Reclaiming Childhood*, author and developmental psychologist William Crain, Ph. D., draws from Rousseau, Montessori, Piaget, Gardner and others to show a perspective of the achievement-oriented environment insistently pushed upon today’s children, and the harm it does. His central tenet is that our society has grown increasingly obsessed with “the future;” we have placed such a powerful emphasis on adult-centered education that we have lost sight of the vitality and importance of child-centered education and parenting. By focusing solely upon how children will perform in the future, parents and educators fail to meet their present intellectual needs. The result is that we have overly stressed children, burned-out from the relentless push for high-scoring academic performance. If, instead, we give children time and space, they will naturally and vigorously explore the world their own way. In so doing, they will develop remarkable skills, deep understandings and a life-long love and

thirst for learning.

At first glance, *Reclaiming Childhood* seems like an odd reading choice for music educators. Written primarily for parents, Crain deftly explores the natural affinities of children in drama, art, poetry, language and their connection with the natural world. While he makes no mention of musical capacity, Orff practitioners will likely draw profound conclusions from reading the book, as the ideas parallel our own realm of child-centered musical experience.

In the latter portions of the book, Crain implores parents and educators to rethink the widespread push for standards and to reconsider the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act. He asks critical questions about children’s increasing exposure to computers, television and video games in the home and classroom. Additionally, his articulate arguments through the book are a valuable resource for all advocates of child-centered education.

In my own Orff Levels teacher training, Judith Cole gave me a powerful bit of advice I have heard echoed many times since: “Take time to just watch your students – they will show you exactly what they need to

learn.” Whether a child is jumping and dancing his way down the hall, silently contemplating bug, or rehearsing *ad nauseam* a chant in the back seat of the car, we do a great service by giving him the space to explore these elements of his being. *Reclaiming Childhood* is a timely call to reevaluate the way we raise and educate children, and a stimulating read for anyone who strives to understand children for what they are: *children*.

David Thaxton serves on *The Orff Echo* Editorial Board.

Write Thaxton at:  
[yoteech@sbcglobal.net](mailto:yoteech@sbcglobal.net)

