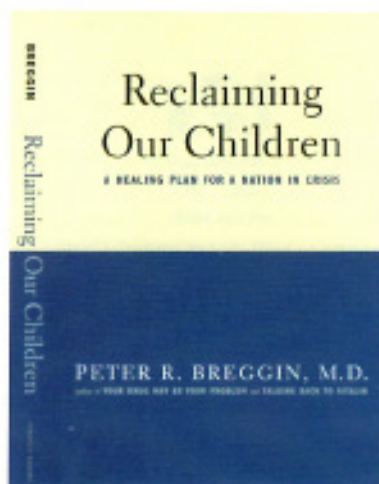




RECLAIMING OUR CHILDREN

A Healing Solution for a Nation in Crisis

By Peter R. Breggin, M.D.
Perseus Books, 2000. \$24.

In the wake of the spring 1999 high school shooting tragedies in Littleton, Colorado, and Conyers, Georgia, the first White House Conference on Mental Health was convened in Washington, D.C., in June 1999. The school shootings were repeatedly mentioned by the conference speakers as they recommended increased psychiatric drug treatment for the emotional and behavioral problems of children. The director of the National Institute of Mental Health informed the conference that two million children have depression, and that this, as well as other diseases of the brain, should be treated like general medical illness, with drugs.

Author Peter Breggin is outraged that personal suffering and misconduct by children is being increasingly attributed to genetics and brain disease without any consideration of environmental effects. He believes that the widespread drug therapy we are seeing for children is a mistake. "Instead of focusing on how to 'fix' our children, we will have to transform ourselves," he says (emphasis his). "We must begin immediately as individuals to transform our personal relationships with the children in our lives by making them a higher priority and especially by creating meaningful relationships with them."

Breggin goes on to discuss what he believes are environmental stressors for children, including the lack of a mean-

ingful parent-child relationship, divorce, domestic violence, abuse, isolation caused by technology, violent entertainment, peer abuse, racism, sexism, religious persecution, poverty, drugs, the availability of guns, and children's perceived lack of meaning in life. He continues with case studies from his private practice as a psychiatrist which show time after time that "a child's behavior will improve within a short period of time if the parents take responsibility for learning better ways of parenting."

Several chapters are devoted to problems children face in school, such as "school slavery" (too much homework) and social ostracism. An interesting chapter is the one in which the author describes several successful alternative schools, including a Quaker high school, a Jewish Yeshiva, and the "Phoenix" schools in Maryland which offer a Twelve-Step Alcoholics Anonymous approach to help children recover from drugs and alcohol.

One unsettling aspect of this book is the numerous graphic descriptions of school shootings and profiles of the shooters. The author makes the argument that drugs commonly prescribed for problem children, such as Ritalin and Luvox, did nothing to prevent the teenagers from committing these violent acts, and in fact, probably contributed to their propensity to do so. In a chapter titled "Are Psychiatric Drugs Making Our Children Psychotic and Violent?" he states that there are absolutely no good reasons to prescribe these drugs for children: "The drugging of our most energetic and rebellious individuals not only crushes them with drugs, it sends a frightening message to all school children. It warns, 'If you do not quietly conform, you're in danger of getting diagnosed and drugged, so sit down and shut up.'"

No doubt drugs are frequently prescribed as a quick fix for troubled children when parents are unwilling to change their own behavior in order to improve relationships and environment for the child. However, the author's main point is that drugs are always the wrong choice. This seems extreme, since the quality of life is improved dramatically for many children when an appropriate diagnosis is made and the prescription is

the right one. The author does make a compelling argument that in order to "reclaim our children," parents must make the needs of their children the highest priority, even if it means a sacrifice of time, desires, relationships, or career goals, and he gives many good suggestions for beginning this process.

—Martha Riley



THE OUT-OF-SYNC CHILD

Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Integration Dysfunction
By Carol Stock Kranowitz
Perigee Books, 1998. \$14.

Because we Orff teachers often take cues from the responses of our students' bodies as well as their minds, we witness an array of behaviors that others may not notice during a normal day. Often we take note of a movement that may seem a trifle clumsy, a facial expression hinting at confusion, or too strong a response to a seemingly insignificant touch or remark. All students have odd moments, but as teachers we pay special attention when inappropriate or slightly off-the-mark behaviors occur in repeated patterns. We write notes to ourselves or consult with a classroom teacher or parents for enlightenment, often to find they are as perplexed as we are.

A key to understanding these behaviors is found in *The Out-of-Sync Child* by Carol Stock Kranowitz, a book that every teacher and parent will want to read and keep on hand to consult frequently over the years. The subtitle, *Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Integration Dysfunction*, may seem daunting for some, but the book was carefully written with

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