

Berrybrook Book Review

Kathy Capasso

Taking Back Childhood- Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Ed.D.

Nancy Carlsson-Paige's *Taking Back Childhood* deals with media influence on our children in today's society. It is incredible to believe that in just a generation we have allowed the media to so completely influence our social interactions. Carlsson-Paige further goes on to look at the role of our highly structured and fast paced society has on our children. Her entire book begs the question: When do our children just play?

Each chapter of *Taking Back Childhood* deals with different scenarios from media influence to dealing with a society based on "instant gratification" and constant shuffling from one activity to another. At the end of each chapter she gives, in bullet form, a helpful list of "steps you can take". These "steps" offer suggestions to deflect media influence and to reconnect with your children. This list is particularly helpful, as you can refer to it when certain situations arise.

We all know that over the past 20 plus years the media has just exploded from the commercialization of every movie, book, game, etc. to the cavalier manner in which the news is now reported. As a child, I remember watching the 6 o'clock news every night with my parents. I was never afraid of what I saw. Now I don't even like to watch the news, let alone allow a child to see the violence that is shown. Furthermore, professional sporting events used to be about sports. There were very few merchandise options, seats were inexpensive and it was about the game. Now the market is flooded with action figures, apparel and video games. Carlsson-Paige offers simple alternatives like family game night or taking in a minor league ball game. She encourages families to connect rather than turn on the TV.

Carlsson-Paige also discusses children's play today versus 30 years ago. Since the deregulation of children's TV in 1984, children's toys have become more and more specific. For example a child in the early 1980's may have had a couple of dolls and a toy car. These dolls could be a family out for a ride one day. The next day they could be used as specific characters from a movie to re-enact a scene. On another day the same dolls could be king and queen of a far away land. Add a set of basic blocks and you have a house, a movie set and a castle. In contrast today, parents are made to feel that they must buy particular character dolls or props that depict certain movies or TV shows. The danger here is that we are stifling our children's creativity and imagination. What's worse is that these companies and the media target children. In turn, parents feel pressure to buy these items for their children. The author offers many suggestions on how to deal with this and encourage creative play instead.

Recently there has been so much talk about violence in the media and how it influences our children and consequently teens and young adults. There are several chapters which deal with this issue. Some chapters deal with avoiding and limiting media expo-

sure. In others there are tips on how to handle aggression in children. The final chapters offer tips for helping children deal with real life situations and encourage respect for others and social responsibility. >>>>

Overall, most of Carlsson-Paige's suggestions mirror our "Berrybrook Way". The language she uses in her examples is very similar to the way Berrybrook teachers talk to students. At Berrybrook, we offer basic tools such as playdough, blocks, baby dolls and housekeeping and it is amazing to see what the children do with these "tools". Fostering our children's creativity and imagination is crucial. *Taking Back Childhood* is a great resource for ideas and support on how to accomplish this. We cannot escape all commercialization of this world. Nancy Carlsson-Paige simply enlightens us as to how wide spread it is and how we can resist at least some of it.