

Books

A Mind at a Time

By Dr. Mel Levine



Reviewed by
Doug Goodkin

"The art of teaching lies not in clever curriculums, new methods or effective test preparation, but in teaching 'one mind at a time.'"

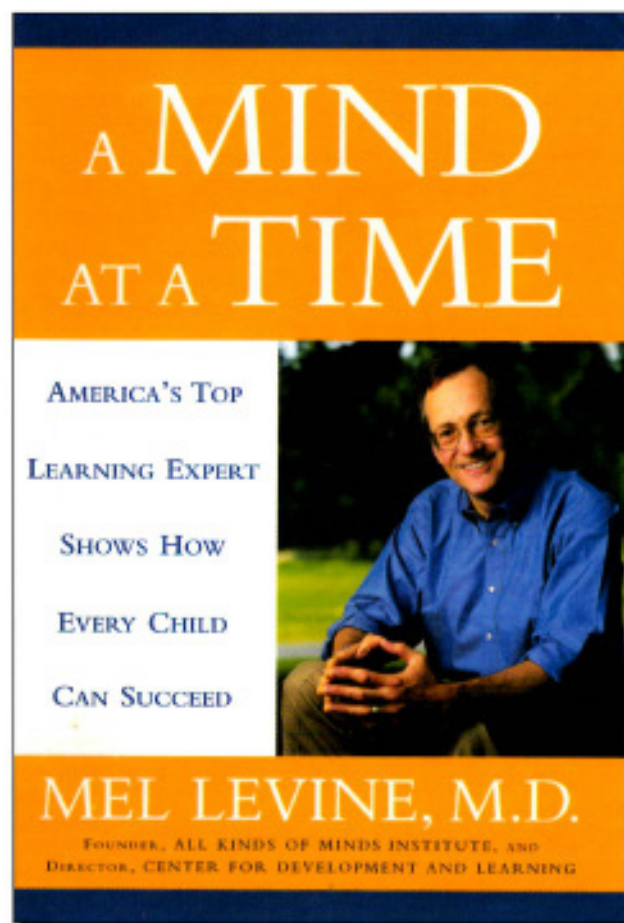
Some of the most articulate statements about the dynamic practice and visionary philosophy of Orff Schulwerk are made by authors who have never heard of it. Such is the case with the recently published *A Mind at a Time* by pediatrician and learning specialist Dr. Mel Levine. Backed by 30 years of experience working with individual children in deciphering their precise learning successes and breakdowns, Levine is an articulate child advocate and an eloquent spokesman for education designed to meet the unique needs of each child.

His central thesis is that a healthy community not only accommodates, but thrives on "all kinds of minds" (the title of a previous book). The art of teaching lies not in clever curriculums, new methods or effective test preparation, but in teaching "one mind at a time." That requires seeing each child, knowing each child, being flexible and committed enough to wrap teaching strategies and curriculum expectations around the needs of each child.

With calm but firm authority, Levine warns of the dangers of labeling, drugging and/or dismissing children who don't fit the school's mold. Instead of holding the child up to a

fantasy norm of equal talent in all areas – a norm he repeatedly reminds us does not exist in an adult world where we play to our strengths – we should recognize the full range of each child's genius and unique challenges he or she faces.

Chapter 8, "Our Higher Thinking System," affirms the marvelous oppor-



tunities offered by good Schulwerk teaching. As he describes the character of higher order thinking – "a willingness to free-associate, to go off on original tangents often not knowing where exactly you're likely to end up, to

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sprinkle your own personal associations and perspectives over what you come across, to take a fresh look, to risk being wrong, to risk creating, to combine some rigorous technical discipline with innovative thinking, to search for a channel for one's creative drives, to be unusual, to develop a unique voice or personal style" – Levine could be describing a typical Orff class.

This book is visionary, but also eminently practical. It specifies the many places learning breaks down,

with helpful suggestions about how to recognize, accommodate, and, in some cases, remediate them. The best part of the book, for me, was its challenge to view each child differently. After reading this book, I looked at the children in my class who were withdrawing, acting out, hiding, looking frustrated or confused and saw them with new eyes. I reached deeper for a way to reach them and teach them.

My one disappointment in the book is the consistent use of mechanical and electronic metaphors to describe the mind. However, the central

metaphor of Levine's teacher-training program, "schools attuned," is a musical metaphor that is brilliant. "Tuning a child" starts from the assumption that the child has a song to sing, a piece to play, but can't yet fully express it when he is out of tune – with the school orchestra and/or with himself. The purpose of tuning – and of teaching – is to allow that song to come forth. In an era of obsessive testing and molding children to fit an artificial norm, Levine's book is a welcome reminder of education's higher purpose. A must for everyone who works with children!

The Aims of Education

By Alfred North Whitehead

Reviewed by Doug Goodkin

"Culture is activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty and humane feeling." So opens Alfred North Whitehead's *The Aims of Education*, a book so rich with insight and vision that new treasures are uncovered with every reading. Based on a series of lectures given between 1912 and 1928 (coincidentally, the formative years of a young composer/educator named Carl Orff), the book covers ten different lectures including "The Rhythm of Education," "The Organization of Thought," and "Space, Time and Relativity."

Whitehead was a rare man – a renowned philosopher, mathematician and intellectual with his feet planted firmly on earth. As his opening sentence indicates, he believes in thought connected to aesthetics, imagination, emotional warmth and human kindness. The vision of education he sets forth arises from a belief in the promise of the human being and a solid notion of how education might cultivate that promise.

The ideas in the first few chapters are so rich and fertile, so affirming of my experience in Orff Schulwerk and so eloquent in giving language and shape to that experience, that I find myself drawing from them in each new lesson I plan. Particularly useful to the practicing Orff teacher are the

two chapters about the rhythmic stages of learning: Romance, Precision and Generalization.

Whitehead speaks for the child, teacher and artist on every page. A daily quote from this book would be enough to see teachers through even the darkest of days. In an educational climate of excessive testing, neglect of the arts and short-sighted vision, we need to drink from the spring of humanistic education for refreshment.

Perhaps this quote will entice you to go to the source:

"Art and literature have not merely an indirect effect on the main energies of life. Directly, they give vision. ... In the contest of races which in its final issues will be decided in the workshops and not on the battlefield, the victory will belong to those who are masters of stores of trained nervous energy, working under conditions favorable to growth. One such essential condition is Art."



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