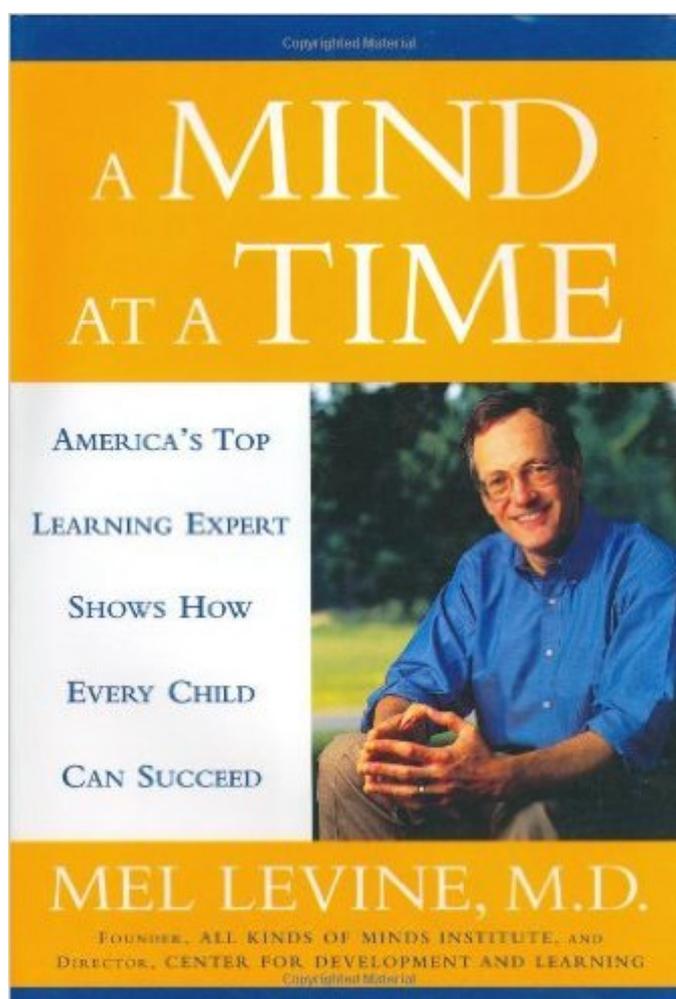


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A Mind At A Time



Synopsis

"Different minds learn differently," writes Dr. Mel Levine, one of the best-known education experts and pediatricians in America today. And that's a problem for many children, because most schools still cling to a one-size-fits-all education philosophy. As a result, these children struggle because their learning patterns don't fit the schools they are in. In *A Mind at a Time*, Dr. Levine shows parents and others who care for children how to identify these individual learning patterns. He explains how parents and teachers can encourage a child's strengths and bypass the child's weaknesses. This type of teaching produces satisfaction and achievement instead of frustration and failure. Different brains are differently wired, Dr. Levine explains. There are eight fundamental systems, or components, of learning that draw on a variety of neurodevelopmental capacities. Some students are strong in certain areas and some are strong in others, but no one is equally capable in all eight. Using examples drawn from his own extensive experience, Dr. Levine shows how parents and children can identify their strengths and weaknesses to determine their individual learning styles. For example, some students are creative and write imaginatively but do poorly in history because weak memory skills prevent them from retaining facts. Some students are weak in sequential ordering and can't follow directions. They may test poorly and often don't do well in mathematics. In these cases, Dr. Levine observes, the problem is not a lack of intelligence but a learning style that doesn't fit the assignment. Drawing on his pioneering research and his work with thousands of students, Dr. Levine shows how parents and teachers can develop effective strategies to work through or around these weaknesses. "It's taken for granted in adult society that we cannot all be 'generalists' skilled in every area of learning and mastery. Nevertheless, we apply tremendous pressure to our children to be good at everything. They are expected to shine in math, reading, writing, speaking, spelling, memorization, comprehension, problem solving...and none of us adults can" do all this, observes Dr. Levine. Learning begins in school but it doesn't end there. Frustrating a child's desire to learn will have lifelong repercussions. This frustration can be avoided if we understand that not every child can do equally well in every type of learning. We must begin to pay more attention to individual learning styles, to individual minds, urges Dr. Levine, so that we can maximize children's learning potential. In *A Mind at a Time* he shows us how.

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Customer Reviews

Other reviewers have discussed the pros and cons of Dr. Levine's theories in depth, so I won't go into those; in the field of cognitive psychology, I'm an interested (and, I think, fairly well-read) amateur rather than a professional. That said, I feel that this is an important book for both parents and educators. The child's "job" of learning how to function in the world, and mastering the many tasks set for him/her by the educational system, isn't an easy one. The human mind is complex and multifaceted, but our schools tend to think of "intelligence" as a narrowly defined set of skills, and anyone who doesn't do well in those must be either stupid or lazy. (Levine notes that the moral implications of such judgments, e.g., that a student "doesn't try hard enough" or is "unmotivated," can be devastating to a child, and are often grossly unfair.) The irony is that -- as Levine points out -- the abilities that enable a child to succeed in school aren't necessarily those that conduce to success in later life; so, by rewarding performance only in certain areas, we doom many children to a low opinion of their abilities and ignore a wide spectrum of human potential. Although the subject isn't exactly lightweight, I found the book appealing and highly readable. Dr. Levine clearly has great respect and affection for his young subjects, so his anecdotes are engaging and (often) amusing. I was especially tickled when he urged a young client not to let his teachers "catch him doing something right" because from then on they'd hold it against him. In school, I was a "divergent thinker" to the max: if a subject interested me, I'd do a brilliant job, but if not I'd blow it off. So my occasional successes turned into threats: "See how well you can do if you just TRY hard enough."

Dr. Mel Levine, Founder of All Kinds of Minds Institute and Director of the University of North Carolina's Clinical Center for Development and Learning, describes himself as "a pediatrician with a mission." He is "obsessed with helping children find success." Indeed, after three decades of

working in schools and with children, Levine is receiving national attention. Not only is *_A Mind at a Time_* a bestseller, Levine has recently been featured on several national talk shows and on the ... documentary *_Misunderstood Minds_*. *_A Mind at a Time_* is easy for the lay person to read and understand. Although Levine closely follows educational research, he does not cite research studies in *_A Mind at a Time_*. Rather he bases the book on "objective clinical observation." Levine writes, "For me these kids have been like textbooks on learning and mind development. I can learn more about a child by getting to know her well than by reading a list of computer-generated test scores. In fact, whenever I participate in the clinical evaluation of a child, I see some facets of brain function that I have never before seen." A genuine appreciation of each child shines through each of the case vignettes that Levine includes in *_A Mind at a Time_*. This appreciation is not merely compassion for a child dealing with learning difficulties; it is a celebration of the unique combination of strengths and weaknesses that makes up each child's mind. Optimism also pervades the discussion of each child. Levine identifies eight "neurodevelopmental systems" that work together during learning. The relationship between these systems is similar to that between the body's physiological systems (such as the circulatory system and the respiratory system).

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