

PRAISE FOR ORIGINAL MINDS

One of the most insightful and inspiring videos I have reviewed on learning and attention disorders in adolescents. It provides an exceptional insider's view of what it is like to have learning difficulties. Through [teenager's]... own words one learns of their struggles to be understood.. and to find pathways in life, in which they can capitalize on their talents and contribute to their own livelihoods and to society. I recommend this video highly.

— Russell A. Barkley, Ph.D., Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston

A compelling first-person account by young people who reflect movingly on their experiences with learning disabilities. The film deftly avoids becoming just another attempt to package experts trying to explain learning disabilities, and keeps a laser-sharp focus on the experiences of these youngsters. Even the most experienced, perhaps dispirited, clinicians and educators will find their empathy strengthened, and maybe find that their sense of pride in the importance of their work has been rejuvenated. Those with learning disabilities and their families will welcome this reflection on their own lives, and that they are not alone.

— Dr. Joseph Blader, Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Science, Stony Brook University School of Medicine, State University of New York

What a good and useful film for educators and parents. But by the end, I was deeply involved with these young peoples' future, their hopes and aspirations, and the tremendous support and encouragement they received.

— Summer Brenner, author books for young adults including *Ivy*, *Homeless in San Francisco* and *Richmond Tales, Lost Secrets of the Iron Triangle*

What if school were different? What if everyone had to first excel at art, dance, music and sports? If that were the case, these young people would not be disabled at all. *Original Minds* provokes the biases that have infiltrated our thinking about learning and the value we each bring to this life. When the students in the film are viewed in terms of their strengths rather than their deficits, they are compassionate, talented, respectable and even genius. *Original Minds* can be used in teacher preparation programs, for teachers professional development and among school administrators as a discussion point about what is worth knowing and the importance of developing strengths. The stories in this film provide valuable insight into the things that matter most in life: the unique gift that each of has to offer. I can think of 101 practical uses for this film as an educator.

— Jenifer Fox, Leader of the Strengths Movement, Author of *Your Child's Strengths, Discover Them, Develop Them, Use Them*

As the title implies, the teens in this film have original ways of learning and perceiving the world. Viewers get a chance to experience the often frustrating and heartbreaking but at times inspiring and exhilarating world of youth who live in the maze of special education, as they come of age and learn to struggle, cope, and adapt. In its portraits of true individuals, it is a welcome antidote to textbook accounts of learning, emotional, and behavioral disorders.

— Steven Hinshaw, Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology at UC Berkeley, author of *The Mark of Shame: Stigma of Mental Illness and an Agenda for Change*, co-author of *The Triple Bind: Saving Our Teenage Girls from Today's Pressures*

The media has, historically, had difficulty presenting 'learning problems' to the public. Nearly every approach has been tried: talking heads, cartoons, documentaries, dramas and scholarly treatises. But -- despite these efforts -- no project has allowed the viewer to see this problem through the eyes of kids.

Enter Tom Weidinger. Tom uses his unparalleled skills as a filmmaker to explain school difficulties in an empathic, sensitive and effective way. He introduces us to five youngsters who face school failure and frustration every day. They explain and describe their daily struggles in a manner that no textbook or seminar ever could. The most outstanding aspect of this project is the utter respect with which these students and their stories are handled. Such a project could easily become exploitative in a well-intentioned attempt to engender sympathy for the students. But Tom treats the kids with the decency and dignity that they deserve and allows them to present their cases in their own words...and with passion and first-hand knowledge.

Kids go to school for a living...it's their job, their workplace. When a child struggles in school, this frustration impacts on his self-esteem, attitudes, behavior and emotional health. The 'stars' of this program explain this in a unique and creative way. As I watched this program, there were several 'aha' moments as the students offered insights into their problems, their affinities, their attitudes and their feelings. ORIGINAL MINDS does not merely 'put a human face' on learning problems...it gives these struggles a heart and a soul."

— Richard Lavoie, Author of *It's So Much Work to Be Your Friend: Helping the Child with Learning Disabilities Find Social Success*

Finally, a view into the minds and hearts of teens who are more often than not misunderstood. Original Minds allows us to feel what it's like to grow up struggling to be seen, heard, and appreciated for our differences and creativity. A must see for all who care about kids!

— Rona Renner, RN, temperament specialist, host of *Childhood Matters* radio show.

A few students in every classroom struggle daily with hidden brain-based disorders – perplexing, easy to misinterpret, frustrating to live with, and challenging for all. This important, insightful, highly recommended film enables viewers to better understand the world of kids with learning disabilities, what it takes to overcome the obstacles, and achieve success. The program the five featured teens participated in should be replicated in every high school - enabling students with LDs to become self-aware of their unique brain differences and effective strategies that work for them, and to capitalize upon their many strengths & talents to achieve their goals.

— Sandra F. Rief, Educational consultant, co-author, *The Dyslexia Checklist* and *How to Reach & Teach All Students in the Inclusive Classroom*

The movie does the best job I have ever seen of taking people inside the minds of learning disabled children. Instead of having adults talk about LD kids, the children speak for themselves; it makes the movie pretty special, even magical. I loved how the story moved past the childrens' disabilities to their strengths, and showed them at their best.

— Michael Thompson, Ph.D., Co-author of *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*.

“*ORIGINAL MINDS* opens up the lives of high school students with learning disabilities. This riveting documentary is essential viewing for educators, parents, teens with learning issues, and all of us who care about them.

— *Beth Samuelson*, Founder and Director of Student Organizational Services (“SOS”)