

Free argumentative essay on a failure to communicate

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In order for a classroom to be a learning environment, the students must be well-behaved and attentive to their teacher. In order for this environment to exist, a teacher must know how to properly communicate to his/her students. The students, just like children with parents, must know who is in charge - the teacher. In *The Class*, Francois rarely has control over his students. John Bowen describes it as a " portrait of a middle-school teacher sparring with his pupils" (1). They frequently misbehave and are disruptive. They do not seem to respect their teacher. This is the direct result of the way Francois communicates with his students. The disorder represented in the classroom in this film and the disorder I have experienced in past classroom experiences are products of the poor communication skills of the teacher. Certainly, students bear responsibility for their own misbehavior. But such misbehavior can be thwarted by a teacher who communicates his/her authority in, and control of, the classroom.

Near the start of the film, in the first scene in the classroom, Francois is trying to bring the class to order. His attempt is clumsy and too wordy. He tries to apply logic rather than firmly establish his authority. He engages in a long winded explanation of how much time is lost over the course of a year by wasting five minutes each class. He states, " With twenty-five hours a week and thirty weeks in the year, we lose thousands of minutes. In other schools, they do a full hour. Imagine how far ahead they get in a year. Figure it out!" Khoumba, a girl in the class, challenges him, " We never do an hour!" This leads to an extended back and forth between Francois and Khoumba that resolves nothing and ends with Francois in exasperation: " All right, all

I'm saying is that we waste time. Like right now" (Cantet, Campillo, Begandeau 5-6).

This represents a laxity in communication with his students. There are several examples of this throughout the film. Instead of just "laying down the law" in a clear, respectful, authoritative fashion, Francois goes down to the level of his students and tries to reason with them. "There is plenty to be frustrated about in the way Mr. Marin teaches. He attempts to create a casual, interactive repartee with the students" (Ayers 1). The students, for their part, understand Francois's style and take advantage of it. They know what he is trying to achieve (in the above case, classroom order), but they also manipulate him by extending his attempts to reason with them.

In another scene, Francois is trying to teach the French imperfect subjunctive verb case. Once again, he gets all tangled up in an oral exchange with a manipulative student, Esmeralda. He states, "All right, will you let me answer the question that you asked me? If you care." And she responds, "Yes, you may." Why should he ask permission from his student to answer her question? He even indicates the futility of his question by muttering "If you care." His communication here with his student is indicative of a teacher, once again, positioning himself as the student's peer, not as the classroom authority. Esmeralda is aware of this and plays along. This invites the rest of the class, and the other students essentially play around with the subject and Francois in a way that reveals his lack of communication skills. By the end of this discussion, the students have turned the topic away from the verb tense to the topic of Francois himself. Angelica

shows this: “ Tell me, when was the last time you heard someone talk like that? When was the last time you heard someone talk like that?” Instead of chastising the students and telling them “ this is not about me,” Francois demurs and gives into the question: “ Yesterday, with friends, we used the imperfect subjunctive” (Cantet, Campillo, Begandeau 15-16). The class then interrupts him with mockery. This represents a complete breakdown in teacher/student communication. The students, who are by no means sympathetic characters here, have mastered Francois and his communication foibles. Rick Ayers asks, “ Why does Marin teach this way? Is there nothing else that could be done to get the students out, get them talking and writing?” (1-2).

A final example occurs when the students are working on their “ self-portraits” and Esmeralda simply asks, “ How do you spell Lafayette?” Francois immediately loses control of this communication by asking, “ How do you mean?” He might be truly curious as to why she requires this spelling, but it’s not appropriate to ask her. It just opens the door again for a communication breakdown. Esmeralda explains she is trying to write “ Galeries Lafayette.” Francois awkwardly persists: “ Why are you mentioning that?” Esmeralda explains that it’s a place she often goes too and wants to mention. Francois loses communication control stating: “ That's weird. I mean, it's four metro stops from here. You never usually leave the neighborhood, that's a huge leap in one go.” Now, typically, other students join in, feeling as though Francois perceives them as having no knowledge of Paris and only aware of their own neighborhoods. The students are insulted

(justifiably), and Francois has once again failed to be an effective communicator. He has no way out, and the exchange ends with Francois trying “ to change the subject” (Cantet, Campillo, Begandeau 54-55). John Bowen writes about how teachers in France reacted to Francois’s character. “‘He never teaches,’ as one teacher put it. But what appears to irritate Frances teaching establishment even more is the attitude of ambivalence Francois shows for his students” (1). Indeed, Francois awkwardly engages his students, fails to establish anything close to an effective teaching rapport, and then just turns away.

I can recall teachers from my middle-school years who also tried to reason with misbehaving students and attempt to communicate with them on their level. I remember one teacher who responded to a student who was shooting spitballs at other students, by asking him, “ Why are you doing that? And then, “ What are you feeling that makes you act this way?” “ Don’t you respect your classmates?” The student just shrugged off the questions, repeating, “ I don’t know.” Moments later, the teacher was a target of a spitball from the unruly student.

I can also recall a teacher who sometimes started the class by asking the students, “ What should we discuss today?” Like Francois, the teacher was trying to engage the students, draw them out, but this kind of approach failed. The responses were always statements such as “ sex,” or “ lunch,” or some sports event, or some celebrity. The class would then have broken down into laughter and chaos, and no learning occurred.

I think middle-school teachers should realize that twelve to fourteen-year-olds are still children more than adults. As such, they almost crave authority and guidance; they want to be told what to do. They may be rebellious, which presents challenges to authority, but they are also, like children, testing the teacher to see what they can get away with. Teachers like Francois fail to grasp this in their communication style. As a result, the students end up more in charge than the teacher, and no one ends up learning anything.

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