



## **A Critical Analysis of the Movie, "Front of the Class ": Exploring Resilience, Pedagogy, and Real-World Implications.**

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### **Abstract**

*This study undertakes a critical examination of "Front of the Class" (2008), a biographical narrative of Brad Cohen's experiences with Tourette's syndrome. Brad's remarkable story exemplifies resilience, perseverance, and dedication, ultimately leading to his recognition as "Sallie Mae's First Year Teacher of the Year" in Georgia. Through a critical lens, this analysis explores the film's core components like character analysis, pedagogical strategies, challenges, and societal relevance, uncovering the intricate dynamics between disability, education, and personal autonomy. The study highlights Brad's remarkable optimism and coping mechanisms, serving as a paradigm for resilience and inclusivity in education.*

**Keywords:** Tourette's syndrome, resilience, pedagogy, disability studies, inclusive education, pedagogy

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### **Introduction**

The Hollywood movie 'Front of the Class' was released in 2008 by the famous director Peter Werner, the movie was written and scripted by Tom Rickman. Front of the Class is a movie which narrates about Brad Cohen, who had Tourette's syndrome from the age of six. This syndrome causes him make strange noises, which upsets his classmates, his teachers and even his father. They demanded that he should stop doing so, but he could not, he is helpless. Eventually, his parents divorced and later his mother pursued finding out what Brad's real problem was. When his mother found out it after so many researches that her son Brad has Tourette's syndrome, she found out that it was incurable. One of his high school principals made a difference in Brad's life, which leads Brad to wanting to become a teacher. But when he tried to find a teaching job in Atlanta, he faced so many obstacles one after another. Even though he is highly qualified, but after the interviews they are scared by his Tourette's syndrome. Moreover, one of the school authorities gives him a chance, and he excels. The

movie shows how he cops up with his syndrome and how he describes his syndrome among the students. Later Brad Cohen has been chosen from amongst all the new educators in the state of Georgia to be 'Sallie Mae's First Year Teacher of the year' award (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005). Hallmark Hall of Fame excels in producing powerful dramas. Front of the Class is one of their best ever. It captivates the viewer, produces tears and laughter, and teaches important moral values. Brad's strong optimistic attitude is incredible. In this analysis the researcher is going to critically analyze its key characters, the educational methods, challenges and the real-world connections of the movie 'Front of the Class'.

### **A Portmanteau of Education and Movies**

Education has evolved beyond the conventional and orthodox teaching methods in the modern era. The days of using technology to teach were long gone. The modern idea of using movies as a tool for education is a product of this technological advancement, and it keep

attracting new admirers with each passing day. Combining learning with a source of entertainment seems like the best way to get the most out of young minds, for whom textbooks frequently fall flat (DiYanni, 2002). Although this approach has its share of detractors, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. Even though using movies to teach can be difficult, there are many advantages to doing so properly. Unlike texts, movies allow students to learn visually. A student can see a recreation of Srinivas Ramanujan's life in the film 'The Man Who Knows Infinity' for instance, who is a significant mathematical figure. More so than just words, the video clips help viewers comprehend the time and place as well as the mathematical figure's way of life. In addition, unlike books, movies do not have the same restrictions. Even in the era of post-independence, when one thinks twice before going to another state, Ramanujan went to foreign nation and excels his mathematical intelligence that are a fundamental part of the movie based on Srinivas Ramanujan are just one example of how they occasionally go above and beyond the requirements of the curriculum.

### **Review of the movie 'Front of the Class'**

Front of the Class is an award-winning autobiography of a kid growing up with Tourette's Syndrome (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005). Going against what everyone said he could do, Brad's goal was to become the teacher he never had. After years of hard work and over two dozen interviews, Brad finally got his first-class room. In his first year of teaching, he was named Georgia First Year Teacher of the Year (IMDb, n.d.; Wikipedia contributors, n.d.). The Hollywood movie Front of the Class was released in 2008 by the famous director Peter Werner. The movie was written and scripted by Tom Rickman (McClintock, 2008).

Tourette syndrome itself is a neurological disorder and behaviour (neurobehavioral disorder), characterized by the action of the unconscious place quickly (brief involuntary actions), in the form of vocal and motor tics, but it is also accompanied by psychiatric disorders (psychiatric disturbances) (Hornby, 2003). Since childhood, Cohen was ridiculed by his friends, even his teacher was upset with Cohen's behaviour caused by his Tourette syndrome, and his father also could not accept Brad because of his disease; it was just his mother, Ellen, who always supported Brad (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005). Ellen seeks medical help. A psychiatrist believes that Brad's tics are the result of his parents' divorce. Ellen takes her search to the library and comes across Tourette syndrome in a medical book. She shows this to the psychiatrist, who agrees with the diagnosis, and says that there is no cure. So, she teaches him to overcome his syndrome and teaches him to adjust with the Tourette syndrome. He continues his formal education and finally Cohen graduated and then he continues his school. In his new school though he got new friends, new teachers, but it did not change his fate. He is still discriminated against by his classmates. One day, while teaching and learning activities took place, suddenly Cohen disturbed his classmate with the sounds that he was out caused by the influence of his Tourette's syndrome. The teacher was upset and finally asked Cohen to meet his Principal; finally, Cohen came to his Principal. When he meets the Principal and asks Cohen, "What is the meaning of your schooling?" But he did not answer his question; besides, he apologized to his Principal as he had disturbed his classmates. The Principal explains that the school is meant to educate and use our knowledge to eliminate ignorance. The Principal asked him if he had any interest in the orchestra happening in the evening. Cohen expressed that he didn't have any interest in the orchestra. Actually, Cohen

does not want to come in the event, but he is instructed by the Principal to be there. Of course, he refuses it because he doesn't want to encounter those looks again. But his Principal asks him to come to the event. Cohen went there and he makes those strange sounds that disrupts the event. Some of his friends ask him to keep silence. Everyone got disturbed of some strange sounds and all of them were caused by Brad. After the event, the headmaster steps upon the stage. And asks everyone if they got disturbed by some strange voice. Everyone looked at Brad and said yes to the Principal. The Principal asked Brad to come upon the stage and asks him that why he always makes such noises or sounds. To his question Brad explained about his Tourette syndrome and how helpless he actually is. He explained that till that time, there were no cure to his disease. The principal asks him leave the stage and return to his seat. When Cohen returns to his seat all attendants gave him applause to encourage him. This was the starting of Cohen's desire to becoming a teacher (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005). This story continues to his adult life. He finished his bachelor degree and then he proposes in some school for job vacancies. He was rejected by all school because of his disease, Tourette syndrome, it is the only reason why he was refused by the schools. In every interview he seeks for one chance and explains them that his disease is not going to disturb his students once they understand his sickness. Brad had a difficult time when applied for a job in Atlanta, Georgia. He was turned down after 24 interviews because of his Tourette syndrome, and finally gets an interview where the staff is accepting and they gave him the job (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.)

On his first day, Brad explains the syndrome to his students. He helps a boy with ADHD, Thomas, with reading and makes an impression on Heather, a girl with terminal cancer. Another student's father pulls her out of Brad's class as he fears Brad

will distract her. When the little girl tries to sneak in Brad's class again, he expresses his gratefulness, but doesn't oppose the girl's father's wishes and reminds her that her father is doing what he thinks is best for her (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005).

In the film Brad proved himself as a great teacher. His interaction skill with his students and their parents is amazing. Later Brad Cohen has been chosen from amongst all the new educators in the state of Georgia to be 'Sallie Mae's First Year Teacher of the year' award and the movie ends here (IMDb, n.d.).

### **Analysis of the movie**

Brad Cohen is positive and an exuberant personality. He has his life-time companion which is called Tourette Syndrome (TS). When he was 6 years old, he started making noises and barking as well as jerking and twitching his face, neck and part of his body. When he was young, he and his family didn't know about TS. His doctor suggested that he could stop his tics intentionally. Brad was not able to control his tics and there was no cure. Because of this he had hard time at school and until 12 years old, he had no friends in his life. His school teachers didn't believe him so that he often was sent to the Principal's office. However, his mother and his younger brother always supported Brad and they moved when he was 12 years old. Brad and Jeff began to attend a new school. However, teachers of the new school were the same. When Brad was sent to the Principal's office, however this Principal listened to Brad and believed him and gave a chance to explain his situation in front of the teachers and students. Before, he had no friends, and no one wanted to eat lunch with him. So, he had never eaten lunch with someone at the cafeteria until he became 12 years old. The Principal who accepted Brad and the other ignorant teachers who didn't believe Brad's TS became the strongest incentive for him to become a teacher. He wanted to become

a teacher who accepts children as they are. Brad also had a difficult time when he applied for a job in Atlanta, Georgia. I don't want to share it here, but his positive thoughts and perseverance resolved this, and he became a teacher. He proved himself to be very good at teaching and received the First-Class Teacher of the Year award in the state of Georgia.

This movie concludes information about the education for especially abled students, conclusive education, use hardware and software in classroom, teacher- student relationship, teacher-teacher relationship, parent- teacher relationship, positive result of never give up attitude.

### **Key character analysis**

A character analysis is a deep dive into the traits and personality of a particular character, as well as a discussion of the character's overall role in the story. A character analysis aims to gain a deeper understanding of the piece of literature. A character analysis needs a main idea to drive the discussion. A character analysis is an exploration of the traits, personality and characteristics of a character within a story. A character analysis will look at the conflicts a character faces, their overall role within the story, and their traits. Here is some character analysis of the movie 'Front of the class':

**Brad Cohen:** As a child with Tourette syndrome, Brad Cohen was ridiculed, beaten, mocked, and shunned. Children, teachers, and even family members found it difficult to be around him. As a teen, he was viewed by many as purposefully misbehaving, even though he had little power over the twitches and noises he produced, especially under stress (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005). Even today, Brad is sometimes ejected from movie theatres and restaurants. But Brad Cohen's story is not one of self-pity. His unwavering

determination and fiercely positive attitude conquered the difficulties he faced in school, in college, and while job hunting. Brad never stopped striving, and after twenty-four interviews, he landed his dream job: teaching grade school and nurturing all of his students as a positive, encouraging role model. Front of the Class tells his inspirational story.

**Norman Cohen:** Norman Cohen is the father of Brad Cohen. Norman initially thinks that Brad willingly creates those unwanted noises. Later he gets to know about the syndrome. Norman feels helpless about his child and later in the movie he feels the disease of Brad is a genetical transmission of him. Brad constantly gets into trouble with his father Norman and his teachers at school due to his tics (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005)

**Ellen Cohen:** Ellen Cohen is the mother of Brad Cohen. Mrs. Cohen loves Brad unconditionally. She is always by Brad's side. At first, she tries to consult him with several doctors, counsellors. But later when she deeply researched about the condition she find out that Brad is sick of a disease named Tourette Syndrome which cause him make strange noises and sounds. She is a constant supporter to Brad even when he is an adult (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005).

**Jeff Cohen:** Jeff Cohen is the younger brother of Brad Cohen. Jeff and Brad always cause trouble in their childhood. But in the end Brad got punished for his trouble making noises. With respect to time Jeff also learned about the syndrome and stays with his brother Brad till his adult age.

**The middle school principal:** At the beginning of middle school, Brad is sent to the principal's office for being disruptive. The principal invites him to the school concert later in the afternoon.

At the end of the concert, which Brad's Tourette's tics had disturbed, he calls Brad up to the stage and asks Brad to talk about his condition. As Brad makes his way back to his seat, the school applauds him. From that moment on, Brad aspires to become a teacher, just like the principal (McClintock, 2008).

Nancy Keene: Nancy Keen is Brad's girlfriend. Nancy has no problem of his disease or his disruptive sound, she just loves him because he makes her laugh. Later Brad marries her and starts living a life together (Cohen & Wysocky, 2005).

Heather: Heather is one of Brad's students who dies of cancer. But before her death she enjoys Brad's class with her fullest. Even heather's mother likes Brad because he makes her daughter happy (IMDb, n.d.).

Thomas: Thomas is a trouble student in Brad's class. But later when Brad understands his problem regarding reading and later Brad inspires him to overcome his problem.

Amanda: Amanda a former student of Brad whose father takes her out of his class because of the latter's Tourette syndrome. But Amanda loves Brad's class. Amanda's father represents those who don't want to understand the situation of a specially - abled person.

### **Educational Methods shown in the movie**

Teaching is a complex process. Teaching requires proper teaching methodologies, in order to inculcate knowledge in the minds of the students and to transfer knowledge, skill or experience to the students (Deighton, 1971). The teaching becomes interesting only when the teaching methodology is good enough. A teaching method is a description of the way that

information or behaviour is carried forward or consolidated during the instructional process (DiYanni, 2002). Teaching methods may be defined simply as a way of carrying out actual teaching in the 'classroom' Teaching Method is a step-by-step formula for presenting material, which teachers must follow in teaching. Considering from this point of view teaching methods are teacher centric. They are the means by which the teacher attempts to impart the desired learning or experience using different techniques. In method of teaching the concern is with the way the teacher organizes and uses teaching techniques or skills, subject matter, teaching aids or resources to meet teaching objectives.

According to T. Raymont -"The term method denotes such an orderly arrangement of the material of instruction as will cause that material to take best effect on the mind of the learner. Teaching methods are always goal directed. In teaching those techniques of teaching should find place in method of teaching which are helpful in fulfilling the purpose of teaching. So, there is a question of choice in case of teaching methods. In this regard Broudy remarked "Method refers to the formal structure of the sequence of acts commonly denoted by instruction. The term covers both the strategy and tactics of teaching and involves the choice of what is to be taught, and the order in which it is to be taught" Thus, teaching methods are logical, sequential and dynamic coordination of different techniques of teaching (Lickona, 2012).

In the movie Front of the class Brad was using various methods as a teacher. In his very first class as a teacher he used Question - answer method to clarify his disease of Tourette syndrome.

Along with question - answer method Brad was seen using different methods of teaching. These are discussed as follows-  
 Question - answer method: The question-answer teaching method focuses on asking students to answer sets of questions in replacement of lecturing. The designed questions should encourage and challenge students to correct their misconceptions and understand the concept by themselves. Most questioning approaches focus on the teacher asking the questions. However, student-generated questions also can lead to deep learning. Requiring students to create their own questions can elicit a greater understanding of the course material. In the movie *Front of the class*, Brad uses question answer method in his very first class amongst his students. Brad let his students ask questions about his disease Tourette Syndrome. The interactive session of question answer is described below-

Q1: Is it catching?

Brad: No, absolutely not. You have to be born with it, like I was.

Q2: Does it hurts?

Brad: Well, sometimes, when my neck jerks. But the noises do not hurt at all.

Q3: Can you go to movies?

Brad: Yes, I can go to movies, but sometimes, I get kicked out and that makes me sad.

Q4: What's the bunny's name?

Brad: Waffle!

Q5: Are they ever gonna make you well. Mr Cohen?

Brad: well. Right now, there's no medicine that can cure Tourette's. But it's okay. Because I've learned to accept it and I don't let it run my life.

These are the questions- answer session that Brad had in his very first class. And of course, it clears all the doubts about his disease. Later on, to keep the class joyful he joked among that he can do anything but can't play hide and seek. Everyone liked Brad in his very first class.

Play way method: The Play Way method of education assumes that play is a natural way for children to learn about and understand the world around them. It relies on the fact that children learn best when they actively participate in their own learning. It makes learning easy and pleasurable. Each child is given identical opportunities for participation. It develops not only knowledge but also abilities. Brings satisfaction at the intellectual level. It creates an aptitude learning environment. In the movie *Front of the class* Brad Cohen teaches his students by using the play way method. As he is a teacher of grade 2, play way method is appropriate to them.

Demonstration method: Another method of teaching widely used in classroom is demonstration. Like lecture method it is also a teacher- controlled method of teaching. In demonstration method, the teacher will do a display or exhibition while the students watch. Classroom demonstrations can be very valuable to teach and critique many skills and examine attitudes and values. The focus of demonstration method is the achievement of psychomotor as well as cognitive objectives. It helps in learning and remembering more than audio-experiences. In the movie *Front of the Class*, Brad Cohen uses various things like maps, puzzles, boards, charts etc to demonstrate various knowledge towards his students.

Kinaesthetic learning: Kinaesthetic learning is a type of teaching method that involves physical activity and movement to help students learn and remember new things. Kinaesthetic learning is a great modern teaching method for all learners because it gives students more ways to explore concepts and get hands-on, real-life experiences.

**Problem solving:** The problem -solving method of teaching is a popular approach to learning that allows students to understand new concepts by doing. This approach provides students with examples and real-world situations, so they can see how the theory behind a concept or skill works in practice. In the movie *Front of the Class*, Brad seemed to be a great teacher in terms of solving problems. One example of Brad Cohen's compassion can be seen in a dialogue he had with a student with Tourette syndrome who was struggling in school. The student was feeling embarrassed and frustrated by his tics and was worried about how his classmates would react.

Cohen: I know it can be tough, but you're not alone. I've been there, and I know how hard it can be. But I also know that you're capable of great things, and I believe in you.  
Student: (The student looked up at Brad, tears in his eyes) But what if my tics never go away? What if I'm always different?

Cohen: (Brad put his hand on the student's shoulder) You're not different, you're unique. And that's something to be celebrated. You have so much to offer the world, and your tics don't define you. They're just a part of who you are.

Student: Thank you, Mr. Cohen. I needed to hear that.

Cohen: Anytime. I'm here for you, and I'll always be here to support you.

This conversation shows Brad Cohen's compassion because he was able to connect with the student on a deep level and offer him the support and encouragement, he needed to feel seen and heard. Brad didn't dismiss the student's struggles or tell him to just "deal with it." Instead, he validated his feelings and showed him that he was not

alone. This is a powerful example of compassion in action.

### **Challenges faced in the education system**

*Front of the class* is a top -notch educational movie which shows a replica of an education system. Challenges are the part of everyone's life. In education everyone faces challenges in various ways. In this movie, the key character, Brad Cohen faces challenges in his formal education journey. As we all know, Brad has Tourette Syndrome and he sits in the classroom along with the other general students which shows the use of Conclusive Education. But conclusive education itself is a big challenge in the movie *Front of the Class*. In his school Brad's neck jerking, strange sounds always disrupt the other students and everyone gets annoyed of him. Everyone thinks he make all the sounds on purpose. His teachers kept complaining about his behaviour inside the class and kept calling his parents and warns him not to do such thing again. But Brad was helpless. And later when he was an adult, he faced challenges to find a teaching job in Atlanta, Georgia because of his disease. Undoubtedly, he has excellent grades in his bachelor's degree, but after knowing his disease, 24 of the schools rejected Brad (Google Books, n.d.).

### **Real world connections**

Almost every film connects people that is the real world. Writers always gets inspired from some events to write a story. *Front of the class* is a movie which inspired from the life of Brad Cohen who really is a victim of Tourette syndrome. This movie represents his life since his childhood. This is a movie where we can feel how a boy with such disruptive disease makes a great attitude towards life and excels his career as a teacher. This movie shows how people treat a person with disabilities. This movie also encourages inclusive education and tries to

bloom a never give up on your dream attitude to its viewer. The front of the class shows how a grade 2 teacher teaches in his classroom. This movie represents equality, democracy, self-confidence, and also the harsh realities of a society. Even if our society consists of so many people with a bad attitude towards people with disabilities, this movie shows that good people also exist. And if we educate those people with a negative attitude, we can change them as well. Many Movies have helped raise awareness and inspire change by depicting historical injustices. Cultural Exchange: International cinema introduces audiences to different cultures, fostering a sense of global unity. Films like this offer glimpses into worlds beyond our own. Movies have the power to move us, inspire us, and even change the way we see the world. Sometimes a movie can come along at just the right time in our lives and have a profound impact on us. It can make us question our beliefs, challenge our assumptions, and open our eyes to new possibilities. The movie *Front of the Class* explained how a person with disability faces various struggles in society. Disabilities have been known to make people feel outcast or isolated from wider society, especially if the disability can be visually seen. This is why it's imperative to remain positive towards anybody we come into contact with, especially those with a disability. The relevance between the implications of the movie toward learning spirit is that the movie makes people have high ambitions (Earle, 1992).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the character and educational values demonstrated by Brad Cohen in the film *Front of the Class* provide inspiration and guidance for all of us to become good individuals and succeed in life. By practicing democratic values, as well as developing patience, perseverance, creativity, and optimism, we can achieve our goals and become responsible and fair

citizens. Brad's character as a teacher and mentor sets a good example for his students and encourages them to become responsible and fair citizens. Brad shows how democratic values can be applied in everyday life and how we can be good leaders by leading by example. In terms of education, Brad demonstrates that everyone has the potential to learn and grow, even when facing obstacles and challenges. Patience, perseverance, and creativity are key to overcoming these obstacles. Additionally, the values of optimism and self-confidence also help a person achieve their goals.

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