

EXAMINING KEATING'S TEACHING IN TERMS OF NATIONAL BOARD FOR  
PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS IN DEAD POETS SOCIETY

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by

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## **AUTHOR DECLARATIONS**

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.
2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has consisted of:
  - i) Research Methods course during the undergraduate study
  - ii) Examination of several thesis guides of particular universities both in Turkey and abroad as well as a professional book on this subject.

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Kadriye Şenlik**

**June 2010**

### **EXAMINING KEATING'S TEACHING IN TERMS OF NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS IN DEAD POETS SOCIETY**

In this qualitative study, the pedagogical content knowledge of Mr. Keating in Dead Poets Society is explored. Mr. Keating in Dead Poets Society and Mrs. Gruwell in Freedom Writers are compared and contrasted not only to give the readers a better idea about Mr. Keating's teaching English Language Art, but also for the readers to see if the Hollywood film makers produce a better screen teacher. His teaching is scrutinized to see what standards he meets as an accomplished teacher, and what standards he does not meet in terms of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

#### **Key words:**

Dead Poets Society, Pedagogical Content Knowledge, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

## KISA ÖZET

Kadriye ŞENLİK

Haziran 2010

### ÖLU OZANLAR DERNEĞİNDEKİ KEATING'İN ÖĞRETMENLİĞİNİN AMERİKAN MİLLİ EĞİTİM KURULU PROFESYONEL ÖĞRETİM STANDARTLARI ACISINDAN İNCELENMESİ

Bu niteliksel çalışmada, Ölu Ozanlar Derneğindeki Keating'in eğitim ve öğretim bilgisi incelenmektedir. Bu çalışma okuyucuya Keating'in İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatını ne derece öğrettiği bilgisini vermektedir. Aynı zamanda okuyucuya Hollywood film yapımcılarının daha iyi okul filmi yapıp yapmadıklarını bilgisi sunulmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Ölu Ozanlar Derneğindeki Keating'in öğretmenliği Özgürlük Yazarları'ndaki Öğretmen Gruwell ile karşılaştırılmaktadır. Keating'in öğretmenliğinin Amerikan Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Profesyonel Öğretim Standartları açısından hangi standartları karşılayıp karşılamadığı incelenmektedir.

#### **Anahtar Kelimeler:**

Olu Ozanlar Derneği, Eğitim ve Öğretim Bilgisi, Amerikan Milli Eğitim Kurulu Profesyonel Öğretim Standartları

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

F. U.	Fatih University
I. S. S.	Institute of Social Sciences
M. A.	Master of Arts
M. Sc.	Master of Sciences
Ph. D.	Doctor of Philosophy
YÖK	Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu (Higher Education Council)



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## Introduction

In this study, Keating's teaching methods will be explored in *Dead Poets Society* from National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. *Dead Poets Society* is a 1989 Academy Award winning movie. It tells the story of an English teacher, Keating, who wants to change his students' lives while teaching poetry. At the end of the movie, a student, Neil, commits suicide and Keating is fired by the administration of the school.

*Dead Poets Society* is a popular school film. Popular school films can be studied for different purposes. *Dead Poets Society* is studied: (1) to prepare pre-service teachers for their profession. (2) To understand how Hollywood portrays masculinity in male teachers. (3) To see if the story written in text communicates the same philosophical expression when shown in movies. (4) To understand experiential relation between a teacher and a student.

This qualitative study is historical in character, descriptive in structure. Throughout this study, the following questions will be answered: Does Keating have pedagogical content knowledge of English Language Art? Is Keating responsible for the death of his student? What National Board for Professional Teaching Standards does Keating have as an English Language Art teacher?

We also look at what the similarities and differences are between the teaching methods of Keating and Mrs. Gruwell, the teacher in *Freedom Writers*. *Freedom Writers* was directed by Richard LaGravenese twenty years after the production of *Dead Poets Society*. This movie is based on the book *The Freedom Writers Diary*. *The Freedom Writers Diary* tells the real life of a new teacher's teaching in an urban school ("Reel

Faces”). Erin Gruwell, a white female teacher, gets a teaching position at Woodrow Wilson High School. Wilson High School is a coed school in the urban area of Long Beach. The students at Wilson are from different ethnic backgrounds. The class of Mrs. Gruwell portrays the life in the inner city of Long Beach; violence among ethnic groups. Although the school is integrated, the students are segregated in their small areas, like the people in urban Long Beach. There is no tolerance among people; all are fighting to get their rights. Mrs Gruwell determined to teach tolerance and English Language Arts. This comparison will help me understand Keating’s teaching better and also we will look at if Hollywood has made a better school film twenty years or not after the production of *Dead Poets Society*.

From my knowledge, this is the first study to scrutinize Keating’s teaching English Language Arts from National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. NBPTS are created by teachers for teachers, and the NBPTS website explains how the standards are developed.

Standards are developed by a committee of outstanding educators who are broadly representative of accomplished professionals in their field. While the majority of each committee is made up of classroom teachers, other members may include experts in child development, teacher education and relevant disciplines. The committee provides recommendations to the National Board and advises those involved in developing the corresponding assessment.

**The Development Process:** The NBPTS Board of Directors appoints a standards committee. The committee develops standards that: Reflect the Five Core Propositions. Identify specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support accomplished practice, while emphasizing the holistic nature of teaching. Illustrate how a teacher's professional judgment is reflected in action. Describe how the standards come to life in different settings. Standards undergo repeated drafts until they are approved for public comment review. A draft of the standards is distributed widely to the education community for public comment after which the committee meets again to review and revise the document. The document is then submitted to the NBPTS Board of Directors for adoption and is then published in final form.

This study is not only done to contribute to the literature, but also to improve my pedagogical content knowledge in English Language Arts. Reflection on Keating's teaching will help me be a better teacher.

This study has four chapters apart from the introduction and the conclusion part. Chapter I of this study informs the reader of the background of the movie and the literature review of school film studies. This chapter also includes the methodology used in this study and the importance of exploring Keating's teaching in *Dead Poets Society*. The reader can find information about the curriculum at Welton Academy and Keating's philosophy of teaching.

Chapter II informs the reader about the definition of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and explores Keating's pedagogical content knowledge. This chapter also informs the reader of Keating's method of teaching English Language Art and explains his methodology in detail.

Chapter III compares and contrasts two teachers' teaching styles, Keating in *Dead Poets Society* and Gruwell in *Freedom Writers*. Gruwell teaches a diverse group of students in an urban school. However, Keating teaches Caucasian boys in a private school. *Freedom Writers* was filmed twenty years after the production of *Dead Poets Society*.

Chapter IV informs the reader about the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBTS). NBTS are based on the Five Core Propositions that form the foundation for what all accomplished teachers should know and be able to do and provide a reference that helps educators link teaching standards to teaching practice. Sixteen standards are developed out of these five core propositions. This chapter also scrutinizes Keating's teaching from National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

In the conclusion, the reader will be informed what standards are implemented and not implemented in Keating's teaching English Language Art. Findings of this study can be found in the conclusion part.

## Chapter I

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THIS STUDY

In this chapter, I will summarize the *Dead Poets Society* and give background information about this study. I will also explain what makes me do this work, the methodology of this study, and the importance of this study.

The movie is directed by Peter Weir. His early work helped to bring Australian film to the world. His later films, made in Hollywood, combined American movie technique with the style of European art films. Weir's vivid and varied work often deals with clashing cultures and ideals (Weir). In *Dead Poets Society*, two clashing cultures are orthodox and unorthodox teaching style and the two philosophies of teaching. This film, rated PG-13, would be more appropriate for older students in the context of understanding others and allowing them to express themselves (Campbell 1).

*Dead Poets Society* takes place at Welton Academy, which is a private boarding school for boys. Private school means every type of school whose founders seek the prerogative to determine whom to admit, whom to hire, what to teach, how to teach, and what to emphasize. Private designates institutions whose founders believe their mission cannot be served by a public institution (Peshkin 10). The four pillars of this preparatory school are: Tradition, Honor, Discipline and Excellence. The movie starts with the hundredth anniversary of the school. After the assembly, parents say goodbye to their sons and leave.

Popular school films can be studied for different purposes; (1) Works that serve a good introduction to the school film genre, (2) Academics who only write about school films, (3) Academics who have taken up school films as part of their practices with pre-service teachers (4) School films as pedagogical texts and devices to engage students in thinking, writing, and discussing a range of issues related to education (Trier 58).

*Dead Poets' Society* is used to promote philosophical reflections and to discuss critical pedagogy in pre-service teachers (Mclaren & Leonardo). Their findings are:

The charismatic portrayal of Keating by Robin Williams made it difficult to separate Keating's engaging personality from the pedagogical philosophy he appeared to embrace in the films. Students admired Keating's nonconformist teaching practices and described them as desirable attributes for a teacher to possess. Other students reacted by saying that a single teacher can do little more than reach out to help students on an individual basis. (Mclaren & Leonardo 145)

Tan used four popular films (*The Lord of the Rings*, *Dead Poets Society*, *The Matrix* and *The Simpsons*) to explore how the four films draw out different types of reflection in the pre-service teachers, and how the pre-service teachers' reflections based on the films help to prepare them for the teaching profession in Singapore. Pre-service teachers in their reflection, share about the same dilemma they face in wanting to be like Mr. Keating on the one hand, and being constrained by social norms and pressures on the other. The pre-service teachers reflect on the need to monitor safety

of their students while encouraging them to be creative. The encouragement should not create a threat to school and school organization.

Dead Poets' Society movie and three other movies (The Principal, Stand and Deliver, and Summer School) are studied to understand how Hollywood portrayed masculinity in male teachers (Bodnar). Bodnar's findings regarding to Keating's masculinity indicates this.

Keating, in *Dead Poets Society*, illustrates that it is all right to show emotion to show sorrow through tears or joy laughter. The film debunks the notion that men not only are supposed to show their feelings, but that they must stay emotionally steady. *Dead Poets Society* is a rollercoaster of emotional ups and downs. And this is reflected through its main character: John Keating. Part of the reason why his students are so drawn to him is precisely because of his passion for (poetry), his sensitivity (to life), and his vulnerability (to love). All are qualities usually associated with femininity (Bodnar 115).

*Dead Poet Society* was studied to understand if the story told in one medium communicates the same philosophical expression when told in another, analyze the adaption of text to movies, movies to text (Dodson). Dodson (219) concluded that there are numerous successful approaches to the "from -one- medium-to another" conversion process. She added that Kleinbaum's adaption of Peter Weir's *New Age Humanism* provides an example of the most recent progression in adaption-the novelization.



In an exploratory study, the *Dead Poets' Society* (Weir, 1989), *Stand and Deliver* (Menendez, 1989), *Madame Sousatzka* (Schlesinger, 1988) were discussed as a narrative medium that provide for experiential understandings of the lived *relations* between adults and children. These movies are studied to reflect on the meaning of relations as depicted in the movies and pedagogical of *contemporary* educational *relations* between a teacher and his or her students into reflective articulation (William).

I am interested in exploring Keating's teaching English Language Art in *Dead Poets Society* for two reasons. The first one is there are controversial opinions about Keating as a teacher. Keating is highly criticized for not doing his job as a teacher.

The hero, John Keating, accomplishes nothing. As for the student rebellion against the incredible headmaster, it is only temporary knee-jerk application of a Keating gesture. Nothing is changed, but we see Keating watching with smirking self-satisfaction, as if he had in fact dethroned a tyrant, instead of choreographing a fake rebellion against a fake villain. The film gets the firing of this rebel all wrong. It says he was fired for fighting injustice. What he should have been fired for was making himself, instead of the works of literature, the object of adulation. The film is immoral: it presents a fraud as a hero. (Heilman 423)

Keating is being accused of causing the death of his student by the administration of the school. At the same time we should concern the question of the teacher's responsibility and irresponsibility such that both excessive creativity and

conformity may result in tragic costs that must be paid in full with personal and professional, private and public lives.

On the other hand, this teacher wins the heart of almost all his students at the end of the movie. His teaching style is appreciated by some films reviewers.

First and foremost, *Dead Poets Society* is cited by many films reviewers an educationally insightful and commercially inspirational film. In this regard the film's portrayal of one teacher's passionate devotion to his students and subject discipline is honored. The teacher's devotion is so embodied to in his way of being that infectiously inspires his students to begin a journey of self discovery and self making. As a result of teacher's influence many lives are forever changed (Williams 197).

Some films critics believe that Keating is a good teacher while other film critics highly criticize Keating's teaching style. This dilemma encourages me to look at this English teachers' pedagogical content knowledge from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

The second reason is that there is a gap in the literature for evaluation Keating's teaching from NBPTS. *Dead Poet Society* has been studied in three areas (1) to understand how Hollywood portrayed masculinity in male teachers. (2) To see if the story told in one medium communicates the same philosophical expression when told in another medium. (3) To ask pre-service and service teachers to reflect on the movie. This study will be the first one to use NBPTS to evaluate Keating's teaching English Language Art.

Keating's pedagogical content knowledge will be evaluated from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). There are sixteen NBPTS for Keating's subject area. His subject area is adolescent and young adulthood English language art.

Teaching content for understanding, teacher disposition during teaching, students learning, and the applied role practitioners in education represent areas of research in change (Prawat 7; Shulman 9). The research in education in the last twenty years have left us an exhaustive analysis of various teaching practices and their effect on the learning process (Barone; Lee & Smagorinsky; Sheekey,). The research indicates that the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge is as important as content subject matter (Wilson 26).

The subject matter has to be presented while in consideration of students' experience. This can be achieved by teachers who have the pedagogical content knowledge of the subject. Conant (1963) argued that although a physicist might understand the important physics content to teach or which concepts are most central to the study of the motion, for example, she might not be able to address whether ten-year olds are able to grasp these concepts. One way of learning pedagogical content knowledge can be achieved by observing teachers and reflecting on their teaching (Cerbin & Kopp 255).

In this study, Keating's teaching will be observed by using wide lens technique. It is not new to watch a teacher's teaching on a video and evaluate his/her teaching. This started at Harvard University and microteaching sprang up on the Stanford University.

This process is called clinical supervision and it has three major components. The supervisor:

1. Meets with the teacher and plans for the classroom observation.
2. Observes a lesson systematically and records information related to the objectives set during the planning conference; and
3. Meets with the teacher to (a) analyze (together) the data recorded by the observer, (b) Interpret the meaning of this information from the teacher's perspective, and (c) Reach decision about the next steps (Acheson & Meredith 9).

The method that I will use to study this movie is rooted in clinical supervision but I cannot call just watching the movie and evaluating teachers' pedagogical content knowledge as clinical supervision.

This study will look at Keating's teaching in the classroom as a teacher and we will describe what he does and how he presents his subject matter to the students. After the description of the events, we will evaluate his pedagogical content knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge has been defined by Shulman:

The most regularly taught topic in one's subject area, the most useful forms if the representations of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations, -in a word, ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others. Pedagogical content knowledge also includes and understanding of what makes learning of specific topic easy or difficult; the conceptions and preconceptions those students of

different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently topics and lessons.

This study will be a qualitative study rather than a quantitative study. The researcher in the qualitative research relies on the views of participants, asks broad general questions, collects data consisting largely of words (or text) from participants, describes and analyses these words for themes and conducts the inquiry in a subjective, biased manner (Creswell 38) The research method to be used is historical in character, descriptive in structure. It is historical because the actors acted the way they did. We have to describe the events in the movie so the reader can understand what we are talking about. Historical research has been defined as the systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events (Cohen & Manion 45). Historical research must deal with data that already exists such as the evidence of the man's past, acts, and thoughts. We will analyze the conversation that has taken place in the movie related to Keating's teaching. Sacks believed that one can only develop truly scientific approach to studying society through studying tape-recordings of conversations (Travers 84). Over the last twenty years conversation analysis has grown from a subfield of ethnomethodology, on the margins of social science, to a large and growing interdisciplinary field (Travers 85), our document is the *Dead Poets Society* film and also the *Dead Poets Society* book. This study is also descriptive: it determines and reports the things are as they are. One way of doing this is through observation and specifically for this study, nonparticipant observation. In our study we are able to observe the events

that are taking place in the movie several times as it has happened in the past. We are lucky to directly observe the events and teachers teaching methods at the school by watching the movie as much as we want. This observation will help us to collect data for our evaluation.

This study is important in four ways. (1) From my knowledge, *Dead Poets Society* was not being studied to find out if Keating has National Board Certification Teaching Standards in his teaching. (2) Criticizing and reflecting on a teacher's teaching methodology will help me as a teacher to improve my pedagogical content knowledge. One study states the transformation of knowledge as:

The movies, however, also offer a powerful lesson about the very nature of classroom teaching. In most of the popular teacher movies, the viewer is able to see a paradigm shift in how teachers view students. Indeed, what makes these movies emotionally engaging is that such a pedagogical shift occurs before our eyes, and afterward neither the teacher nor the students nor the viewer will be the same. All will be transformed. (Lasley).

(3) This study may inspire movie script writers to write a school movie in which the teacher may have the National Board Certification Teaching Standards qualifications. (4) It will contribute to the body of knowledge in teacher education and literature.

## Chapter II

### PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT KNOWLEDGE OF MR. KEATING

In this chapter, I will focus on the curriculum at Welton Academy and explore the pedagogical content knowledge of Keating. I will also describe the teaching methods that Keating uses during his class in *Dead Poets Society*.

*Curriculum at Welton:* Curriculum can be defined as a plan for the action or written document that includes strategies for achieving desired goals or ends. Curriculum can be defined as dealing with the experience of the learner inside and outside of the school experience of learner during his life time (as long as it is planned). Curriculum can be considered as a system for dealing with people and processes or the organization of personnel and procedures for implementing that system (Ornstein & Hunkins 5).

The curriculum is designed at Welton in private freedom and in a traditional way. The school is a traditional school focusing on the success of the students, therefore, it becomes one of the best schools in the United States. Instead of the students choosing their extracurricular activities, the Headmaster assigns the extracurricular activities to the boys on the basis of their previous record repetition. The purpose of the schooling at Welton is to prepare students for Ivy League universities and the curriculum is created and designed for this goal. The students of Welton represent the "gold" stratum of future corporate and professional leaders (McLaren & Leonardo 132). The four pillars of the school are mentioned as tradition, honor, discipline, and excellence. This

style of educating privileges the desire for obedience, dependence, and authority (William 195). The administration of Welton believes the sanction of the boys' parents to enforce tough discipline over their children, to exert his will over the children's desires and if necessary to control with threat, fear, or through punishment (William 195). When he implements rigid discipline, Mr. Nolan assumes this as being for the best interest of the Welton's students.

Welton's official curriculum material -one that the school principal, Nolan, boasts "is set proven, and works"- follows a program of inquiry that fetishizes the production of knowledge. It concentrates on "what works" and disregards the work which goes into working (McLauren& Leonardo 138).

The school administration believes in the essentialist philosophy of teaching. One of the main goals of Essentialist educators is to pass on the cultural and historical heritage to each new generation of students, beginning with a strong foundation. This strong foundation is built by teaching English, Math, Social Studies, and Science. It is expected that the students learning of these subjects will help them deal with the world, solve problems and move onto new discoveries. In this philosophy, students do not have a right to select the courses that they want to study. It is also believed that students do not have the experience of knowing what they need to learn. The second important aspect of the essentialist philosophy is that competition is inherent in the



human species and is a driving force virtually all human attempts (Lober 12). Students have to be prepared for the global economy.

William S. Bagley, One of the Essentialist philosopher states gripping and enduring interests frequently grow out of learning efforts that are not intrinsically appealing or attractive. The control, direction, and guidance of immature by the mature is inherent in the prolonged period of infancy or necessary dependence peculiar to the human species. While the capacity for self discipline should be the goal, imposed discipline is a necessary means to this end. (Lober 12)

The reason why the parents send their children to Welton Academy is that the students are likely to go to Ivy League universities. Mr. Nolan, the principal of Welton academy, states "In her first year, Welton Academy graduated five students. Last year we graduated fifty-one. And more than seventy-five percent of those went on to the Ivy League. This, this kind of accomplishment is the result of fervent dedication to the principles taught here. This is why you parents have been sending us your sons. This is why we are the best preparatory school in the United States." Therefore, the staff of Welton focus on the success of their students.

Welton high school is not different than Edgewood Academy, which is described in *Permissible Advantage* by Peskin. Peskin asks a student "Do your parents believe that you get something here that you cannot get at the public schools?" Student says "Yes. They want you to be on the top of the food chain. They want us to be the bosses, not

the employees. They want us to be the people who get high wages. They want us to be in charge. We are going to be the leaders.”

*Parent of Welton Student:* Welton is a private boarding school and the cost of boarding and education of the school cannot be neglected. Instead of parents enrolling their boys into a public school for free, they chose to enroll their sons into Welton. Parents sacrifice economically to send their sons to the best preparatory school in the nation. Parents expect their sons will go to Ivy League universities and become doctors, bankers, or lawyer. One of the parents (Mr. Perry), Neil’s father, doesn’t want his son to participate in many extracurricular activities that his son’s grades might be negatively affected. The only purpose of high school education for Mr. Perry, is to prepare his son to be a doctor. Parents of Welton Academy want to create a future for their sons but they do not realize that it is their boys’ life.

Moreover, students at Welton are not only physically away from their parents but also emotionally away from them. Birthday is one of the most important day in American culture for a child, that most important day is kind of neglected by the parents. Todd parents have given Todd the same desk set two years in a row for his birthday. When Neil tries to relive Todd’s hurt by saying that they probably just forgot, Todd says “They probably just weren’t thinking at all.” The parent, especially the father does not know how to create father-son bonding or they are busy fathers and they do not have time to create father-son bonding. Mr. Perry is cold emotionally and Neil is afraid to talk honestly to him. Even when Mr. Perry wants to know what his son wants,

he speaks as giving a command to a soldier as a general. Mr. Perry says "If you need anything, let us know!" After Neil discusses the situation with his father, Keating says "Have you ever told your father what you have told me?" Neil says, I can't talk to him this way." Neil says that his father doesn't know him because "He has never asked me what I want." When Mr. Perry tells Neil to quit as a co-editor of the year book, Neil just follows his father order. This father son relationship is not different for the rest of the students. After Neil's father leaves, the other students gather around Neil and Charlie suggest that Neil just tell his father what he wants. Neil snaps back, "Don't tell me how to talk to my father- Mr. Banker, Mr.Lawyer". He then tells them that they have as much success talking to their fathers as he does to his. Then students say "Okay, okay." Neil cannot talk to him and express his feelings. When Mr. Perry approached his son to learn about his son's feelings he shouts. "Tell me your feelings!" Mr. Perry does not understand that Neil will not express his feelings to his demanding father.

In this white American culture at Welton, sons represent their fathers. A successful son represents a successful father in the same way an unsuccessful son represents an unsuccessful father. When Knox visits the Danburrys' for dinner (friends of his father), Mr. Danburry, upon greeting Knox, put his arm around Knox's shoulder and says "He is a spitting image of his father." He asks Knox about his father. Knox says he just handled a big case for General Motors. Mr. Danburry says, I know where you're headed, like father like son". Son representation of father culture pressures fathers to sacrifice economically to make their sons successful. At the same time, this pressure prevents father to see and understand what their sons want.

When Neil's father finds out that his son is acting in a play he is worried that his son cannot go to Ivy League Universities and he withdraws his son from Welton and enrolls him into Braden Military School. Mr. Perry believes, as a father, he is providing his son, Neil, a lot of opportunities that he has never dreamt of. He does not want his son to waste those opportunities. Mr. Perry does not care what his son wants for his future and he does not have trust his son to make judgment for himself. He just wants his son to follow his orders without questioning them. On the other hand, Neil believes that going to military school and being a doctor is a lifetime and he does not want to do that. Neil knows his life will be over any way, so he wants to seize the day by doing what he thinks is good for him. It is obvious that neither Neil nor his father understands each other or even try to understand each other. We have seen that the fathers also have an essentialist philosophy of teaching. Father is mature and he has to guide, control and direct, his son, the immature as Bagley stated.

*Keating's Philosophy of Teaching:* Keating has an existentialist philosophy of teaching. Existentialism can be thought of as the twentieth-century analogue of nineteenth-century romanticism (Irvine web). Existentialism is based on the idea that man is the measure of all things which is one of the three doctrines of Protagoras (Lorber 19).

Protagoras was born in approximately 490 B. C. E. in the town of Abdera in Thrace and died c. 420 B. C. E. (place unknown). He traveled around Greece earning his living primarily as a teacher and perhaps advisor and lived in Athens for several years, where he associated with Pericles and

other rich and influential Athenians. Protagoras of Abdera was one of several fifth century Greek thinkers (including also Gorgias, Hippias, and Prodicus) collectively known as the Older Sophists, a group of traveling teachers or intellectuals who were experts in rhetoric (the science of oratory) and related subjects (Poster).

Neill has an existentialist philosophy of teaching and he started his boarding school in 1921. He stated the goal of his school "My view is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing.... We set out to make a school in which we should allow children freedom to be themselves. In order to do this we had to renounce all discipline, all direction, all suggestions, all moral training, and all religious instruction" (Neill 4).

Keating promotes the existentialist philosophy of teaching which takes the position that all people are unique individuals and must define, and find, happiness for themselves. Keating offers to the student via a decreasing sense of dependency upon the teacher, a way to move toward self exploratory and self responsibility (William 195). When Keating is teaching how to rate a poem, he only wants his students soul and heart to rate the poem. He rejects another method of rating a poem even asking his students to rip the page which explains how to rate a poem.

Keating also emphasizes "Seizing the Day". This emphasizes guides some of his students to use their time and energy to satisfy their internal desire. One of his

students, Neil, lies to the school administration to be an actor in the play, another one, Knox writes a poem for an engaged girl, Chris, to gain her love.

Tan states that this film is ideal in bringing out the philosophical concepts of romanticism and realism. While romanticism emphasizes individuality, originality, imagination, emotional expression, freedom and idealism, realism emphasizes reality, objectivity, detachment, accurate observation and rejection of the impractical and visionary (Baker & Kemper 2004). The pre-service teachers then discussed Beiser's (1998) article where he outlines the key features of a romantic education. Essentially such an education views education as the highest good where the individual's goal is self-realization and self-discovery (489).

Existentialism remains as an extreme philosophy. Few people are willing to grant students the kind of freedom advocated by Existentialists for fear that American cultural heritage would be lost and that students would be ill prepared to take their places as productive members of the society (Lorber 21). Keating's teaching creates the same problem in the movie.

*Keating's Curriculum:* Keating does not follow the curriculum that is shared by the parents and school administration. Keating has a purposefully different curriculum than the school administration and the parents. Mr. Keating makes students believe in themselves by introducing them to the discipleship of Walt Whitman, "the bard of personality" (Collins 74). Keating's main goal is to teach students express themselves and seize the day. Mr. Keating reads poems from poets who have the same belief as

him. He reads a poem from Whitman, and wants the boys to be part of the ongoing play of life. Keating believes and teaches that words and ideas can change the world. Keating wants his students to have confidence in themselves and express their feelings and thoughts without fear.

It can be seen on the first day of the school that Keating has a different curriculum than the rest of the teachers. Other teachers' curriculums are based on preparing students for the Ivy League colleges but not Keating's. On the first day of school boys move from one class to the other and meet the teachers and learn about the curriculum and teachers' expectations from them. All the teachers except the new English teacher, Mr. Keating, introduce their subjects, give assignments, and the class is over. Only Mr. Keating does something unusual; with a yardstick in his hand, he walks up and down the aisles of the room, recites a poem energetically "O Captain! My Captain!" He then takes the class to the Welton Honor Room, and asks the boys to make their lives extraordinary by "seizing the day." To convince his students to seize the day he shows pictures of alumni and tells the students that those students were not different from them and they are not alive anymore. He prefers to be called O Captain, My Captain. O Captain, My Captain is a poem written by Walt Whitman after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. He was revolutionary president. Lincoln abolished slavery and won the civil war. He (February 12, 1809 – April 15, 1865) served as the [16th President of the United States](#) from March 1861 until his assassination in April 1865. By asking students to call him O Captain, My captain, Keating thinks that he is a leader of the students as Abraham Lincoln was the President for the United States of

America. Keating is a revolutionary person, and he will liberate the students by teaching them *Carpe Diem*. Being called *O Captain, My Captain* means that whatever you are and what you do; you will die as the president. Keating completely believes or want to keep in mind that it is impossible for a person not to die and not to fertilize daffodils. Being *O Captain, My Captain* by the students will help him remember the death of himself, his leadership role. Sometimes, Keating dictates students to follow his order. He wants the students to rip the introduction to the poetry part out thinking that value of a poem cannot be measured by mathematical numbers. Keating does this without encouraging his students to analyze and criticize the preface themselves. By doing this he also implies that any critical commentary should be ignored (Glatthorn 83).

Keating is also aware of his students' expectation and he knows that he has to prepare his students for Ivy League Colleges. In one instance, while teaching poetry, he looks at one of his students and says this "I see that look in Mr. Pitt's eye, like nineteenth century literature has nothing to do with going to business school or medical school. Right? Maybe. Mr. Hopkins, you may agree with him, thinking "Yes, we should simply study our Mr. Pritchard and learn our rhyme and meter and go quietly about the business of achieving other ambitions." Keating does not really care about students' preparation for colleges and he does what he thinks is the right thing for them.

Keating does not believe in Tradition which is one of the four pillars of Welton Academy. He uses unorthodox methods of teaching and he is warned by the principal. The Principal tells Keating to follow the tradition and prepare the students for college. The Principal believes if the students are prepared for college, then the teacher has



done his job. In the movie, we do not see that if Keating is going to follow his principal's order or not.

Keating was a student at Welton Academy and he knows the curriculum and culture at the school. Keating was hired to teach the curriculum that is set there. Although, Keating knows the expectation of the parents and the administration for the teachers, he ignores their expectation. Keating encourages students to pursue education to the ends of self actualization, existential freedom, and humanistic quest for peak experiences (McLauren & Leonardo 132). He does not have a right not to follow the curriculum and he has to respect to four pillars of Welton Academy. Keating is being paid to teach English Language Art, and to follow the curriculum at the school. Keating neither follows a curriculum that fits the school mission nor meets parents' expectation.

### **Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

A teacher without content knowledge will have difficulty as well as a teacher who does not have the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Knowing a subject matter is not enough to teach diverse learners. The instructor has to know how to present the material to the learners. Combination of content knowledge and practice of teaching is pedagogical content knowledge. A central contribution of Shulman and his colleagues was to reframe the study of teacher knowledge in ways that attend the role of content in teaching (Ball, Thames, & Phelps 390). In the late 1980s, they conducted case studies to find out how strong subject matter preparation translated into the knowledge

needed for teaching that subject. The purpose of the study was to draw from teacher knowledge to inform the development of a National Board system for the teacher's "ability to reason about teaching and teach specific topics, to base his or her actions that can bear the scrutiny of the professional community" (Shulman 20). Shulman and his colleagues developed typologies to characterize professional knowledge for teaching. Shulman's major categories of teacher knowledge are:

- General pedagogical knowledge, with special reference to those broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organization that appear to transcend subject matter
- Knowledge of learners and their characteristics
- Knowledge of educational contexts, ranging from workings of the group or classroom, the governance and financing of school districts, to the character of communities and cultures
- Knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds
- Content knowledge
- Curriculum knowledge, with particular grasp of the materials and programs that serve as "tools of the trade" for teachers

- Pedagogical content knowledge, that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding (Shulman 8)

Pedagogical content knowledge is the most useful forms of representations of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations—in a word, the most useful ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others.. Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those frequently taught topics and lessons. (Shulman 9-10).

From Shulman's perspective, a teacher who has the pedagogical content knowledge has three abilities. (1) Presenting the material to the students using different teaching methods so they can comprehend what is presented to them. (2) Understanding the difficulties that students may face learning the material. (3) Being aware of the students previous knowledge about the material that will be taught to them. I will write some part of the plot in the movie that will be evidence of his pedagogical content knowledge. I will start with the first one, Keating presents the subject by using graphs and charts and explain in a way that the students can comprehend it. Here is the scene that proves he is making his subject comprehensible to the students. Keating asks

"Gentlemen open to page 21 of the introduction. Mr. Perry will you read the opening paragraph to the Preface to Understanding Poetry." Neil reads "Understanding poetry by Dr. J. Evans Prichard. To fully understand poetry you first must be fluid with its meter, rhyme, and figures of speech. That leads to two questions. (1) How artfully have the objectives of the poem been reached? (2) How important is each objective? Question one rates the poem's perfection. Question two rates its importance. Once these questions have been answered deciphering the poem's meaning is relatively simple matter." Meanwhile, Keating gets up from his desk and walks toward the blackboard. He gets a chalk and starts picturing the description of how to measure the importance of the poem by drawing a horizontal and a vertical line which intersects at a point.

Neil keeps reading "If the poem's score for perfection is plotted on the horizontal of the graph and the importance plotted on the vertical then, calculating of the total area of the poem yields the measure of the greatness. The students begin copying the diagram which is drawn by Keating. A sonnet by Byron may score high on the vertical but only average on the horizontal. A plotted Shakespearean sonnet may score high horizontally and vertically yielding a total mass area thereby revealing the poem to be truly great. As you proceed through the poetry in this book practice this rating method. As your ability to evaluate grows in the manner so will your enjoyment and understanding the poetry."

Keating has written  $P \times I = G$  on the board. He turns the class and waits. The students are trying to copy the chart that is drawn by Keating. Keating says "Excrement! That is

what I think of Mr. J. Evans Prichard. We are not laying pipe here Gentlemen. We are talking poetry." Keating continues, "How can you describe poetry like American Bandstand, I like Byron; I gave him a 42 but I can't dance to it. Now rip out that page. Go on. Rip out the entire page. You heard me. Rip it out." The others hesitate but Dalton rips immediately upon being told to do so. Keating realized that Dalton is the first student who follows his order and Keating says "Thank you Mr. Dalton.". Keating continues "Tear out the entire introduction. I want it gone. Rip it out. Be gone J. E. Prichard, Ph.D." Still many of the students seem confused. "It is not the Bible; you will not go to hell for this. Make a clear tear. I want nothing left of it." Slowly more boys begin to rip their books.

The second ability that the teacher has to have is to understand the difficulties that students may face learning the material. Here is the evidence from the movie that Keating has this ability. Keating says "we are going to talk about William Shakespeare". The students moan and groan. Keating says "I know, a lot of you look forward to this as much as you look forward to root canal work." "We are gone talk about Shakespeare as someone who writes something very interesting."

The third ability that the teacher has to have is being aware of the students' previous knowledge about the material that will be taught to them. Hawkins also argues that the critical importance of content in the relationship between teacher and student. What distinguishes teaching from other helping professions or from parenting is the centrality of a common involvement in subject matter and the need for the teacher to develop an attitude of respect toward the student as a learner of that content (Hawkins

48). Here is the evidence from the movie that Keating has this ability. He assigns students' homework by saying "in addition to your essay I would like you to compose a poem of your own—an original work." As he gets back to the door of the classroom Keating flicks the lights. "That is right you have to deliver it out loud in front of the class for everybody on Monday." He leaves the room, but quickly reenters to catch Todd on the desk. Speaking directly to Todd, Keating says, "Don't think that I do not know this assignment scares the hell out of you the most." Keating walks out flipping the light off. This plot presents that Keating knows what Todd is able to do. The next day Keating starts listening to students' original poem. Keating's knowledge about Todd helps Todd discover his potential: Now, who is next? Mr. Anderson? You are sitting there in agony. Come on step up. We will put you out of your misery." Todd says "I didn't do it. I didn't write a poem." Keating says "Mr. Anderson thinks that everything inside him is worthless and embarrassing. Isn't that right, Todd? That is your worst fear. Well, I think you are wrong. I think you have something inside that is worth a great deal." Keating goes to the board and writes, "I sound my barbaric YAWP over the roof tops of the world. W.W." Keating explains the meaning of YAWP for the students who may not know its meaning. Keating says " Now, Todd, I would like you to give us a demonstration of a barbaric yawp. Come on! You cannot yawp sitting down. Let's go! Come on! Up!" Keating holds Todd's arm to encourage him to. Keating "Got to get in a yawping stance." Students laugh. Todd says "a a yawp". Keating "Not just a yawp. A barbaric yawp. Todd says "Right. Yawp" Keating says "Come on! Louder. Todd says louder "Yawp." Keating says "That is a mouse. Louder." Todd says "Yawp." Keating

says "Oh, good God, boy yell like a man! Todd says louder "YAWP." Keating says "You see you have a barbarian in you after all." Todd wants to go to his seat. Keating does not let him go and he says "You don't get away that easy. There is a picture of Uncle Walt up there." Keating shows the picture and asks him "What does he remind you of? Don't think. Answer, go on." Todd says "A madman." Keating says "what kind of madman? Don't think about it, just answer. Todd says "A crazy madman." Keating "No, you can do better than that. Free up your mind and use your imagination. Say the first thing that pops into your head even it is total gibberish." Todd says "A sweaty toothed man" Keating "Good God, boy, there is a poet in you after all!" There. Close your eyes. Close your eyes. Close them. Now, describe what you see." Todd says "I close my eyes." Keating says "yes?" Todd says "uh! His image floats besides me. A sweaty toothed mad man." A sweaty toothed madman with a stare that pounds my brain." Keating "that is excellent! Now give him action, make him do something" Todd "His hands reach out and choke me. Keating "That is it. Wonderful! Wonderful!" Keating takes his hands off from Todd's eyes. Todd says "And all the time he is mumbling. Keating asks "what is he mumbling?" Todd says "Mumbling truth." Keating says "Yes." Todd says "Truth is a like a blanket that always leaves your feet cold." Students are laughing. Keating says "Forget them. Forget them. Stay with the blanket. Tell me about that blanket." Todd says "You push it, stretch it, it will never be enough. You kick at it, beat at it. It will never cover any of us. From the moment we enter crying, to the moment we leave dying. It will cover your face as you wail and cry and scream." Todd finishes reciting his poem and the class is surprised to see that Todd can recite his

original poem. The class applauds him. If Keating did not know Todd's ability and his potential, he may not be able to help Todd to discover himself.

*Keating's Teaching Methods:* In *Dead Poets Society*, there are three different teaching methods that are implemented in Keating's teaching. These methods are: Representing to learn, authentic method, and multiple-intelligence. I will present the script from the movie that will be the evidence for Keating's teaching method and then I will define it.

Keating assigns students to write a poem and read it aloud. Here is the script:  
Keating: "Now, in addition to your essays, I would like you to compose a poem of your own, an original work. The students begin to groan. Keating begins flickering the lights off and on while chanting ominously. Keating: That's right! You have to deliver it aloud in front of the class on Monday...."

Keating uses the representing to learn method by assigning students to write an original poem. The representing to learn method can be defined as "learners present what they have learnt by using different ways of representation such as drawing, writing, making movies". This representation helps learners reflect on what they have learned and to retain the learning longer in their memory.

Writing is not just one of the "language arts." It is also a form of thinking, a way of engaging and acting on information. Writing can be a way of acting on information, manipulating, challenging, exploring, and storing it (Daniels & Bizar 97).

Students learned about poetry and how to evaluate a poem in Keating's class. The best way for students to represent their learning in poetry is to write a poem. Keating also



asks his students to read their original work aloud and that will help the students share their work with their classmates. Writing can be used to share learning, to represent and embody ideas; we need to involve the class as collaborators and as audiences for each other writing's (Daniels & Bizar 97).

Assigning students to write a poem can also be taught as authentic experience. Authentic experiences in schools can be as small as writing a real letter to ask for an autographed picture, and as large as school wide projects like planting a garden, setting up a recycling center, or investigating the sources of pollution on a local river. (Daniels & Bizar 171).

Keating is also aware of multiple intelligences. The theory of multiple intelligences was developed in 1983 by Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University. Dr. Gardner proposes eight different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential in children and adults. These intelligences are: Linguistic intelligence, logical –mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalist intelligence. The theory of multiple intelligences proposes a major transformation in the way our schools are run. It suggests that teachers be trained to present their lessons in a wide variety of ways using music, cooperative learning, art activities, role play, multimedia, field trips, and inner reflection (Thomas 27).

Keating takes his students to the school backyard and asks them to walk. He explains why he brings them to the courtyard. Keating: "Mr. Overstreet, driven by deeper force. Yes. We know that. All right. Now, I didn't bring them up here to ridicule them. I brought them up here to illustrate the point of conformity: the difficulty in maintaining your own beliefs in the face of others. Now, those of you -- I see the look in your eyes like, "I would've walked differently." Well, ask yourselves why you were clapping. Now, we all have a great need for acceptance. But you must trust that your beliefs are unique, your own, even though others may think them odd or unpopular, even though the herd may go, "That's baaaaad." Robert Frost said, "Two roads diverged in a wood and I, I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." Now, I want you to find your own walk right now. Your own way of striding, pacing. Any direction. Anything you want. Whether it's proud, whether it's silly, anything. Gentlemen, the courtyard is yours." Keating, considering students bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, takes students to the school backyard. His goal is to teach them the danger of conformity by asking them to walk the way they want. Keating has the students follow him into the corridor, walk in the backyard, thereby transforming their potential energy into kinetic movement. The routine or the tradition at Welton is that students sit in their assigned seats properly. This sets the tone for what the students can expect as normal usage of the body while learning: sitting quietly and speaking when asked to speak. Keating has changed this by not following the tradition at Welton.

Keating presents learning material in one of his classes by using graphs. This part of the movie is evidence that Keating is using visual aids to present his lesson. Neil

reads "If the poem's score for perfection is plotted along the horizontal of a graph, and its importance is plotted on the vertical, then calculating the total area of the poem yields the measure of its greatness. Keating draws a corresponding graph on the board and the students dutifully copy it down." This presentation helps visual learners to understand what is presented to them. In a class there might be students with different learning styles.

Visual learners need to see the teacher's body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. They may think in pictures and learn best from visual displays including: diagrams, illustrated text books, overhead transparencies, videos, flipcharts and hand-outs. (Web)1.

### Chapter III

## COMPARISON AND CONTRAST BETWEEN KEATING'S AND GRUWELL'S TEACHING METHODS

This chapter will cover the two screen teachers comparatively. Mr. Keating in the movie of *Dead Poets Society* will be compared and contrasted with Mrs. Gruwell in *Freedom Writers* in terms of the curriculum and their teaching methods. *Dead Poets Society* was filmed in 1987, while *Freedom Writers* was filmed twenty years later in 2007. Some research has been conducted on *Dead Poets Society*, but not much research has been conducted on *Freedom Writers*. This chapter will fill some gaps in studying these two English teachers comparatively and contribute the idea of "good screen teachers." Johnson studied the movie of *Freedom Writers* together with some other movies to depict urban youth in urban areas and the relationship and between urban youth and urban high school (Johnson, Lamar Cristopher, 37). No comparative study, to my knowledge, has been conducted extensively on Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets Society* and Mrs. Gruwell in *Freedom Writers* in terms of the curriculum and their teaching methods.

Analyzing and comparing the teachers in *Dead Poets Society* and *Freedom Writers*, more differences than similarities stand out in the teachers' teaching method and their curriculum. The movie *Freedom Writers* was directed by Richard La Gravenese in 2007 based on actual events. The message of *Freedom Writers* to its audience is that the problems such as poverty, and racial conflicts could be solved only through strong

white leadership (Petersen 31). Erin Gruwell, a white female, is the English teacher in Woodrow Wilson High School. The school is a coed school in the inner city of Long Beach. In the beginning of the movie, the viewers are introduced to the violence of the urban life with the snapshots of a riot in the newspapers and the soundtrack of emergency vehicles. When Mrs. Gruwell's students come to her class, they sit on their desks or start walking around the classroom during the class period. She sees the students sit in their segregated groups: Latino-Americans, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and White-Americans all sit together with their group members. When she starts teaching, she sees that the students are not interested. Later on, thinking that the students would be interested in Tupac Shakur's songs, she tries to teach internal rhyme using the song lyrics of Tupac Shakur. Again, the students do not welcome the efforts of their English teacher. Mrs. Gruwell cannot establish a connection with her students in the beginning of the movie. The students are cynical about Mrs. Gruwell's interest in their lives. In order to break up the segregation in her classroom, she assigns a new seating. Yet, there is still resistance to the new seating chart.

Mrs. Gruwell sees a riot broken out in the yard of the school. She recognizes some of her own students in the fight, and one of them is carrying a gun. She then realizes the importance of her students' lives outside the classroom. She plays a "Line Game" to get information about her students. She places a line of tape along the center of the classroom. She asks some relevant questions about their lives. If the answer is yes, the students need to go to the line. Hence, students from different ethnic backgrounds find similarities among each other. Todd claims that Mrs. Gruwell wants to

create a "sense of community" in her classroom (Todd, Anna Lea 33). She asks them to write daily in their journals. When Mrs. Gruwell reads her students' diaries, she understands that they have encountered gang violence, abandonment, drug abuse, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and interracial conflicts. Thus, she learns about the society her students live in by reading their diaries. She then organizes some events, such as a field trip to the Holocaust Center, A Toast for Change, The Borders Bag of New Books, Letter to Miep Gies. However, organizing these events she doesn't get enough support from the faculty or from her family. Her students become successful in statewide tests. Her students write petitions to have her in their Junior and Senior years. She manages to teach them in their junior and senior years although novice teachers are not allowed to teach juniors and seniors. She succeeds in winning the hearts of her students, but loses her ties with her husband. Mrs. Gruwell's dedication and sacrifices are appreciated and criticized (Keltner 63).

Not only did the teacher help them escape the ever present paranoia of living in the "hood," she helped them begin to focus outside themselves and to redirect their energies into more productive areas. I am sure that for many of these students it was a life-changing time. So, it had a mental health message because the teacher helped (i.e., cajoled, forced) these students to take the road less traveled. The story demonstrates how someone who really cares can make a crucial difference in the lives of others.

Her sacrifices are criticized because she ignores her husband and assumes that she has only responsibility which is to change the lives of students.

Giving one's self to help the less fortunate is more than a good idea—it is a wonderful thing to do. But there is a balance when you are married or have children. If you want to forsake everything else in order to serve the underprivileged, you should make that decision before promising until death do us part. Marriage is sacred. Teaching is not (Keltner 63).

There are some similarities between *Dead Poets Society* and *Freedom Writers*. Although the ages of the teachers are not indicated in the movies, the viewers see that both teachers are young and energetic in their late twenties. Mr. Keating has taught in England for a few years. Although, it is not his first year of teaching in his profession, it is his first year of teaching in the United States. On the other hand, Ms. Gruwell teaches for the first time in her life. They are both high school English Language Art teachers. Both movies are based on actual events.

One of the most outstanding mutual qualities of Mr. Keating and Ms. Gruwell is that they are idealistic teachers. They are both dedicated to teaching. Ms. Gruwell thinks of being a lawyer before the teaching profession in order to support civil right movements as her father did. Then, she changes her mind thinking that defending a kid in the court room would be too late for the battle. She chooses to fight in the classroom. In this way she can prevent kids from being put in the court or in jail. One of her students draws a humiliating cartoon of an African American student and

circulates it. Ms. Gruwell takes the cartoon that exaggerates the physical different seriously and says that nobody will remember them when they are dead, because all they left behind was this humiliating cartoon. She tells the students that some newspapers in Europe circulated humiliating pictures of Jews, and sowed the hatred seeds among people; that is why the Holocaust happened. She teaches the students the value of tolerance. They should be remembered as good people having done good deeds. She takes the students to the Holocaust Center to show what hatred toward the differences has caused. She organizes "A Toast for Change" in which the motto is "Who you were is over. Tell us who you are now." She wants the student to change in a positive way. She thinks if the students learn tolerance towards social differences, the civil rights would be gained. People would not be fighting over differences. Thus, she committed herself to teach tolerance, and her progressive pedagogy positions her discussion of the Holocaust as an effective tool to elicit racial empathy and tolerance in an urban classroom. Yet, Yosso and Garcia criticize Mrs. Gruwell's use of Holocaust as the biggest gang in order to teach tolerance to the students who have their own stories of intolerance. They claim that Gruwell ignores the ideology of white supremacy as the biggest cause of violence in society. In their words:

However, *Freedom Writers* fails to connect the students' own community histories with their present realities. Their individual accounts remain disconnected from any larger narrative, and therefore from any societal critique. In the film, Gruwell does not facilitate any dialogue about the structured subordination of Communities of Color. ...Instead, the film



ignores the histories of Communities of Color or reduces those histories to particular and personal tragedies. Without this context, it becomes even more problematic that Gruwell discusses the Nazis as the “biggest gang” in history, falsely equating the regime’s violence and an ideology of White supremacy with her students’ racial prejudices. (Yosso and García 176)

As for Mr. Keating in *Dead Poet Society*, he is dedicated to teaching his students to seize the day, to suck morrow out of life. In order to do that, he takes his students to the hall where the pictures of Welton’s previous are hung. Both of these screen teachers’ language to convince the student is “You will rot when you die. You will be fertilizer to the daffodils.” With this idea, Mr. Keating wants his students to live their lives and express themselves by putting individuality first. Mrs. Gruwell wants her students to leave good deeds behind when they die. Hence, they will be honored. In order to do that, the students need to change their negative ideas about each other and be bias free. The students change their prejudice against each other after they find many similarities when they play line game. Both teachers try to find different ways to convey their message and reach their students.

Both of the teachers in *Dead Poets Society* and *Freedom Writers* do not fit in with the faculty. Mr. Keating uses unorthodox methods while he is teaching. The administrator of Welton Academy warns him about his way of teaching. He seems not to care and goes on his way. Mrs. Gruwell cannot get enough support from the faculty. Margaret Campbell is the veteran teacher and the head of the English department in

*Freedom Writers*. When Mrs. Gruwell asks for help if she could distribute books to the students, the department chair says that these books are for reference, and that the students do not take care of the books well. She shows Mrs. Gruwell some damaged books by the students. Then, Mrs. Gruwell organizes The Borders Bag of New Books, and buys each student *The Diary of Ann Frank*, a book about Holocaust. The students seem to be interested in the book, and see the horrible similarities between themselves and the people who caused the Holocaust. After teaching Freshmen and Sophomore year in Woodrow Wilson High School and earning the hearts of the students, Mrs. Gruwell confronts another veteran English teacher who teaches juniors and seniors. The reason of the confrontation is that Mrs. Gruwell's students want her to teach them during their junior and senior years. Since Mrs. Gruwell is a new teacher, she cannot legally teach upper classmen. Besides, the other English teacher who has been teaching in the same school for a long time does not want to give up his junior and senior students, because the problem causing students either drop out of the school or are expelled by the time they are juniors. So, it is easier to teach juniors and seniors. Mrs. Gruwell goes beyond the faculty seeking her right to teach upper grades. She asks her students to write petitions. She meets with the people on the Board of Education. Her students do better in the standardized tests. She earns the right to teach them in the following couple of years.

Students in both movies express themselves through writing. Students in *Dead Poets Society* write their own poems after the poetry section is covered. Students in *Freedom Writers* keep journals, which is the turning point in Mrs. Gruwell's teaching.

Although there are some similarities in both movies, the differences outnumbered the similarities. The school in *Dead Poets Society* is a boarding private prep school for Caucasian boys. It is one of the elite high schools in the United States. The production of the movie coincides with the rule of the Republican Party. The Republicans represent traditional religious Europeans in the United States, while democrats represent all colors of people in the United States. Therefore, there has been some criticism against the use of masculinity and partial representation of the schools in the United States. *Freedom Writers* was produced 20 years later. The school in the movie is a co-ed integrated school which represents all colors of the diverse ethnicity in the United States. While the students in *Dead Poets Society* are boys, the students in *Freedom Writers* are both boys and girls. In addition, the students are mainly from high society of suburban area in *Dead Poets Society*, while the students in *Freedom Writers* are from different ethnic backgrounds in underprivileged urban area. So, *Dead Poets Society* is a suburban school, *Freedom Writers* is an urban school film.

Students in *Dead Poets Society* wear uniforms and sit in their well arranged chairs. Students in *Freedom Writers* are in casual clothes and walk around the classroom whenever they wish to. Although no food is seen in *Dead Poets Society*, students in *Freedom Writers* eat and some girls use cosmetics. The students in *Freedom Writers* are from different ethnic backgrounds, but they sit together with their group members in the classroom. African Americans sit with African Americans, Asian Americans sit with Asian Americans, Latino Americans sit with Latino Americans. They are involved in gang activities. The students of Welton Academy in *Dead Poets Society*

are expected to enter Ivy Universities. The faculty and parents have high expectations of these students. Therefore, the curriculum of this preparatory school is designed accordingly. Administrators keep the stake of education high, so that the students could get as much as education to be ready for the best universities. On the other hand, Woodrow Wilson High School is an inner city public school. There is not much teaching and learning going on in this urban school. The teachers are not able to follow the curriculum because of the reluctant and resistant behaviors of the students. The school in *Freedom Writers* is like a warehouse for students until they each drop out or are expelled.

The students' attitudes toward the teachers in these two movies are also different. The students in *Dead Poets Society* welcome Mr. Keating. The other teachers in *Dead Poet Society* look to be in their 50's and 60's. Only Mr. Keating looks younger. They instruct their subjects and move on. Their goal is to convey their subject to that the students could do well in the university entrance exams. Mr. Keating, on the other hand, is interested in the students' feelings. He understands his students. Since he establishes close relationships with his students using different teaching methods, students welcome Mr. Keating. The students of Wilson High School do not welcome Mrs. Gruwell in the beginning of the movie. They don't trust and respect her. When Mrs. Gruwell tells Eva, one of the Latino students, that in order to get respect you need to give it. Eva states that since Mrs. Gruwell is a teacher does not mean she deserves to be respected. Maybe, Mrs. Gruwell is a bad person standing in front of the students. Mrs. Gruwell needed to work hard to prove good intentions by organizing different

activities for the students' education. Hence, she both earned their trust and respect at the end of the movie. I can say that Mrs. Gruwell's job in Wilson High School is harder than Mr. Keating's in Welton Academy in terms of the attitudes of the students.

The moods in both movies are also different. Boredom is prevailing in the movies *Dead Poets Society* when Dean Nolan asks the students what the four pillars of Welton Academy are, they answer monotonously without knowing what these pillars mean. The students in *Dead Poets Society* are not as excited and proud as their parents about their school. They even make fun of the pillars by switching the words Honor, Discipline, Tradition and Excellence to Horror, Decadence, Travesty, and Excrement. Later on they enjoy the class of Mr. Keating. Fear and hatred are prevailing in the beginning of the movie *F. W.* Fear and hatred are introduced to the viewers with the sirens of emergency vehicles and the riot on Los Angeles. Some students of Mrs. Gruwell are involved in fighting in the yard of Wilson High School. The atmosphere is tense in the classroom. Some students start fighting in the class room a couple of times. The look in the students' eyes against other ethnic groups is threatening. After several organizations, Mrs. Gruwell establishes trust and tolerance among the students. They, then, enjoy the class of Mrs. Gruwell. They want to her to be their teacher in their junior and senior years.

The two teachers express themselves differently. Mr. Keating's two main goals for the students are to teach them to seize the day and to express themselves. He takes his students outside and asks them to walk while they are clapping their hands. He tells them that since everyone was walking at the same pace; none of the styles of

walking were different. He then points out the danger of conformity. Since everyone is different, he says, they should have their own way of walking. He pushes his students to speak their ideas. Although he becomes successful in his goal of helping his students gain self expression, he himself doesn't set an example for his students. The audience doesn't see him speaking against the accusation and fighting for his rights. He is accused of the death of Neil because of his unorthodox teaching methods. As a result, he is dismissed from teaching at Welton Academy. Although he doesn't agree with the verdict of the administration, he complies with the verdict and leaves the school. Mrs. Gruwell is a new teacher in *Freedom Writers*. She cannot legally teach upper grades. Her students want her to teach during their junior and senior years. She asks her students to write petitions. She gets an appointment with the Board of Education to express herself. She obtains the right to teach her students in the following two years. Unlike Mr. Keating, she sets a good example.

The viewers don't see Mr. Keating changing his curriculum throughout his teaching. He probably doesn't need to modify his methods since the students are happy with his way of teaching. He applies different activities in different places of Welton Academy unlike his veteran colleagues. The students enjoy his class. The administrator warns him of his unorthodox way of teaching, but he doesn't take this warning seriously. He maintains his curriculum. Since nothing goes wrong until Neil's death, he doesn't feel the need to modify his curriculum. On the other hand, Mrs. Gruwell in *Freedom Writers* changes her curriculum in the course of time. In the beginning of the movie, she has her own curriculum and applies it. Thinking that her students will be

interested, Mrs. Gruwell uses their favorite singer to teach poetry. One of the students recites all the scripts of the song, and asks Mrs. Gruwell "Do you think we don't know him?" It is like introducing the students to their own culture. Seeing that her students are not interested in the curriculum, Mrs. Gruwell changes it. She modifies her teaching methods. She organizes different activities to reach her students. She buys notebooks for her students to keep journals. Writing journals becomes the turning point in Mrs. Gruwell's teaching to reach and understand her students. Unlike Mr. Keating, she feels the need to modify her teaching methods.

## **Chapter IV**

### **KEATING'S TEACHING IN TERMS OF NATIONAL BOARD FOR PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS**

In this chapter, Mr. Keating's teaching will be scrutinized in terms of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The purpose of the organization is to recognize accomplished teachers nationwide and to provide professional development for teachers to improve schools. This independent, nonprofit, non partisan and nongovernmental organization was founded in 1987 ("NBPTS").

NBPTS has created five core propositions for all teachers to practice at a high level:

These five core propositions are grounded philosophically in the NBPTS policy statement What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do (The Philosophical Context). Five propositions are: (1) Teachers are committed to students and their learning. (2) Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students. (3) Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students learning. (4) Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience. (5) Teachers are members of learning communities ("What Is National Board Certification").

Out of the five core propositions, which are for all teachers, the National Board for Professional Teaching standards has developed sixteen standards of accomplished



practice for Adolescence and Young Adulthood/ English Language Arts teachers ("Adolescence and Young"). I will look at the sixteen standards of accomplished practice for Adolescence and Young Adulthood/ English Language Arts teachers. Since Mr. Keating teaches at a high school, he is an Adolescence and Young Adulthood/ English Language Arts teacher. His teaching will be examined in terms of the standards for Adolescence and Young Adulthood/ English Language Arts teachers. I will introduce each standard and then I will check to see if Keating has this standard in his teaching at the *Dead Poets Society*. However, it is almost impossible to explore a teacher's instructional strategies in a two-hour long movie in terms of sixteen standards. Some of the standards can be found in the teacher, some may not be found, and some may not be applicable. Dalton made a similar work to the one of mine. She took Dwayne Huebner's (1975) article "Curricular Language and Classroom Meaning". Huebner introduced five "values frameworks" that could be used to describe teaching and teachers. Dalton used these "values frameworks" to analyze "screen teachers", as I am analyzing Mr. Keating's teaching in terms of National Standards for Professional Teachings. I picked National Standards for Professional Teaching, because these standards are widely accepted by educators, unions, and concerned citizens. They are used nationwide to credit an accomplished teacher.

Standard I. Knowledge of Students: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers acquire specific knowledge about students' individual, intellectual, and social development and use

that knowledge to advance students' achievement as readers, writers, speakers, listeners, and viewers in English language arts. ("Adolescence and Young").

Keating does not attempt to know his students individually at the beginning of the school year. He cannot even pronounce his students' names. He learns about his students as he teaches them. As the time passes, he is aware of each individual's intellectual level. Keating's knowledge of his students' intellectual level helped him guide Todd Anderson to recite his poem in the classroom. Anderson was a shy student and he could not speak in front of people. On the other hand, Keating fails to understand his students' social development and how students can interpret his teaching. Mr. Keating pushed his students too hard to "seize the day". The students understood him wrongly. Knox, for example, wanted a date with the fiancé of his father's family friend although he knew that if his father finds out, he would kill him. He holds onto "carpe diem" and calls Chris. He is beaten up at the party, but at the end, he reaches his goal, and earns the heart of Chris. Is this good? It could be good for Knox, because he gets what he wants. But, what about the relationship between his family and the Denberies? Charlie understands Keating's "carpe diem" as "do what ever you want while you may". He publishes an unauthorized article in the school newspaper and gets spanked by the principal. He is eventually expelled from the school after he punches Cameron. Todd's heart is broken when Mr. Keating is fired. He is put in a dilemma between what he learns and the expectations of the world outside the classroom. Mr. Keating becomes successful in his teaching "carpe diem" as many of the student stands on the desks

while he is leaving the school. His teaching "carpe diem" makes some students ego-centric, as Knox, some students suffer, as Charlie, Todd, and Neil.

Standard II. Knowledge of English Language Arts: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers have a thorough command of the various domains of knowledge that compose the English language arts. Various domains of knowledge that composes the English language art include: (a) literature, including traditional and contemporary fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and drama; and other print and nonprint texts; (b) Reading processes and how students learn to read; (c) Writing processes and how students learn to write; (d) speaking and listening and the conventions of oral communication; (e) viewing and producing media texts; (f) language, its conventions, and the role it plays in shaping all forms of communication; (g) the cognitive and social development of adolescents and young adults; (h) current research on effective instruction in the English language arts; and (i) assessment in the English language arts. ("Adolescence and Young")

Standard II is not applicable in Keating's teaching. Keating is teaching poetry to his students so he is not using various domains of knowledge that compose the English Language Art. At the same time, Keating does a good job teaching poetry in his class. He covers only romantics in the poetry part. Film critic Robert Ebert states that "At the end of the great teacher's course in poetry, the students love poetry, at the end of this teacher's semester they really love the teacher" (142).

Standard III. Instructional Design and Decision Making: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers use their knowledge of students, English language arts, and pedagogy to design curricula, instruction, and assessment. ("Adolescence and Young").

According to Standard III, accomplished teachers "balance" the demands at their students' needs with the requirements of local, national standards and community expectations to design instruction. It is significant to use the verb "balance" here instead of enforcing community expectation on students. Mr. Keating acknowledges the requirements at local, state, and community expectations when he says that doctors, lawyers are the essential part of life, but poetry is what people stay alive for in order to express themselves. He doesn't neglect the community expectations on the students. Instead, while being a lawyer, or a doctor, students need to express their individualities by contributing a verse to the play of life. In a way, he is balancing the students' hyper romantic mood at the adolescence and young adult age with the community expectations.

Standard IV. Fairness, Equity, and Diversity: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers demonstrate their commitment to fairness, equity, and diversity. ("Adolescence and Young")

Mr. Keating does not appreciate diversity and he has chosen only poems written by white male authors in his teaching. Although there were other parts, like post-civil war literature and realists, in the textbook, Mr. Keating mainly covered the romantics

because romanticism emphasizes individuality, originality, imagination, emotional expression, freedom and idealism while realism emphasizes reality, objectivity, detachment, accurate observation and rejection of the impractical and visionary (Baker and Kemper, 2004 in Charlene Tan 489). So Mr. Keating didn't offer the students the full version of his subject. He wanted to inspire his students to pursue individual passions and make their lives extraordinary. Keating ignores the fact that different cultures have different standards of judgment. He offered only one side of his subject in order to convey his message. As a result, the students were not exposed to different tastes in literature, and they became one-sided, partial, that is to say, just to "seize the day". Romanticism dominates Mr. Keating's teaching strategies instead of balancing his teaching with realism. Keating's oppositional one-sided teaching styles unsettle Welton's hegemonic relations of power, especially those that reconfirm parental authority and decision making (McLauren & Leonardo 139). Keating's teaching style makes the students fail to understand how the social logic of dominant society is actually inscribed and enfolded in their daily life (McLauren & Leonardo 140)

Standard V. Learning Environment: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers establish and manage inclusive learning environments in which they engage, challenge, and support students. ("Adolescence and Young").

Welton is a rich, white boys' boarding school. There is not ethnic, gender, and social status diversity at the school. It is not observable in the movie if any students need special instruction or not. There is only one event that one student, Todd, cannot

speak in front of the audience. Keating helps Todd overcome his fear so that he can speak in front of the audience. Keating always challenges and encourages his students to do their best. He never puts a student down except once, when Hopkins recites his one sentence poem, which is, "The cat sat on the mat". After Knox recites his poem, he says "Sorry, Captain. It's stupid. Keating says "No, no. It's not stupid. It's a good effort. It touched on one of the major themes, love. A major theme not only in poetry, but life." Keating has created a learning environment that all his students are loyal to him. His instruction and teaching are never criticized by his students. Students showed their loyalty to him even as he is fired from his teaching position in front of the headmaster, by calling him as O Captain! My Captain!

Standard VI. Instructional Resources: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers create, select, adapt, and use a wide range of instructional resources to support their students' learning and strengthen their own teaching. ("Adolescence and Young")

Keating uses a wide range of instructional resources to support his students' learning and strengthen his own teaching. In the first day of school, he has taken his students to the hallway and used the alumni picture to teach them "Seize the day." He has used his own desk in the classroom to teach the students to look at things from different perspectives. Keating glances around the classroom from atop the desk and says "You see, the world looks very different from up here. You don't believe me? Come see for yourself. Come on, Come on!" Keating has taken his students to the courtyard to teach them the danger of conformity. Keating is also a soccer coach; he instructs

them poetry while they are practicing soccer. Keating is a creative teacher and he uses a wide range of instructional resources in his teaching.

Standard VII. Integrated Instruction: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers integrate reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing and producing media texts in their instruction and incorporate content from other disciplines. (“Adolescence and Young”)

Having covered poetry, Mr. Keating asks the students to write their original poems. The students first read some poets’ poem and then write their own. Mr. Keating wants the students to read their own poems in front of the class. While one student recites his poem, others need to listen. Therefore, it can be said that Mr. Keating integrates reading, writing, listening, and speaking in his instruction. He also incorporates his math knowledge in his instruction by drawing a graph with “x” axis and “y” axis to measure the value of a poem. He shades the areas that show the value of Baron’s poem, and that of Shakespeare’s, and that is something which is not usually done in a literature class. He not only shows his knowledge of math, but also implies that these disciplines literature, math, physical education, art, social studies are all interrelated. In order to be good at one subject, you need at least the basic knowledge of other subjects.

The following standards; Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening are only observable in his teaching when he assigns students to write a poem and recite their poems in front of the class. These standards’ definitions are provided below.

Standard VIII. Reading: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers develop students' reading skills and their abilities to comprehend, interpret, and analyze a wide variety of texts for personal, literary, informational, and critical purposes.

Standard IX. Writing: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers develop and refine students' abilities to write effectively and independently different types of texts for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Standard X. Speaking and Listening: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers advance students' abilities to speak and listen for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Standard XI. Viewing and Producing Media Texts: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers enable students to critically read, evaluate, and produce messages in a variety of media. ("Adolescence and Young")

Keating is focused on teaching students to express themselves. He always emphasized individuality in his teaching. Keating never encourages his students to read critically and evaluate the text if reading the text does not help to achieve his teaching goal. It was not applicable to observe Keating to enable students to produce messages in a variety of media.

Standard XII. Language Study: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers develop students' abilities to



use language effectively and to appreciate the different ways readers, writers, and speakers use language. (“Adolescence and Young”).

The different use of language for readers, writers and speakers are writing various types of essays, letters, giving speech, and reading different literary genres. Students in Mr. Keating class are seen only reading and writing poems. Their reading short stories, novels, nonfiction is not seen in the movie. Students are not seen to be either giving speech or writing essays and letters for various purposes. Therefore, this standard is not observable in Mr. Keating’s teaching.

Standard XIII. Assessment: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers use a range of formal and informal assessment methods to plan for instruction, to monitor and evaluate student progress, to involve students in the assessment process, and to report student achievement to various audiences. (“Adolescence and Young”)

Mr. Keating assigns the students to write poems of their own to be recited in the class to see if they can express their ideas or feelings. After Hopkins recites his poem, Keating assesses Hopkins’ work and tells him that he would get negative score on the Pritchard scale. Pritchard scale evaluates the greatness of the poem on ‘x’ and ‘y’ axis. Hopkins recites a very simple one sentence poem. His poem is “The cat sat on the mat”. This is an informal assessment. Mr. Keating’s formal assessment of the students which is bias free and objective is not seen in the movie.

Standard XIV. Self-Reflection: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers continually observe, analyze, and seek to improve the quality and effectiveness of their teaching, and articulate reasons for instructional decisions. (“Adolescence and Young”)

Keating’s reflection can be observed when he hears about Neil’s death. He cries and covers his eyes. He closes the text. At this time, Keating might be thinking and reflecting if he has done the right thing for Neil. Neil is encouraged by Keating to act in the play even though his father does not want him to act in the play. Keating does not know if his father let him act in the play or not. Mr. Keating is not seen to be using the second strategy to replace the first one which did not go well in his class. It is inapplicable to observe his reflection about his teaching methods and curriculum.

Standard XV. Professional Community: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers participate collaboratively in the educational community to improve instruction, advance the knowledge and practice of the field, and enhance their professional identities. (“Adolescence and Young”)

Keating thinks that he knows how to teach and his goal is to create free thinkers. In the movie, Keating interacts only with Mr. McAllister. Their conversation is about Mr. Keating’s teaching. This conversation is not beneficial to learn from each other. Each teacher argues what they think. Keating conversation with McAllister indicates that Mr. Keating’s mind is set to create free thinkers as a teacher. Keating will not be convinced

to teach in a different way and to change his goal as a teacher. Thus, it can be said that Keating is not part of the professional community.

Standard XVI. Family and Community Involvement: Accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/English Language Arts teachers work with families, caregivers, and community members to best serve the needs of students. ("Adolescence and Young")

Mr. Keating is not seen to be working with the families and community members to serve the needs of his students. If he had worked with the families, he would have known the family background of Neil. Neil's death is mainly caused by the lack of the teacher's knowledge of the student's family background. Since Mr. Keating doesn't know how Neil's father could react to his son's taking a part in a play, he asks Neil to talk to his father. Neil fails to talk to his father thinking that his father will never listen to him. However, Neil lies to Mr. Keating saying that his father let him act for the time being. If Mr. Keating had known the truth, he might have felt the need to talk to Neil's father. After Neil tells Mr. Keating that his father is against many extracurricular activities, a concerned teacher could have called the parent either on the phone, or to talk face to face with the parent and student in order to find a better solution to the student's dilemma. The teacher could restate the parent's expectation to show the parent that he understands parental concerns. He could also restate the student's ambition to act in a play. Consequently, he could find a mutual solution to the student's dilemma. Even if the parent is still adamant, the teacher should ask the student to postpone his ambition to be fulfilled at a later time when he earns his economic

independence from the family. If the teacher, here, asks the student to defy the authority of the family, such as Neil's, the student will either break the ties between him and the family, or commit suicide as Neil did. Mr. Keating did not ask Neil to go against his family, but he failed to anticipate how Neil's father could react.

Mr. Keating tried to talk to Neil's father when the play was over, but it was too late. Neil's father had already seen that his son defied his authority. He blamed Mr. Keating for his son's actions, so he refused to talk to Mr. Keating. On the other hand, the movie does not depict Neil's father as someone to talk to. His mind is fixed, unlikely to be changed.

The tragedy of Neil might have been prevented if Mr. Keating had checked with Neil's family when Neil said that his father let him act in the play. Mr. Keating probably believed Neil, and did not feel the need to call his family. It is not practical for a teacher who works overtime at a private school to double check with the family. He also coaches the soccer team of the school.

Mr. Keating started teaching his ideals on the first days of school without exactly knowing who the students are. He pushed his students to live their wishes without knowing their family backgrounds. The students, as Dean Nolan says, are highly impressionable at these ages. In this case, it can be said that Mr. Keating somewhat lacks the knowledge of the students. Since he was a reckless student at the same school, he somewhat knows how the students feel at a private boarding school. Had he waited until he knew his students and their family backgrounds, he could have known

that Neil's father would never approve his son's acting in a play. Therefore, he could have found a better way to solve Neil's dilemma.

Is the lack of the student's family background a legitimate reason to fire a teacher? Do all the teachers at Welton Academy know their students' backgrounds? Probably not. The school needed to pick a scapegoat to make the other parents feel comfortable about the school. By firing Mr. Keating, the administrators of the school meant that the school is safe again. If Mr. Keating had not been fired, the parents would have been skeptic of the school, and would have withdrawn their children from the school. So, firing a teacher is an economical solution for the school.

Mr. Keating actually wants the students to be cautious after Charlie gets spanked. While Dean Nolan was giving a speech on the unauthorized article, Charlie picked up the ringing phone, said that it is from God telling Nolan to accept the girls to the school. Mr. Keating says Charlie's action was true, but daring. He wanted the boys to be cautious instead of losing the opportunities they have, so that they could fulfill their ambitions. In Neil's situation, Mr. Keating needed to have either convinced the parent to let his son perform, or the student to put off his desire until he meets the expectation of his parents first. After he meets the expectation of his parents, by becoming a doctor, he could return to the acting business. Being patient for ten years would be a torture for a teen-age school boy to fulfill his dream. However, Neil also needs to know that it requires time and patience to fulfill the dreams.

The reasons Nolan fired Mr. Keating is not just because he was held responsible for Neil's death, but Mr. Keating was seen in the field together with his students

practicing against conformity. In the field, Mr. Keating wanted his students to be different. Mr. McAlister also saw Mr. Keating asking the students tear the page of introduction to the poetry. Mr. Keating has acted several times against the norms of the school. Therefore, he did not demonstrate his educative responsibility when he encouraged the students to follow what is contrary to expectations of the parents and Dean Nolan.

The students make fun of the four pillars of the school, which are Tradition, Honor, Discipline, and Excellence, by twisting the words into Travesty, Horror, Decadency and Experiment. In a way, the students question the authority of the school and their parents' expectations which represent the popular school culture. The current postmodern theory questions the popular culture in schools (McLaren 127). So reculturation is an important focus for educational reform. The students find their voice in Mr. Keating's.

McLaren and Zeus Zeorando compare the classroom in *Dead Poets Society* to Foucault's prison in *Discipline and Punish* (133). Both in classroom and the prison, the lives of the dwellers are regulated by the authorities. McLaren studies *Dead Poets Society* in terms of deconstructionist post-modern point of view because there is a resistance among the students in the classroom, which is a small society, against the authority.

A "good" teacher doesn't have to be in conflict with the administrators, to be precise, he shouldn't confront the administrators. He needs to help them for the benefits of the school community according to the standard XVI. What I mean is that

the school community is not just limited to with students, but also parents, administrators, and colleagues. Mr. Keating is portrayed as the "good" teacher and Mr. Nolan as the "bad" teacher in the movie. Mr. Keating doesn't confront explicitly the on-going procedures of Welton Academy. He takes the students out of the classroom setting in order to teach how conformity destroys the "voice" of individuals.

This is an "unorthodox method" in Dean Nolan's term. The "good" teacher here confronts the administrators implicitly. Dalton states that "good" teachers are portrayed in the school movies as:

Good teacher is an outsider, not well-liked by colleagues. He or she gets personally involved with students, learns from those students, and has an antagonistic relationship with administrators. Often these teachers personalize the curriculum to meet everyday needs in their students' lives, and sometimes they have a ready sense of humor (22).

Dalton continues explaining the features of a "bad" teacher in Hollywood school movies as he/ she "fits into the administration's plans for controlling students" and they "follow the standardized curriculum, which they adhere to in order to avoid personal contact with students". According to the XV and XVI standards of National Board for Professional Teaching certificate, accomplished teachers work with families, community members and educational community both to best serve the needs of the students and to advance their knowledge of the field. Mr. Keating seems to be like "I know who you are, so you don't have anything to offer me. I am here young and new to offer new ideas to you and the school." I wonder if he is eager to learn something from the

experienced teachers at Welton Academy. The movie doesn't show any interdisciplinary exchange of knowledge. There is one sided talk when Mr. Nolan said that the curriculum at Welton is set and proven. Mr. Keating said that the point of education was to think for yourself. Then Mr. Nolan asked Mr. Keating to prepare the students for college and the rest will take care of itself. Exchange of information can take place when two sides are both senders of the message and receivers of the message. In this conversation, neither Mr. Nolan, nor Mr. Keating had an exchange of knowledge, because they said what they thought about educating the student and left. Apparently, no one got anything from the conversation. A "good" teacher should be able to be a good listener, and evaluate what is told, and get what is necessary. Good teacher should work in order to construct, not to destruct. So, Hollywood school movies should portray "good" school teacher as constructing and building new ideas on the educational experiences. The movie portrays "good" teachers as not well-liked, however the good teachers are actually liked not only by student but also by parents and administrators in reality.

After having covered the poetry part in my Survey of Literature classes, I let my students watch *Dead Poets Society*. Our students are coming from low-income families and 90% are Hispanics, 4% are African American, 3% are Asian-African and 3% are Caucasians. 54% of the students are female and 46% are male. At the end of the movie I handed out a survey to the students to write their opinions on the teaching methods of the literature teacher, Mr. Keating. There were four questions on the survey: a) What are the good characteristics of Mr. Keating as a teacher? b) What



characteristics doesn't Mr. Keating have as a good teacher? c) What are the characteristics of a good teacher from your perspective? d) Is Mr. Keating responsible for Neil's death? Why or why not?

The purpose of this survey was to see; a) if Hollywood school film makers were successful in depicting a "good" teacher image on the students, b) if ninth grade students could go beyond the message the movie conveys, and c) what they think the characteristics of a good teacher.

Ninety seven students out of a hundred ninth graders wrote that Mr. Keating has a unique way of teaching. He is different, and that's cool. He is happy, and loves the students. He has a good understanding of poetry, and makes the subject fun to teach. He inspires the students to think for themselves. He shows real life experiences. The majority of the students listed the characteristics of a good teacher. They put Mr. Keating in the category of good teachers. Three of my students wrote they don't know. (These three students might have felt lazy to think and write, because I applied this survey on Friday, March 26, 2010, on the eve of their Spring Break.) I can say that Hollywood School Film Makers became successful in depicting Mr. Keating as a good teacher.

In regards to the second question; what characteristic does Mr. Keating lack as a good teacher, eighty two students wrote that he doesn't cover all the materials he is supposed to teach. He doesn't follow the rules of the school. He asks the students to rip the pages out of the textbooks. He is a little pushy at telling the students what to do, giving the student too much freedom and letting them to whatever they want.

Seventeen of the students in this group wrote that Mr. Keating has a “weird” way of teaching. He is crazy and different but “cool” at the same time. Fifteen students out of a hundred wrote that Mr. Keating doesn’t have any weaknesses as a teacher. Three out of a hundred wrote they don’t know.

Four out of a hundred students found Mr. Keating responsible for Neil’s death. They claimed that Mr. Keating encourages Neil to go for his dream in acting. Since he gave the idea to fight for what Neil wants, Neil didn’t get to do that, he got frustrated and committed suicide. These four students wrote that although Mr. Keating didn’t actually kill Neil, or ask him to commit suicide; he is indirectly responsible for pushing Neil too hard. The other ninety six students didn’t find Mr. Keating responsible for Neil’s death. They claimed that he didn’t kill, or shoot him. It was mainly Neil’s father who is responsible for his son’s death, as he didn’t let his son act in a play.

In the movie, Todd accused Neil’s father for Neil’s death. It was not Neil who killed himself, it was his father who was not flexible, who was too strict with his child, who didn’t allow his son to move individually in life. Neil’s father represents the realism while Neil represents romanticism. When the two ideas clash, the immature and weak one fails to exist. Neil kills himself creating sympathy of the viewers who lament at the realistic ideas. The movie makers became successful in conveying the message that this tragedy happened because of the unbendable realistic demand of a parent from his son. I can say that only four students saw a move beyond what is seen. I don’t say this is only white and black. The death of Neil has some gray parts. The movie sends message to the institutions of school and family that if your rules are rigid and

unbendable, you will either break the individuals or you rules will be broken. The rules at Welton were well established and confirmed by the parents, therefore they were unlikely to be broken. Neil is broken instead. In addition to Neil's strict father, Mr. Keating failure to understand Neil's led Neil to kill himself.

Mr. Keating needs to play within the limits. He needs to push the limits to be different, but when he feels the boundaries will break, he needs to step back in order to prevent tragedies. This is also a way of showing respect to the family structure, which an accomplished teacher according to the Standards of National Board Certification does.

## CONCLUSION

When I watched the *Dead Poets Society* for the first time in April 2009, I had a few questions; 1) The English teacher, Mr. Keating, who is the protagonist of the movie, is glorified as a good teacher. Why does one of his students commit suicide? 2) The administrators blame Mr. Keating for the death of a student. Is he rightly or wrongly accused? 3) Could Mr. Keating have prevented this tragedy if he had played his role as a good teacher? 4) Is Mr. Keating as an accomplished teacher in terms of National Board for Professional Teaching Standards? I began my thesis in pursuit of these answers.

Mr. Keating teaches poetry at a private boarding school for boys. According to the work of Wilson, a teacher needs to have both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in order to convey the subject to the students. For Mr. Keating, content knowledge is what he knows about his subject; poetry. After some research I found out that this English teacher knows his subject area. He recites some poems from different poets, such as Whitman, Shakespeare, and Frost. He interprets the value of poems differently than J. Evens, Pritchard, the author of the introduction to the poetry in their text books. While Pritchard writes that the value of a poem could be shown in the 'x' and 'y' axis, Mr. Keating thinks that reading and writing poems are done in order to express the passion of human beings. This shows that Mr. Keating has a content knowledge of poetry. As for the pedagogical knowledge, a teacher needs to be able to use, modify, different strategies and methods according to the level of the students for

the students to grasp the subject he teaches. Mr. Keating uses different methods both in the classroom and outside the classroom to convey the subject he teaches. He becomes successful in conveying the message he wants to give the students. Most of the students get the message and support Mr. Keating with their disposition standing on the desks as he is leaving the school forever. Wilson combines content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge known as, "pedagogical content knowledge". I conclude that Mr. Keating has pedagogical content knowledge

I have viewed the curriculum of the school at Welton Academy. The curriculum includes strategies in order to achieve desired goals for the learners inside and outside the school. The goal of the curriculum at Welton Academy is to place students the best universities. The parents enroll their sons at Welton Academy, because they want their children to go to these elite universities; thus the parents comply with the curriculum at Welton. However, Mr. Keating doesn't focus on the curriculum as much as the administrators and the parents. His main goal is to focus on students' gaining self-esteem and self-confidence. He teaches in a way that the students gain confidence to express their feeling and ideas. Although the Dean of the school warns him about his unorthodox teaching methods, Mr. Keating doesn't care. Mr. Keating must have known the curriculum at Welton Academy for two reasons. The first one is that he was a student at Welton Academy. The second reason is that if one applies for a position at a school, he must familiarize himself with the curriculum. That means, the applicant follow the rules, procedures, and the curriculum. Mr. Keating knows the curriculum, but

goes against it. Not following the curriculum at the school Mr. Keating against the administrator and the expectations of the parents.

Mr. Keating uses three methods in his teaching; representing to learn, authentic method, and multiple-intelligence. In representing to learn method, learners present what they have learned by using different ways of representation such as drawing, writing, giving speech, role playing, and making movies. The representation to learn method helps the learners retain the information or knowledge they gained for a longer period. The learners present what they have learned using their own abilities. When the poetry part is covered, students are engaged in writing their original poems in Mr. Keating's class.

The second method Mr. Keating uses in his teaching is the authentic method. In the authentic method, students use real-life experiences to gain knowledge, or to apply what they have learned in real-life experiences. After covering the poetry part, Knox writes a real poem to express his feelings toward Chris. Knox uses what he has learned in real-life situations. Mr. Keating also takes his students out of the classroom setting to the hall where the pictures of graduate students are exhibited. Mr. Keating does this in order to show his students that those students in the pictures are dead now. The pictures of graduate students and the fact that they are dead are not fake, make-believe. It is a part of real life. Mr. Keating's students learn that their life will also pass. They will die too. So it is best to "seize the day" now, while they can.

The third method Mr. Keating uses in his teaching is the multiple intelligence method. Each human being has different potentials. Those who are good at language

have linguistic intelligence. Those who are good at math have logical intelligence, and those who are good at sports have bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. The other multiple intelligences are spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and naturalist intelligence. In multiple intelligence method, teachers need to present their lessons in a wide variety of ways using music, group work, and activities, role play, field trips so that the students who are good at one of those multiple intelligence can comprehend what is being taught (Bogod). Mr. Keating uses the teen-age boys' bodily-kinesthetic intelligence by taking them out to the school backyard in order to teach them what conformity is. Students are asked to walk the way they want. When students walk and clap at the same time, there is only one way of walking. Everyone keeps pace with each other, and with the sound of claps. Mr. Keating teaches that everyone needs acceptance in the group. This is called conformity. He then tells his students that their beliefs are unique, so each one of the students' way of walks should be different since each human beings' ideas are different. Mr. Keating uses the students' bodily energy by exercising their own way of walk to teach them to express their own unique ideas.

In implementing multiple intelligence, Mr. Keating also uses visual aids for the visual learners. He draws the graph to show the value of a poem on the board. The students who are good at visual arts will learn better if pictures or graphs are drawn on the board.

Mr. Keating uses different methods in his teaching. He has pedagogical content knowledge. Using various methods in teaching and having pedagogical content

knowledge are enough to be certified as an accomplished Adolescence and Young Adulthood/ English Language Arts Teacher. Therefore, I looked at his teaching methods and pedagogical content knowledge in terms of National Board Teaching Standards. National Board for Professional Teacher Standards is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan and nongovernmental organization. There are five core propositions in the National Board Teaching Standards for all teachers. These propositions are: 1) Teachers are committed to students and their learning. 2) Teachers know the subjects and how to teach those subjects to students. (Also known as Pedagogical content knowledge.) 3) Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students' learning. 4) Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience. 5) Teachers are members of learning communities.

The most outstanding proposition that can be seen in Mr. Keating's teaching is that he is committed to his students and their learning. He is a dedicated teacher. He dedicates his time and energy to teach "Carpe diem; seize the day" to the boys of Welton Academy. He chooses a different method to attract the attentions of the students so that he can convey the material easily. In order to do that, he whistles, which is unusual of a teacher in that time at the school. He accomplishes his aim and gets the attentions. He then starts conveying the material that is to teach poetry and reads the poem "Oh Captain My Captain". Followed by the poem, then he asks questions about the poem. His use of various methods shows that he is committed to his students' learning.



Mr. Keating also has the second core proposition, which is, teachers have pedagogical content knowledge. I have mentioned at the beginning of the conclusion part that Mr. Keating has pedagogical content knowledge.

As for the third core proposition, teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring students' learning. Mr. Keating takes the responsibility to manage the learning of his students. He uses different strategies to teach his subject. He uses different tone in his voice to be sincere and effective. It can be seen that he was effective since Neil pursues his passion and gives his life for it. Todd, who is the shyest of all, is the first to stand up against the unfair treatment towards Mr. Keating. Mr. Keating can have the students involved in what he is teaching. When he wants to teach different points of view he, he doesn't just give a long lecture. Instead, he asks the kids to look at things from a different angle. To do that, he asks the students to stand on the teachers' desk to see the class from a different point of view. He uses this tangible example to teach others' point of view. When students are actively involved in what they are learning, the knowledge they acquire retain in their long-term memory. When they learn the subject by note-memorizing, they are bound to forget after a short amount of time.

The fourth core proposition, teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience- is not seen in the *Dead Poets Society*. Nothing goes wrong in his teaching, so he doesn't need to change any of his teaching methods. He is fired even before he completes his first year at Welton Academy. He doesn't have a chance to learn from his teaching in the U.S.A. The fifth core is related to the fourth core. Teachers

are members of learning communities. This core is not seen in Mr. Keating's teaching as well. When his colleagues, Mr. Nolan and Mr. Alistair, tell their ideas about education, Mr. Keating does not get involved. He is focused on his own way of teaching, and ignores others' ideas. The fourth and fifth core propositions are not seen in Mr. Keating's teaching.

Sixteen standards are developed out of these five core propositions in National Board for Professional Teaching. These are; Mr. Keating started teaching "Carpe diem" before he knew his students individually. In the course of time, he became aware of his students' intellectual level. He became successful in teaching "carpe diem; seize the day." Some students misunderstood him. If he had waited until he knew the students individually, fewer students might have misunderstood him. He should have anticipated that pushing students to "seize the day" before he knew them might create some problems. The first standard which is knowledge of the students is not completely seen in Mr. Keating.

The standard IV- Fairness, equity, and diversity is not seen in the movie also. The school is for Caucasian boys. There is no diversity of ethnic or genders in the school. Mr. Keating teaches the poems of only white male poets who are romantics.

Mr. Keating is not seen to participate collaboratively in the education community to improve his instructions. This is the requirement of standard XV: Professional Community. His aim is to create free thinkers. He doesn't listen to the advice of his colleagues. He is not part of the professional community.

As for the standard XVI which is family and community involvement, Mr. Keating is not seen to be working with community members and families to serve the needs of his student. He doesn't keep in touch with Neil's family to solve his student's problem of whether or not Neil should take a part in a play. The tragedy of Neil's death is partly caused by the lack of the teacher's contact with the parent. Out of sixteen standards of the National Board Certification, four standards are not seen in Mr. Keating's teaching.

Mr. Keating implements five standards out of sixteen in his teaching. Standard III- Instructional Design and Decision Making- can be seen in Mr. Keating's teaching. He designs his own curriculum while he is aware of the community expectations. He encourages his students to include them in the learning environment; standard V. He uses a wide range of instructional resources (Standard VI) to support his students' learning, such as taking them outside to teach the danger of conformity, and standing on the teacher's desk to teach different perspectives. He integrates reading, writing, listening, and speaking in his instruction (Standard VII Integrated Instruction). He also uses his knowledge of Math in his teaching poetry. He is seen assessing the students (standard XIII). After covering the poetry part, he asks his students to write their own poems. Students write and recite their original poems in front of the class. This is an informal way of assessing students. However, another part of assessment, which is a formal assessment, is not seen in the movie.

Mr. Keating's teaching methods are compared and contrasted with Mrs. Gruwell's in *Freedom Writers*. The purpose of this comparison is to see if Hollywood filmmakers produced a better screen teacher image in twenty years after *Dead Poets Society*. Both

teachers are dedicated to teaching and become successful in conveying their messages at the end of the movies. Film makers used a white female teacher in *Freedom Writers* instead of a male teacher. The students in *Dead Poets Society* are all Caucasian boys, which does not represent the ethnic diversity in the schools of the United States. The students in *Freedom Writers* mirror the diverse nature of the public schools. The audience of *Dead Poets Society* does not see Mr. Keating change his curriculum. However, Mrs. Gruwell in *Freedom Writers* needs to modify her curriculum to reach her students.

The following standards are not applicable to explore in Mr. Keating's teaching. Standard II: Knowledge of English Language Arts. Mr. Keating's instructional curriculum starts with the poetry part. He is not using various domains of knowledge which compose the English Language Art. Although he teaches poetry well, other domains of language such as fiction, nonfiction, producing media texts, are not seen to be covered in the movie. Mr. Keating is not seen checking the abilities of students to comprehend, interpret, and analyze a wide variety of text (standard VIII Reading). The students do not write different types of text for variety of purposes and audiences (Standard IV. Writing). Students are asked to write only one type of literature; poetry. He is not seen to advance students' abilities to speak and listen for a variety of purposes and audiences (standard X. Speaking and Listening). Students in his class don't read the texts critically and produce messages (standard XI. Viewing and Producing Media Texts). Students are not seen to use different ways of language use, which are writing various types of essays, letters, and giving speeches or different purposes (standard

XII. Language Study). Standard XIV. Self reflection, is not seen in the movie as well. Everything goes smoothly until Neil's father pushes Mr. Keating out of his way. Mr. Keating doesn't have a chance to use a second strategy to replace the one that doesn't go well. He is fired soon after.

This study is not a bias free, objective study. It is a qualitative study. I explored the teaching methods of Mr. Keating in terms of the National Board for Professional Standards. There is not a clear cut difference between the standards. Many of these sixteen standards intermingle with each other. Some of them are interrelated. Some may find the father of the student who committed suicide guilty; others may find the teacher of the student guilty, while others find the strict curriculum of the school guilty. Since my focus is on the teacher, I find that he has a part in the tragedy. Mr. Keating is rightly glorified in the movie, because the teacher is dedicated to teaching, and become successful in what he is teaching. The message of *The Dead Poets Society* is that if teachers are committed to their students and dedicated to teaching,, they will be successful teachers. The screen teacher in *Dead Poets Society* could have prevented the death of his student if he had played his role as an accomplished teacher in terms of National Board Certification Standards. The tragedy of Neil is caused not only by the strict rules of his father and the school but also by the "good screen teachers" failure to understand the family background of the student. Hollywood film produces could produce school movies with accomplished teachers sensitive to the morals and values of the students' family.

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