

Mr. Keating's Role as English Teacher as Seen in The Main Character of *Dead Poet Society* the Movie

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ABSTRACT

Dead Poets Society is a classic movie that explores about English teaching-learning class in Welton Academic. Mr. Keating as the main character is described as unusual English teacher who gives a big influence toward his students' life. This unusual teaching style absolutely opposites with academic policy. The academic administrator intensively warns Mr. Keating about his teaching style although his student very interested on him. This paper attempts to explore Mr. Keating's roles as teacher as reflected in Dead Poets Society movie. The paper was qualitative study with American studies approach. American studies is multidisciplinary studies of America. In this multidisciplinary approach, the writer uses sociology, psychology and historical approaches to conduct the result of the research. Sociology and psychology are used to explain the roles of teacher in teaching and historical approach is used to explore all data dealt with American teacher fact in the past. The data was collected by various sources; text book, newspaper, internet and some available printed master.

This research reveals that English teachers have roles as facilitator, personal models or demonstrator, and as delegator. As facilitator, teacher controls the class and creates good environments and activities, stimulates new information, provides opportunities for collaborative work, to be problem solving and offers students a multiplicity of authentic learning tasks. As personal models, teachers are free to give an example what student should do in the study as long as deals with the object of the study. As delegator, teachers are free to rule their class with target to build cooperation between the students. Those freedoms are used only to make teaching and learning process well done, although, sometime breaks the academic administrator policy.

Keywords: Roles of English teacher, American teacher, Dead Poet Society, Movie, American Studies.

1. Introduction

The educator or teacher is one of the important factors which may influence learning achievement. Teacher is very important where the success of the students in their learning depends on teacher's attitude, effort and consciousness. Teachers who have the job to

transfer knowledge, science and experience, increase student's ability and skill and create better quality of new generation, etc. are also influenced by their own personality in their teaching in classroom.

Teacher as a subject of teaching learning process beside students is a key in the teaching

learning process. It is the teacher who promotes particular learning situation through his choice of objective, organization of experiences, and selection of materials and methods. (Cohen. 1976: 211).

S. Holtrop said that a traditional view of the teacher is of someone who dispenses knowledge: someone who lectures, tells feeds, disseminates, covers material, and teaches the subject matter more than the students. The students sit passively while the teacher is on show. Desks in rows and a blackboard and podium up front are an arrangement designed for this role of a teacher. However, lectures are effective for giving short sets of instructions, background information, guidelines, or other information that is needed in a short time frame (e.g., before doing a class project, lab, or group activity). (Teachers roles. Par: 1 2008).

Dorris's statements, which are quoted by Dakir (1987: 179) that effective teaching depends on teacher's attitude, methods, chosen, behavior, and the relevan competence. Another scientist Bar, says via SuryoBroto (1997) that one thing which influences the effective teaching is teacher's attitude and behavior when they are teaching.

Hammer (1998: 2) also said that the character and personality of the teacher is a crucial issue in the classroom. All teachers, like all people, he says, have their own physical characteristic and habits, and they will take these into the classroom with them.

To create an effective learning situation in the classroom, Combs (1976) says that three characteristics are needed: The atmosphere should facilitate the exploration of meaning. Learners must feel safe and accepted. They need to understand both the risks and rewards of seeking new knowledge and understanding. The classroom must provide for involvement, interaction, and socialization, along with a business-like approach to getting the job done. (Problem-based learning, Par. 2: 27 April 2008)

Those above make the writer interest to discuss about teacher. Their roles in the class are very important toward students' achievement. How they move, how they stand and how physically demonstrative he or she is, all these play their part in the effective management of class.

American teacher has some freedom to stimulate their student in learning. They have freedom to express their methods as long as suitable and deal with their lesson. Teachers have important role in create human behavior beside parents. Their life dedicates to education and shows to the people the way to be successful.

To be a teacher is not easy, they meet many people from different background and personality. But good teacher can solve this problem. They have an authority in their class to present a lesson. In America, this authority is used to make students interested, much creativity, and wide thinking. So, they play their

roles as educators and the students will get what they want to achieve in their study.

One of the films that explored the roles of teacher is *Dead Poets Society*, The classic films about English class and poetry. *Dead Poets Society* could have been a different movie entirely. With the big name of Robin Williams attached, the film could have focused on the teacher who attempts to inspire his students. Instead Williams takes the back seat to a group of relatively unknown young actors and the movie shows the audience just how one teacher can affect the lives of his students.

Dead Poets Society stars Robin Williams, Robert Sean Leonard, and Ethan Hawke. Directed by Peter Weir (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Green Card*, *Master and Commander*), *Dead Poets Society* is set in the late 1950s in an East Coast boys' prep school, Welton Academy. Robin Williams plays the school's new English teacher and Welton alumnus, John Keating, who inspired his students in their life. Those above that bring the writer choosing the roles of teacher as reflected in *Dead Poets society*.

2. Discussion

2.1. Theoretical Approach

American study as an academic discipline possesses distinctive theories. This study applies the American studies approach. According to Termain Mc Dowell the American studies moves toward the reconciliation of the tenses, the reconciliation of the region, nation,

and world (1984: 82). Therefore, as the work of American studies, this research will apply such above theories.

Henry Nash Smith in Joseph Kwiat and Mary C. Turpie (1980) states that American studies is a collaboration among men working from within existing academic disciplines but attempting to widen the boundaries imposed by conventional methods of inquiry.

From Termain Mc Dowell's theory we can conclude that American studies should embrace past, present, and future forming the tenses reconciliation. Today American studies is also using the resources of new learning to bridge the past, and the future and it not only talks about history, culture, and literature but also other discipline.

This study applies several academic disciplines. According to Meredith American studies makes up an interdisciplinary study which involves culture as the core, and therefore this study must be supported by some other discipline such as history, social science, anthropology, literature, women studies, etc (1969: 1). In relation to the topic discussed the writer applies the following theories: historical, sociological, psychological, and popular culture approach. It is clear that the study applies an interdisciplinary approach.

Historical approach is expected to the past event or recording history, that provides the fact (Spiller, 1981: 3). This approach is used to discern any data that the writer put in some references and it have link with the past such as

to describe teacher in America. Sociology is the science of human society. Just as people enjoy watching the actions of other people, sociologist observes in a systematic or scientific way. They perform experiments, they conduct surveys, and sometimes they just observe and record what people do. Their aim is to build a body of knowledge that allows them to understand, predict, and (sometimes) control social interaction (Curran, 1977: 1).

This paper uses sociological approach. Wilbur S. Scott (1979: 123) states that sociological approach starts with a conviction that arts relations to society are vitally important, and the investigation of these relationships may organize and deepen ones' aesthetic responses to a work of art. This approach is used to explain the teacher roles in interaction with the students as reflected in *Dead Poets Society* the movie. In this paper the writer also uses psychological approach. According to Henry Clay Lindgren, psychology is a behavioral science. It concerns with the study of human behavior. Psychology is the science which study about soulnessness or the science or the study of the mind and how it functions (Hornby, 1995: 934). Psychological science also contents the motivations of human reactions as reflected of their though in real actions.

Other theory which can support this research is American popular culture approach. Film has been known as one of popular culture. America is one of countries that has big role and contribute in the development of film in this

world. To analyze a film the writer used popular culture approach. This approach is applied to uncover the development of American popular culture in relation with the development of American thought, norm and value in modern time.

2.2. Teaching Theories

The word teaching comes from "teach" according to Hornby (1995: 225) teaching is showing somebody how to do something so that they will be able to do it then selves, giving somebody information about a particular subject, helping somebody to accept something as a fact of principle, giving somebody to somebody knowledge, skill, etc. or giving lesson.

Brown (1987: 7) defines teaching as guiding and facilitating learning, enabling the learner to learn, setting the condition for learning, teaching as showing or helping someone to learn how to do something providing with knowledge and causing to know or understand.

Teacher is just human being and the key factor in the education process. It means that the teaching learning process will not run without a teacher. The teacher as one of the main components besides the student is very influential in determining the success or the failure of learning (Darwis, 1978).

Most teachers agree that teaching includes artistic and science elements. Dictionaries give a variety of message about teaching. According to the Cambridge

international dictionary of English, “teaching” means to give (someone) knowledge or to instruct or train (someone) whereas the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English suggest that it mean to “show some body how to do something” or to change some body’s ideas.

From the many definition of teacher above, the writer concludes that teacher is someone who give something or knowledge to the others, someone who create something creative and someone who have a big influence in education.

2.3. American Teacher

In America, there are some difference between the teachers of young children and teachers of youth and adults. The teachers of young children have traditionally had a very low status and extremely meager qualifications. The teachers of adults, on the other hand, have been accorded respect in their communities and have generally been well educated according to the standards of their times. This made a cleavage between the teachers, and this can be handling in the first quarter of the twentieth century. (Jefferson, 1959: 4).

As in Indonesia, American teacher have some problem with their salaries. Low salaries made many teachers dissatisfied with their job. According to Meat Leaf survey that several former teachers say they found the challenges of the career outweighed the rewards. Lack of professional prestige, low pay, inadequate resources and poor communication, many of the same

problems current teachers cite.

“I left the profession for a couple of reasons. First of all, I needed to make more money and the opportunities for me to make extra money outside of school [were] limited since it took up so much of my time. I did work in the summer, but even that didn’t get me to where I needed to be. Second of all, I was expecting to receive a little more respect and thanks for the hard work I was putting in, and just wasn’t getting it!” (Steve K., Former Teacher).

Still Meat Leaf survey that a majority of teachers are dissatisfied with their salaries. Two-thirds (64%) report that their salaries are not fair for the work they do. Elementary school teachers in particular feel this way (67% vs. 60% of secondary school teachers).

But American teacher have a reason why their profession is defended. The reason is they were happy in the classroom seeing children expression if they make some mistakes or they think so hard when teacher give an examination.

Because all the teachers do not have the same professional abilities and interest, a number of educational theorists have suggested that various jobs of teaching be divided in ways that would allow teachers to under-take those jobs that are most suitable to their goals and abilities. According Leonard H. Clark, Raymond L. Klein and John B. Burks, in their book “The American Secondary School Curriculum”, in

America the work of teachers is divided into four levels, they are:

1. The Associate Teacher, a young teacher or intern who is breaking in and who, therefore, has a lighter schedule and less demanding responsibilities.
2. Staff Teacher, a full professional teaching a full schedule and carrying full responsibilities with the assistance of paraprofessional help, clerks, and technicians.
3. Senior Teacher, an expert in teaching methods and techniques who teaches 60 per cent of the time and acts as a consultant and guide to other teachers the rest of the time.
4. Master Teacher, a twelve-month employee who teaches 40 per cent of the time and remainder of the time acts as a curriculum expert.

2.4. The roles of Teacher

Teacher has some styles in their teaching in the class to give their knowledge to the students. They are free to use their own styles to make some effective methods. Thereby, the effective methods for the students will be fun aren't bored and then are to expose the information from materials. The good method makes successful learning and bad method makes unsuccessful learning.

In teaching learning process, a teacher plays an important role. It is the teacher who sets the learning activities and who encourages student's activities. The teacher directly or

indirectly manages the classroom interaction every day.

Littlewood (1981: 92) explains that the roles of the teacher are as general overseer of his student learning, as a classroom manager, as consultant or advisor, and as a communicator with the students.

According to Harmer (2001: 58-61) the teacher's role is as a controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, tutor and observer. When the teacher acts as a controller, he takes the role, tell the student things, organizes drills, read a loud, and various other ways which are related to teacher's fronted classroom. As an organizer, a teacher has to organize students to do various activities. This involved giving the students information, telling them how they are going to do activity, putting them into pairs or groups and closing thing down when it is time to stop. As an assessor, a teacher should offer feedback and correction and grading students in various ways. Besides that, a teacher also has a function as a prompter. He should hold back and let the students work when they lose of what is going on. Sometimes a teacher not always stands back from the student's activity but he might join in activity not as teacher but also as participant.

In teaching learning process, may still have needed their teacher as resource. Students may ask how to say or to write something or what a word or phrase means. The student might want to know information in the middle of an activity; they need their teacher acts as

prompter. A teacher also can act as a tutor. It occurs when they are working with individuals or small groups, pointing them in direction. As an observer, they will observe what the student do (especially in oral communicative activities) in order to give feedback.

Grasha said that there are three roles of teacher in the classroom. The roles as follows: Teachers as facilitator, teacher as personal models and teacher as delegator. Facilitator is the style of teacher A, emphasizes the personal models of teacher-student interaction. He stated that the teacher guides and direct students by asking question and encouraging them to develop criteria to make informed choices, the overall goal of this teaching style according to him is to develop students: capacity for the independent action, initiative, and responsibility. Therefore, the teacher works with the students on project in consultative fashion and tries to provide as much support and encouragement as possible. (Grasha. Five teaching styles. Par. 5: 2008). Personal model is the teacher's oversees, guides, and directs student to observe and then to emulate the teacher's approach. (Grasha. Five teaching styles. Par. 5: 2008).

Felder and Solomon said that personal model or demonstrator teaching style is an instructor-centered approach where the instructor demonstrated and models what is expected (skills and processes) and then acts as coach or guide to assist the students in applying the knowledge. (Felder and Solomon. Learning styles and strategies. Par. 9: 2008).

As delegator, teachers tend to place much control and responsibility for learning on individuals or groups of students. This type of teacher will often give students a choice designing and implementing their own complex learning projects and will act in a consultative role. Students are often asked to work independently or in groups and must be able to maintain motivation and focus for complex projects. Students working in this type of setting learn more than just course specific topics as they also must be able to effectively work in group situations and manage various interpersonal roles. (Grasha. Five teaching styles. Par. 5: 2008).

Schools have been creating in which school officials decide what should be thought, and how it should be thought, and those official try to see to it that teachers carry out the curricula presented. Likewise, teachers determine what pupils should learn and how they should learn and how they should learn it and try to it that the pupils learn as they are supposed. (L. H. Clark, 1965: 44).

The roles of teacher in teaching in America can also be seen in their ethical principle of teaching and students. The ethical principles of teaching and students are:

“As teachers, the professors encourage the free pursuit of learning of their students. They hold before them the best scholarly standards of their discipline. Professors demonstrate respect for

students as individuals and adhere to their proper roles as intellectual guides and counselors. Professors make every reasonable effort to foster honest academic conduct and to assure that their evaluations of students reflect each student's true merit. They respect the confidential nature of the relationship between professor and student. They avoid any exploitation, harassment, or discriminatory treatment of students. They acknowledge significant academic or scholarly assistance from them. They protect their academic freedom." (Atkinson, Richard C. General University Policy, Pg: 27 Par. 5 2008).

2.5. The Role of Teacher as *Reflected in Dead poet society*

Teacher as one of the main factor besides the students is crucial in determining the successful or failure of learning. Teacher as the central figure must apply other relevant information and insight in addition to the human qualities that makes the students want to learn. Effective and efficient teaching needs certain preparation such as methods, media, materials, teacher student's interaction and learning environment. These important roles of teacher can also be seen the film *Dead Poets Society*. The writer found three roles of teacher in the class as reflected in that film, the roles as follow:

2.5.1. As the facilitator

As facilitator, teacher involves creating rich environments and activities for linking new information to prior knowledge, providing opportunities for collaborative work and problem solving, and offering students a multiplicity of authentic learning tasks. This is can be seen in the English class. Here, Mr. Keating gives the lesson not in the classroom, but he brings out the student to the Welton Oak Paneled Honor Room. The walls line with class pictures. Dating back into the 1800s. School trophies of every description fill trophy cases and shelves. In this room Keating start the lesson with ask one of the students Pitts to read a poet. After that, Keating start explains what the poet means.

KEATING: "Seize the day while you're young, see that you make use of your time. Why does the poet write these lines?"

A STUDENT: "Because he's in hurry
KEATING: "Because we're food for worms, lads! Because we're only going to experience a limited number of springs, summers, and falls. One day, hard as it is to believe, each and every one of us is going to stop breathing, turn cold, and die! Stand up and peruse the faces of the boys who attended this school sixty or seventy years ago. Don't be timid, go look at them". (scene 17).

The scene above shows that teacher should have many methods to transfer their knowledge to the student. Teachers try to make the student interested in the subject. In this case,

Mr. Keating wants his student to understand what the poet means. He tries to explain with imaginations so the student interested in the poet.

2.2. As Delegator

Students are often asked to work independently or in groups and must be able to maintain motivation and focus for complex projects. Students working in this type of setting learn more than just course specific topics as they also must be able to effectively work in group situations and manage various interpersonal roles

As delegator, Mr. Keating gives his student opportunity for meeting individual needs, abilities, and interests. This is also show that Mr. Keating instruct to his student to be a free thinker. This can be seen when Mr. Keating shows the student about Dead Poets Society. Keating explain about dead poets' society although it is the secret of the academic that could not allowed to tell anything about Dead Poets Society to others even the student. This also shows the Keating wants the student find out anything even its wrong.

NEIL: "Mr. Keating? Sir? Oh Captain My Captain. (Keating stops) What was the Dead Poets Society?"

KEATING: "Ah, so you boy's have been snooping. Nothing wrong with research".

KEATING: "The Dead Poets was a secret organization. I don't know how the present administration would look upon it but I doubt the reaction would be favorable. Can you keep a secret?"

"The Dead Poets Society was dedicating to

sucking the marrow out of life. That phrase is by Thoreau and was invoked at every meeting. A small group of us would meet at a cave and there we would take turns reading Shelley, Thoreau, Whitman, our own verse-any number of poets-and, in the enchantment of the moment, let them work their magic on us". (Scene: 29).

Keating lets them know about the Dead Poets Society because he wants his student to learn about it, so the student can explore their capability such as their senior. The *Dead Poets Society* is the organization that have many members who gathering in the cave at night out of their school. Every gather, they show their own poems and they read loudly in from of the member.

Keating wants his student to have a creative like their senior. This also is used by Keating to know what kinds of them because this organization aimed to develop their own characters. As delegator, Mr. Keating wants his student independently or in groups and must be able to maintain motivation and focus for complex projects.

2.3. As personal models

Teacher as personal models or demonstrator are free to teach with their own style by giving examples of how to do things; and the students see the examples given by teacher then try to practice or do. This style is used to guide the student in applying the knowledge. Personal models should be able to interesting and give more fun to their student so

their student can study in happy situation. This can be seen in Mr. Keating class.

The class laugh appreciatively. Keating closes his book, then walks over and raises a map that covers the blackboard in the front of the room. On the board is a quote, which Keating reads aloud:

KEATING: "Creeds and schools in abeyance I permit to speak at every hazard, Nature without check, with original energy. --Walt Whitman. Ah, but the difficulty of ignoring those creeds and schools, conditioned as we are by our parents, our traditions, by the modern age. How do we, like Whitman, permit our own true natures to speak? How do we strip ourselves of prejudices, habits, influences? The answer, my dear lads, is that we must constantly endeavor to find a new point of view".

He leaps onto his desk.

KEATING: "Why do I stand here? To feel taller than you? I stand on my desk to remind myself that we must constantly force ourselves to look at things differently. The world looks different from up here. If you don't believe it, stand up here and try it. All of you. Take turns".

This very strange method is showed by Keating because he wants his student to try everything in many ways. He wants they are never give up trying something new even the way is wrong or silly. Keating teach that the student should do anything to find out the problem solving if they are in trouble especially in their study.

KEATING: "Try never to think about anything the same way twice. If you're sure

about something, force yourself to think about it another way, even if you know it's wrong or silly. When you read, don't consider only what the author thinks, but take the time to consider what you think. You must strive to find your own voice boys, and the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all. Thoreau said, "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation." I ask, why be resigned to that? Risk walking new ground. Now. A flame in your hearts could change the world, lads. Nurture it". (Scene: 35).

Keating also show us that teacher has a freedom to criticize the administrator when the regulations have been felt incompatible with the subject. He gives an example to develop his student's capacity for independent actions. This can be seen when Keating asks to his student to read a theory about poetry. Keating shows his disagreement to the theory with asks all the student to rip it out the book especially the page that write the theory.

KEATING: "Treacle! Mawkish treacle! Rip it out of your books. Rip out the entire page! I want this sentimental rubbish in the trash where it belongs!"

He marches down the aisles with the trash can and waits for each boy to deposit the page from his textbook. The boys, having been led down the sentimental path, cannot help but laugh at this sudden change of mood.

KEATING: "Make a clean tear. I want nothing left of it! Eugene Field! Disgraceful." (Scene: 27).

Keating disagrees with the theory because it said that understanding poetry we

must understand the volumes, rhymes and the figurative of speech. To measuring the greatness of the poetry, we must know the objective of the poem and how it's important. According Keating, this theory seems like line the pipe. Keating has some reasons why he did not like the theory, he wants the student understand that poetry is not the theory but poetry like human life poetry have a feel, romance and love.

KEATING (Defiant whisper): "Well, I say drive! One reads poetry because he is a member of the human race and the human race is filled with passion! Medicine, Law, Banking-these are necessary to sustain life-but poetry, romance, love, beauty! These are what we stay alive for. I read from Whitman. Oh me, Oh life of the questions of these recurring. OF the endless trains of the faithless of cities filled with the foolish... skipping... What good amid these O me, O life? Answer: That you are here-That life exists and identity that the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse." (Scene: 27).

The method above is very different in the school. This show us that Keating wants to show that the curriculum in the school is out of date. He wants to break the administrator. He also shows to the student that theory is not being real correct forever.

The unusual method of Keating in teaching makes another teacher admonishing him. This can be seen when Mr. Mc Allister sees boys ripping pages out of their books. He feels so strange see that action. In dining room, he comes to Mr. Keating than say:

"You take a big risk encouraging them to be artists, John. When they realize they're not Rembrandts or Shakespeare's or

Picassos, they'll hate you for it." "Not artists, George, free thinkers. And I hardly pegged you as a cynic".

This action can be analyzed that Keating wants his student to be free tinkers. His methods show the student to be a creative without many theories but they can understand what they should do in learning especially in poetry

Another freedom in teaching in the class is that the teacher free to building team between the students. Teacher free to organizing the student as they like. Teacher free to form a team in the class to make the student unite and have ability in cooperation. Mr. Keating brings his student to the yard field and asks them to walk around the yard field together with their own style in walking.

KEATING: "All right, stop. You may have noticed how at the beginning Mister Overstreet and Pitts: seemed to have a different stride than the others, but soon they were all walking in the same cadence. Our encouragement made it even more marked. Now this experiment was not to single out Pitts or Overstreet. What it demonstrates is how difficult it is for any of us to listen to our own voice or maintain our own beliefs in the presence of others. If any of you believe you would have marched differently, then ask yourself why you participated in the clapping. Lads, there is a great need in all of us to be accepted. However, that need can be like a nasty current, whisking us away unless we're strong and determined swimmers. Don't insist on the separate path simply to be different or contrary, but trust what is unique about yourselves even if it's odd or unpopular. As Mr. 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." (Scene:

65).

Mr. Keating wants student to express their own way with their own style. This is used by Mr. Keating to show the student about the freedom of self-expression. The student can express in many ways but they also must remember that they have friends to share; they have a team to makes they understand that whatever they do, they do it as a team

2. Conclusion

As stated in the discussion, teacher plays important role in student achievement. The movie shows that teacher should have unique strategies in the class to make student interesting to the subject. Besides it, effective methods should be applied especially in transfers knowledge. The more unique and effective strategy used, the more student develop their knowledge in the subject. In this film, teachers who have own styles in teaching more be understood than formal teacher by their student. Mr. Keating applies his method during the class with unique methods, different from another teacher. But, student more interesting to follow Mr. Keating's class than another class. This proves that teacher should be creative than follow the legal instruction. Teacher more understand the class than the administrator. Keating shows that freedom of expression such as freedom to act, freedom to criticize, freedom to learn the way they are. Keating teaches student with a new point of view, he teaches

poetry with enjoyment, he can develop the student sense in poetry.

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