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A Study of Mr. Keating's Role in Dead Poets Society from Humanistic Perspective

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***Abstract**: Currently, education is shifting its emphasis from test scores to individual growth. How to effectively implement a student-centered approach in teaching remains a question worthy of ongoing consideration. Using humanistic educational theory as an analytical framework, this study offers an in-depth interpretation of the film Dead Poets Society. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rogers' student-centered educational philosophy, it systematically analyzes Keating's specific behaviors in the classroom and their impact on students. The study finds that Keating's role can be understood on three levels: as a practitioner of student-centered education, an awakener of students' potential for self-actualization, and a builder of equal teacher-student relationships. Through actions such as having students tear up their textbooks, stand on desks, and revive the Dead Poets Society, he created a space for free expression and self-exploration within the stifling school environment. Under his influence, students began to develop a sense of subjectivity and gradually unleashed their suppressed potential. Keating's educational practices inspire the idea that teachers need to shift from being authorities on knowledge to becoming companions in students' growth, fostering safe and free atmospheres in the classroom. Education, therefore, is not merely the transmission of knowledge but should also help students develop a passion for life and confidence in themselves. Although Keating's methods carry an idealistic tone, the educational philosophy and role transformation they embody still provide a practical path for today's teachers to follow.*

***Background**: Modern education is shifting from a focus on test scores and enrollment rates toward recognizing students' emotional well-being, sense of value, and authentic self-expression, reflected in the rise of "core competencies" and "emotional education", ideals that remain difficult to implement in a 45-minute classroom. Dead Poets Society tells of Mr. Keating, who in 1959 joins the rigid, tradition-bound Welton Preparatory School, where conventional education suppresses students' true selves. Keating challenges this model by urging students to discard textbooks, liberating them from conservative pedagogical constraints. Decades later, his methods still resonate: he disregards exam rankings and inspires students to reflect on their own aspirations. Scholars have moved from viewing the film as a symbol of rule-breaking to analyzing its classroom logic through Maslow's self-actualization and Rogers' student-centered learning. The film thus stages a dialectic between Welton's disciplinary force, standardizing students, and Keating's emancipatory force, affirming each learner's individuality.*

***Materials and Methods:**. This study adopts a qualitative research design, combining literature review with close textual analysis of the film Dead Poets Society (1989). Humanistic educational theory, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rogers' student-centered philosophy, serves as the analytical framework. Research materials include the film itself, particularly classroom scenes and teacher-student dialogues, as well as relevant domestic and international journal articles and monographs. Keating's representative teaching behaviors, such as having students tear up their textbooks, stand on desks, and revive the Dead Poets Society, were systematically analyzed against the theory's core concepts to interpret his educational role and its influence on students.*

***Results:** The analysis shows that Mr. Keating's teaching practices align closely with humanistic educational theory, with his role manifested at three levels: a practitioner of student-centered education, a facilitator of students' self-actualization, and a builder of equal teacher-student relationships. His behaviors, tearing up textbooks, standing on desks, and reviving the Dead Poets Society, created a space for free expression within the stifling school environment. Consequently, students' suppressed potential was unleashed: Todd gained confidence and creative voice, Neil pursued his acting dream, and Charlie defied authority. These findings indicate that education should shift from knowledge transmission to nurturing students' passion for life and belief in themselves, with teachers becoming companions in growth rather than authoritative knowledge-holders.*

***Conclusion:** This study, through the lens of humanistic educational theory, reinterprets Mr. Keating's teaching role in Dead Poets Society. The findings reveal that Keating embodies a student-centered practitioner, a facilitator of self-actualization, and a builder of equal teacher-student relationships, whose practices awakened students' subjectivity and unleashed their potential. His example demonstrates that education is not merely*

knowledge transmission but the cultivation of life passion and self-confidence. Although his methods remain somewhat idealized, the humanistic philosophy they reflect offers a practical path for modern teachers transforming their roles. Future research could examine Keating's methods across diverse cultural and classroom contexts.

Keywords： *Humanistic education, student-centered approach, the role of the teacher, self-actualization, Dead Poets Society*

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I. Introduction

Education is gradually shifting from an emphasis on test scores and enrollment rates toward recognition that healthy development depends on whether students feel valued, understood, and free to be themselves. Concepts such as "core competencies" and "emotional education" now pervade policy frameworks, yet their implementation in daily classroom teaching remains challenging. The film *Dead Poets Society* offers a vivid case: at the tradition-bound Welton Preparatory School in 1959, literature teacher John Keating breaks with conventional pedagogy by having students tear up their textbooks and discover their authentic selves. Although scholars have long studied this film, systematic interpretations of Keating's role through humanistic educational theory remain scarce. Drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rogers' student-centered philosophy, this study analyzes Keating's classroom practices and their impact on students, aiming to provide practical insights for teachers' role transformation in contemporary education.

II. Theoretical Framework

2.1 The Development of Humanistic Education Theory

The roots of humanistic education can be traced back to the humanistic psychology movement in the mid-20th century. In the post-war years, western society witnessed rapid technological progress, yet people increasingly struggled to find meaning in their lives. At the time, behaviorism reduced human beings to mere mechanical stimulus-response systems, while psychoanalysis focused heavily on mental illness and instinctual drives. As a result, the growth needs of healthy individuals were long overlooked. This is why humanistic psychology naturally emerged as "the third force" in psychology. Its fundamental goal was to bring human dignity and the value of life back to the central position in research. During the 1940s and 1950s, Maslow did the foundational work for what would become humanistic psychology. He opposed to overreliance on animal experiments and the study of pathological cases within psychology. Instead, he turned his attention to study mentally healthy individuals. Through systematic and rigorous observations of a large number of self-actualized people, he eventually proposed his well-known hierarchy of needs，which naturally became one of the most important cornerstones of humanistic psychology.

Rogers, on the other hand, developed client-centered therapy in the field of psychotherapy and made it clear that the therapist's attitude matters more than technique. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, he had naturally and fittingly carried these ideas over into education. In his 1969 book Freedom to Learn, he laid out for the first time a systematic vision of student-centered education. Teachers should act as facilitators of learning, not as authority figures who pour knowledge into students. The book had a profound and positive impact on the educational world at the time. By the 1970s, humanistic education theory had taken on an important role in educational reform across Europe and America. Practices like open education and affective education drew, in one way or another, on its core ideas[10]. Many schools actively moved away from the traditional lecture-based classroom model, giving students more room to make their own choices. Curriculum reform also began to place greater emphasis on emotional experience and self-awareness.

By the 1980s, standardized education and cognitive psychology were gaining the upper hand, and humanistic approaches for a time faded from the spotlight. But even then, the core concerns of humanistic education never really went away. Whenever the system leaned too hard on test scores and rankings, there were always people who circled back to its core ideas. That's why, in recent years, concepts like core competencies, emotional education, and whole-person development have drawn serious attention from the academic world again. And with that, humanistic education theory has naturally found its way back into the conversation.

2.2 Core Viewpoints of Humanistic Education Theory

Humanistic educational theory emphasizes that the fundamental purpose of education is to help students discover their own potential and ultimately achieve self-actualization. It opposes traditional education, which focuses only on knowledge, and advocates combining cognitive learning with emotional experiences. Furthermore, humanistic educational theory emphasizes that students are the subjects of learning, while teachers should act as facilitators and guiders. Overall, humanistic educational theory attempts to shift education from a

"subject-centered" approach to a "human development-centered" one.

First, the emphasis on student-centered learning. Rogers' student-centered educational philosophy offers concrete methods for practice. He adapted client-centered therapy from psychology to the classroom, proposing three key conditions. The first is sincere congruence, which means teachers should avoid adopting an authoritative facade. The second is unconditional positive regard, that is, respect and acceptance for students shouldn't depend on how they perform. This doesn't mean letting them get away with anything, but helping them see that they have inherent value as individuals. The third is empathic understanding. Teachers should see things from the student's perspective rather than offering critical judgment from the outside. Rogers believed that when teachers achieve these three points, the classroom becomes a place where students feel safe and free. In that kind of atmosphere, their inner potential for growth is activated, and meaningful learning begins to happen. He challenged the traditional image of teachers as knowledge authorities, emphasizing that the teacher's role is not to shape students but to promote growth, to create the conditions that make learning possible rather than to pour knowledge into them.

Second, the pursuit of self-actualization. To fully understand this concept, it is important to recognize that Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory underwent a process of development. In 1943, he first proposed the classic five-level hierarchy of needs, which included physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Maslow explained that if the bottom four levels aren't satisfied, people won't have the energy to move upward. Only when basic needs are satisfied will individuals develop the desire to become better themselves. The first four levels are deficiency needs. When these needs are lacking, they cause problems, and when they are fulfilled, people's well-being will improve. Self-actualization, however, is a growth need. It's not about fixing deficiencies but about self-development; the more it's satisfied, the more one seeks to pursue it.

In 1954, he added cognitive needs and esthetic needs to the five-level hierarchy, forming a seven-level structure. Between 1969 and 1970, Maslow added the highest level, transcendental needs, to the original seven-level framework, completing the final version of his hierarchy of needs theory, including physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, cognitive needs, esthetic needs, self-actualization needs, and transcendental needs. This study employs the most classic five-level model which is widely accepted for analysis.

Third, nondirective teacher-student relationship. In humanistic educational theory, equality in the teacher-student relationship does not mean that their roles and responsibilities are exactly the same but rather emphasizes equality in psychological status and interaction methods. Teachers transition from being authoritative instructors to "facilitators of learning," approaching students with sincerity and authenticity, offering unconditional positive attention and empathetic understanding, respecting students' emotions and choices, and allowing them to independently determine their learning content and progress. This equality is built on a foundation of trust and dialogue, where teachers are no longer judges or controllers but companions in students' growth, and both parties explore knowledge together in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect.

When these three perspectives are combined, the fundamental outline of humanistic education becomes clear. It regards the student as a whole person, not just how much knowledge they can store in their mind, but their emotions, attitudes, and values all matter too. It believes that every student has their own ideas for self-development. Education isn't about pouring knowledge into them, but about giving them enough room to develop on their own. And it holds that the relationship between teacher and student matters more than any teaching technique.

III. Analysis

3.1 Mr. Keating's Educational Role

The core of humanistic educational theory is to place the individual back at the center of education, emphasizing that the purpose of education isn't to memorize numerous knowledge points but to help students grow into fully developed individuals. Mr. Keating's unique educational philosophy and principles powerfully challenged the traditional educational model. Within the stifling environment of Welton Academy, he brought awakening and respect, becoming a practitioner of student-centered education, a guider of student self-actualization, and a builder of equal teacher-student relationships.

3.1.1 Practitioner of Student-Centered Education

Rogers' student-centered theory holds that the core of education should shift from the teacher to the student. Teachers should act as facilitators, finding ways to motivate students to learn on their own rather than passively learning. During the teaching process, teachers should not intervene unnecessarily but instead guide students to develop their inherent potential. This theory emphasizes that every student has an inherent potential for growth and development and that the key to education is creating a genuine, accepting, and empathetic psychological environment that encourages students to learn actively. In this educational model, learning

content is closely integrated with students' personal life experiences, the learning process is initiated by the students themselves, and assessment is primarily based on self-evaluation. The ultimate goal is to promote students' comprehensive personal development, rather than merely the accumulation of knowledge.

Mr. Keating perfectly represents this humanistic approach to education. During his first class, he began by asking a student to read aloud the introductory essay titled "Understanding Poetry" from the textbook. The moment the student finished reading, Mr. Keating responded with "Excrement" as his assessment of the essay and then ordered the students to tear out those pages. This was because the essay attempted to analyze poetry using a rigid framework that stifled students' thinking. He told them that reading poetry wasn't about applying some standard answer but about feeling the power behind the words and language with their own hearts. This behavior aligns perfectly with what Rogers described, trusting in students' potential, believing that every student has an inherent capacity for growth and a motivation to learn, and seeing that the role of education is to provide the conditions that allow this potential to unfold naturally.

Mr. Keating's educational philosophy emphasizes individual differences and cultivates students' capacity for independent thinking. During a class, while discussing poetry, Mr. Keating suddenly stood on the desk at the front of the classroom and said, "I stand upon my desk to remind myself that we must constantly look at things in a different way." It wasn't for disorderly behavior but to remind them to view the world from different perspectives, awakening their sense of autonomy. He encouraged students to take control of their own lives rather than follow paths drawn by others.

His actions are precisely in keeping with Rogers' approach of encouraging students to evaluate themselves, emphasizing students' primary role in their own learning, reducing external comparisons such as grade rankings, and fostering a sense of responsibility and internal motivation toward learning. Rogers' student-centered approach are no longer abstract concepts in Keating's classroom but rather tangible moments in life. Through this theoretical perspective, Keating's roles as a practitioner of student-centered education, a guider of self-actualization, and a builder of equal teacher-student relationships gain a clear theoretical framework. Analyzing his teaching practices thus becomes not merely an exercise in praise but research that can contribute to contemporary education.

3.1.2 Facilitator of Student Self-Actualization

Maslow placed self-actualization at the top of his hierarchy of needs, explaining that individuals must first satisfy the lower levels before seeking higher pursuits. Only when basic physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, and esteem needs are fulfilled will the desire for self-actualization emerge. But at Welton Academy, these fundamental needs were precisely neglected. Students felt no sense of security because they could be punished at any moment for breaking school rules; they felt no sense of belonging or love because the school cared only about grades and admission rates; they felt no sense of respect because neither the school principal nor their parents ever treated them as independent individuals.

After Keating arrived, he gradually began to fulfill students' fundamental needs. He created an atmosphere of free expression in the classroom, he made time to talk with students privately, making them feel noticed and understood, and he guided students to appreciate the beauty of poetry. Once these basic needs are fulfilled, students begin to develop a desire for self-actualization. Under the influence of Mr. Keating, Neil realizes his dream, while Todd and others reevaluate their life paths and regain their courage and spirit of independence.

In the movie, Neil Perry is a character who is both vivid and heartbreaking. He is optimistic, passionate, and highly talented as a performer, with a natural flair for leadership. He was one of the first students to respond to Mr. Keating, taking the lead in reviving the "Dead Poets Society" and determined to live his life through poetry and theater. Yet his father is the complete opposite as he is authoritarian and extremely controlling. He had already mapped out a path for Neil to become a doctor from an early age and would not allow him to pursue acting at all. When Neil signed up for the lead role against all objections, his father found out and demanded that he drop out immediately, which caused Neil immense pain. Later, Mr. Keating said to him:

> "Then you're acting for him, too. You're playing the part of the dutiful son. Now, I know this sounds impossible, but you have to talk to him. You have to show him who you are, what your heart is!" "You are not an indentured servant! It's not a whim for you, you prove it to him by your conviction and your passion! You show that to him, and if he still doesn't believe you—well, by then, you'll be out of school and can do anything you want."

Instead of solving Neil's problems for him, Mr. Keating encouraged Neil to pursue his dreams by using words to awaken his inner strength. First, he pointed out that Neil was "playing the part of the dutiful son," which helped him realize how he had been suppressing his true self. Second, he emphasized that "You are not an indentured servant," affirming his right to choose his own path in life. Because of Mr. Keating's ceaselessly encouragement, Neil secretly performed in A Midsummer Night's Dream and gave an outstanding performance. But after watching the play, his father forcibly took him home and announced that he would be transferring to a

military academy the next day. Late that night, feeling that all hope had been extinguished, Neil ultimately took his own life with his father's gun. Neil's death is proof that the seeds of self-actualization have quietly taken root in the students' hearts

In the film, Todd Anderson is a quiet, introverted teenager who is even fearful at first. As Neil's roommate, he was extremely unconfident when he first transferred to Welton Academy, so much so that he didn't even dare to read aloud in class. Mr. Keating keenly recognized the talent that lay hidden within him and he said, "Mr. Anderson thinks that everything inside of him is worthless and embarrassing. Isn't that right, Todd? Isn't that your worst fear? Well, I think you're wrong. I think you have something inside of you that is worth a great deal." Through acceptance, trust, and gentle guidance, Mr. Keating helped Todd break free from the shackles of self-doubt and awakened his suppressed creativity. The final line, "Don't you forget this" became a crucial turning point in Todd's personal awakening. Todd's journey from never daring to speak in class to reciting his own poetry in a cave illustrates how self-actualization potential gradually unfolds within a humanistic educational environment.

What makes Mr. Keating unique is that he treats his students as whole human beings, rather than mere learning machines. He creates a space where students can express themselves freely, making them feel understood and respected. Neil's ending is regrettable, but it also shows that he had already developed a clear sense of self and a pursuit of his own goals. Todd's transformation, on the other hand, showcases the positive effects of humanistic education. Originally introverted, he gradually overcame his psychological barriers through Keating's trust and encouragement. This change is a natural expression of students' potential being unleashed after receiving full respect and support. Rather than choosing life paths for his students, Keating helped them build up the courage to stay true to who they were. This also reflects the most fundamental and core meaning of education.

3.1.3 The Builder of Equal Teacher-Student Relationships

The traditional education at Welton Academy focuses only on grades and enrollment rates. Students living in this stifling environment gradually lose themselves. Chen Yan analyzing the film has pointe out that traditional education often exhibits a tendency to "prioritize teachers over students." The rote teaching model has gradually been discarded by modern society. What society needs today is for teachers to guide and inspire students, awakening their inherent self-awareness. Rogers believed that promoting meaningful learning requires fulfilling three core conditions of congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. These three conditions point toward a teacher-student relationship built on mutual trust and equality. Mr. Keating's teaching practices perfectly match these three conditions.

Congruence refers to the alignment between teachers' inner feelings, self-awareness and external behaviors, meaning being genuine and consistent without pretense or authoritative facade. Keating never concealed his passion for poetry nor kept secret his own experience as a member of the Dead Poets Society in his youth. This sincerity allowed students to perceive him as a living, breathing human being rather than a teaching machine. When speaking to his students, he carried none of that lofty sense of distance. When Neil wanted to act, he helped him find ways to do it. When Todd turned bright red with embarrassment in class, he simply waited quietly before guiding him with poetry. These details all reflect the kind of trust in people that Rogers spoke of.

Unconditional positive regard means teachers respect and accept students regardless of their performance or behavior, and recognize their inherent value as individuals without any conditions. Keating's attitude toward Todd is the perfect example. When Todd first arrived, he was always silent, head bowed, and afraid to look at anyone. His older brother was the school's excellent graduate and his photo hung on the wall so that teachers would greet him by saying, "You have some big shoes to fill, young man. Your brother was one of our finest." Some commentators have vividly captured Todd's early struggle as the silent, introverted boy at the start of the school year, and his expression stiffening each time someone mentioned his superior older brother. Through the film's close-up shots, people witness the boy's vulnerability magnified, revealing a young man's helplessness and profound sorrow. Keating neither pressured him nor abandoned him. That day in class, Todd was called to the front and stood flushed and speechless, but Keating didn't let him sit down. Instead, he caught Todd's incoherent utterance, which was "a sweat-toothed madman", with poetry, declaring that was poetry. With Mr. Keating's guidance through both physical and verbal methods, Todd's poetic talent poured out freely. Keating didn't abandon Todd because of his introverted silence but patiently waited for him to recite his own poetry aloud, showing him respect and understanding.

Empathic understanding means that teachers perceive students' inner feelings and experiences from their perspective without judgment, and accurately communicate this understanding to them. Educators should proactively understand students, notice any problems in their thinking or behavior, and offer assistance. When Neil was suffering under his father's pressure, Keating understood that feeling of being stifled and encouraged him to bravely express himself. From a young age, Neil knew exactly what he wanted is to become an actor. But

his father insisted he become a doctor, attend Harvard, and abandon his dreams. At school, Neil was the leader of the group, guiding everyone in reviving the Dead Poets Society and reciting poetry in the cave. Yet no matter how outstanding he was, once he returned home, he could only silently endure his father's criticism and arrangements. Keating's arrival showed him another possibility. He gradually realized that loving acting wasn't wrong and that he could change for his dreams. He secretly auditioned without his father's knowing and stood on stage receiving everyone's praise. But his father brought him home and demanded he transfer to a military academy. That night, Neil ended his life with his father's gun. Neil's tragedy precisely demonstrates that he awakened too completely, never able to return to being the obedient child he once was.

Keating won his students' trust not through his profound knowledge but by building a relationship of equality and trust where students felt respected and understood. When Mr. Keating was ultimately forced to leave the school, Todd was the first to climb onto his desk and shout, "O Captain! My Captain!" One by one, more students joined him. In that moment, the teacher-student relationship built on equality and trust was perfectly embodied. It was not merely a farewell but a silent declaration that what he left behind would never truly depart.

3.2 The Impact of Mr. Keating's Humanistic Education Practices on Students

Humanistic educational theory maintains that every student has an inherent potential for personal growth. The role of education is to provide suitable environments that help students achieve independent development by relying on their own abilities. After analyzing this film, Gorbatkova O, Levitskaya A have pointed out that its core concept is the "social moral struggle" that is the struggle for individual happiness, love, truth, the right to self-identity, and the freedom to express thoughts and idea. The impact of this education is most evident in the students themselves. Some students start to understand they are independent individuals who should not be disciplined by uniform standards or live simply to fulfill their parents' expectations, which means the awakening of self-awareness. Others gradually discover their own capabilities and values, for example, they can write poetry, bravely stand on desks, and become whoever they want to be. This is the release of individual potential. Through these two levels, the significance of Keating's educational practice finds its concrete realization.

3.2.1 Unleashing Students' Individual Potential

The most appealing aspect of humanistic education is not improving students' test scores but helping them discover their own abilities and value. Welton Academy, however, imposes strict control over its students, leaving them no opportunity to think about their personal development and future. Keating's teaching approach is to help students build self-confidence and believe in their own worth. Liu Hui has pointed out that traditional knowledge-centered teaching ignores human existence, while Keating's teaching practice vividly exemplifies a return to life-centered education. Some scholars have also pointed out from a macro perspective that the traditional education system stifles learners' potential, failing both to guide students toward establishing goals for self-actualization and to help them achieve those goals[7]. Mr. Keating's educational approach changed this situation.

The most moving storyline is Todd's journey of unleashing his potential. Having an extremely talented older brother made him feel like he wasn't good enough, leaving him severely lacking in confidence. Keating didn't rush him to change but patiently waited and gently guided him toward transformation. That free writing class was the turning point of the whole transformation. Under Mr. Keating's guidance, Todd's poetic talent was unleashed in full force. At the film's end, Todd was the first to stand on the desk, shouting "Captain! My Captain!" to Keating as he walked away. At that moment, all potential erupted into the courage to stand up.

Charlie was born free. He wrote a piece in the school paper demanding that girls be admitted, openly talked back to the headmaster during a school assembly and in the end, he refused to sign the paper blaming Keating and never regretted it, even after being expelled. Charlie's release of his own potential was the most straightforward, the most complete. He wasn't like Neil, full of inner struggle. He wasn't like Todd, hesitant and unsure. Within the limited space Keating granted him, he simply lived out his true self.

Education has reached a point where it is no longer merely about imparting knowledge but about helping individuals become whole and independent beings. At the moment Todd stood on the desk, the moment Neil donned the theatrical cap, the moment Charlie spoke those words, they were no longer the students Welton Academy wanted them to be. They had become themselves. As Gorbatkova O, Levitskaya A have pointed out, the film presents an idealized image of a teacher, one who is wise, capable, and respected, conveying humanistic moral values and behavioral standards. Under such guidance, the students truly come into their own.

3.2.2 Awakening the Students' Souls

Mr. Keating's class is different from other teachers', often with unexpected arrangements. He asked the students to tear out the introductory section of the textbook because he believed that it was unnecessary to use

an unchanging method to analyze poetry. He stood on his desk and also had his students do the same, reminding them to see things from a different perspective. He also let the students walk freely in the yard at their own pace, without lining up straight lines. These activities may seem simple, but their only core objective is to help students understand that not everything has a standard answer.

Neil was the first student to be influenced by Mr. Keating. When Mr. Keating realized that Neil truly loved acting, he told Neil to let his father know what he really thought and what his real interests were. But without telling his father, Neil secretly took part in the performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream, where he gave an excellent show on stage. Todd was another student who was deeply impacted. He had always been shy and didn't even dare to read aloud in class. Under Mr. Keating's guidance, Todd was encouraged to close his eyes and write freely. Eventually, he read his own poem aloud and gradually became more outgoing. Charlie, on the other hand, took a more direct approach. He published an article in the school newspaper suggesting the school admit female students, and he openly challenged the principal at a school-wide meeting, never hiding his views.

Mr. Keating awakened Neil's dream of becoming an actor, and with his encouragement, Neil successfully performed in A Midsummer Night's Dream. However, Mr. Keating did not teach Neil how to negotiate or how to protect himself while making compromises. After the successful performance, Neil faced his father's strong opposition, and he did not know how to communicate with his father and ultimately decided to end his life. Mr. Keating awakened the students' inner desires, but he did not tell them how to communicate when their dreams are not understood by those closest to them or how to properly express their own inner longings. This is also what people need to consider today..

IV. The Enlightenment

4.1 The Transformation of the Teacher's Role

What made Mr. Keating most memorable wasn't the amount of knowledge he imparted but the way he approached teaching. He was humble and didn't treat textbooks as absolute authority. He had his students call him "Captain", a title that itself declared a new kind of relationship, one where teacher and student weren't superior and subordinate but partners. Wang Huiran, Wang Xiaolei have pointed out that teachers should transition from traditional knowledge authorities to companions and guides for student growth, redefining their roles from the perspective of humanistic teaching theory.

This shift is particularly urgent today. In an era dominated by artificial intelligence, where knowledge is readily accessible, teachers who continue to define themselves as the only ones holding the answers will ultimately be outdated by the times. Researchers exploring the transformation of teachers' roles in the era of artificial intelligence have suggested that educators need to shift from being knowledge imparters to becoming learning facilitators and emotional companions. Looking back today, Keating's actions seem even more prescient. By having students stand on their desks, he taught them to observe the world from different perspectives, and encouraging them to read poetry, he helped them connect with their truest feelings through verse. Technology cannot provide these things, but only people can do that.

Wang S has also focused on the specific pathways for transforming the role of teachers in the era of digitalization and intelligence, arguing that educators need to develop higher levels of emotional sensitivity and interpersonal communication skills. When Keating talked with students, he looked them in the eye, responding to each one as a unique individual. He supported Neil in pursuing his acting dreams, patiently waited for the introverted Todd to find his voice, and offered timely guidance to Knox when he was emotionally troubled. Every student was different in his eyes. This attitude of seeing students as individuals is the very core of the teacher's role transformation.

4.2 The Integration of Humanistic Principles in Teaching

Humanistic education theory, when applied in the classroom, means respecting students and treating them as independent individuals. Lei Jing has pointed out that integrating humanistic principles into teaching requires educators to create a safe and free psychological environment where students feel accepted and understood. Keating encouraged students to appreciate poetry with their hearts rather than mechanically applying textbook analysis methods. He created an atmosphere of free expression in class, giving students the courage to speak up and make mistakes. Todd was able to write that line about "a sweaty-toothed madman" because Keating gave him the freedom to let his imagination run wild.

Based on Rogers' humanistic learning theory, teachers should pay attention to students' emotional needs and individual differences, making students feel respected and trusted. Keating knew what Todd feared and what Neil desired. He did not impose the same standards on all students but instead provided personalized guidance and support based on each student's specific needs. Jelena J, after analyzing Dead Poets Society, has suggested that the film's individualistic educational philosophy reminds educators to focus on students' personal

development, respect their choices, and allow them to find their own path as they grow. The humanistic spirit integrated into teaching ultimately seeks not report cards, but the true self-actualization of every student.

4.3 The Cultivation of Students' Emotional Values

Education can never avoid one core question of what kind of people should we educate students to become? Welton Academy's answer is to become elite and gain admission to top universities. This answer itself is not wrong, but the problem is that it is too limited. Keating doesn't tell students what they should become but encourages them to think, experiment, and feel for themselves. He leads them in reading poetry so they can see within the verses how others have lived, loved, and struggled. These experiences seep into their hearts, becoming the reference points for their future.

Awakening students' sense of agency is one of the core tasks of education. Only when students recognize themselves as independent individuals can real learning take place. Keating had the students tear out the introduction to their textbooks to teach them not to blindly accept others' ideas but to learn to think for themselves, and he had them stand on their desks to show them that the world looks different from a new perspective.

Analyzed from the perspective of authentic personality development, education should help students cultivate genuine and fully formed personalities, even if this process conflicts with established norms. Neil's tragedy was not the failure of education but the conflict between education and society. Though he had the courage to pursue his true self, he remained bound by external constraints. This tragedy also reminds people that education must not only enlighten the mind but also know how to protect and support it. Mr. Keating gave his students the most precious gift, a passion for life and a belief in themselves. Todd stood on his desk; Charlie refused to sign, these weren't specific skills Keating taught, but the beliefs he planted in his students' hearts, which eventually blossomed into courage. Guiding students' emotional values has no standard answers. Keating gave Neil support, Todd patience, and Charlie trust. He wasn't playing the role of a good teacher but believed every student carried a light within. When education reaches this level, it becomes far more than a profession. It's a noble pursuit..

V. Conclusion

This study employs humanistic educational theory as an analytical framework to reinterpret the teaching role of Mr. Keating in Dead Poets Society. Mr. Keating's educational practices were deeply consistent with humanistic educational theory. Behind his actions was a complete educational logic.

Research has found that Mr. Keating's educational role is primarily reflected in three aspects. First, he is a practitioner of student-centered education, inspiring students' internal motivation to learn by challenging the authority of textbooks and encouraging independent exploration. Second, he is a guider for students' self-actualization, helping them discover and pursue their own dreams and values while fulfilling their fundamental psychological needs. Third, he is a builder of equal teacher-student relationships, earning students' trust and respect through sincere, unconditional positive regard and empathetic understanding. On this basis, Keating's educational practices had a profound impact on the students. The students' individual potential was unleashed and began to challenge the limitations of standardized education and rethink the direction of their lives. What Mr. Keating taught, a passion for life, a belief in themselves, cannot be measured by grades, though these are precisely what education should leave behind.

Integrating humanistic values into teaching is not some profoundly complex theory, but rather giving students more space in the classroom and truly treating them as independent individuals. There are no standard answers for guiding students' emotions and values, as each child may need something different. What teachers can do is to pay close attention to every student and provide guidance and support based on their actual needs.

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