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Experiential Learning Reflected in Dead Poets Society by Peter Weir

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Abstract:
Traditional teacher-centered instruction is widely criticized for restricting students' critical thinking and meaningful learning. This study aims to identify how Experiential Learning Cycle is reflected in Keating's teaching, while also examining the extent to which these experiential learning moments reflect the qualities of transformative learning. This qualitative study used a directed qualitative content analysis design and twenty scenes were purposively selected as the primary data. Data were collected by repeatedly watching the film and recording relevant scenes on a documentation sheet, then deductively coded using a fifteen-code codebook built from Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory. The coded data were analyzed thematically by interpreting the dialogue and script against both theories, then organized into a thematic matrix to trace patterns within and across categories. The trustworthiness was ensured through repeated viewing, an audit-trailed coding matrix, peer debriefing, and negative case checking. The findings show that thirteen scenes reflect Kolb's four experiential learning stages with Concrete Experience appear frequently. The remaining seven scenes reflect Mezirow's transformative process, comprising one Disorienting Dilemma and three scenes each of Critical Self-Reflection and Perspective Transformation These results show that experiential learning can lead to transformative learning and highlight the value of integrating authentic learning experiences with structured reflection to foster critical thinking, active participation, and meaningful learning.

Keywords: Directed Content Analysis; Experiential Learning; Film Pedagogy; Transformative Learning

Introduction

Traditional pedagogical models, dominated by rote memorization, rigid discipline, and standardized achievement measures, have long been criticized for producing passive learners rather than critical thinkers. When education prioritizes the transmission of fixed knowledge over student agency, it suppresses the reflective and metacognitive capacities essential for independent thought. Freire described this as the "banking model" of education, in which students serve as passive depositories, while Dewey argued that learning detached from lived experience fails to cultivate genuine reflective thinking(Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1997). In contrast to transmission-oriented pedagogy, transformative learning conceptualizes learning as a process of critically reflecting on and transforming the assumptions that inform individuals' interpretations of experience, thereby enabling more reflective and inclusive ways of making meaning (Mezirow, 1997). The cumulative consequence of these traditional methods is a classroom environment that systematically limits students' reflective potential, metacognitive skills, and critical engagement with knowledge. This pedagogical crisis finds vivid cinematic expression in *Dead Poets Society*, where the oppressive traditions of Welton Academy dramatize the destructive impact of conformity-driven schooling on young minds (Peter Weir, 1989).

Existing scholarship on *Dead Poets Society* has predominantly examined the film through the lenses of nonconformity, institutional power, and humanistic values. While these perspectives have yielded valuable insights into the film's social and philosophical dimensions, they have largely overlooked the pedagogical mechanisms through which John Keating facilitates students' learning and personal development. Previous studies have interpreted Keating's teaching as an expression of critical pedagogy and resistance to traditional schooling (Muro, 2018; Nevil, 2026; Qaniu, Sarair, & Netta, 2024; Taufiq & Islam, 2022). However, none had thoroughly evaluated his teaching methods through the lens of an established learning theory. In addition, no earlier study has investigated how the experiential learning processes shown in the film ultimately result in transformative educational outcomes. This lack of inquiry creates a significant theoretical void since the connection between learning experiences and shifts in perspective is still not adequately explored in educational study focused on films. The novelty of this study lies in the combination of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory into one analytical framework to analyze *Dead Poets Society*. This study presents them as supportive viewpoints that clarify various phases of the same educational experience.

To address this gap, the present study integrates Kolb (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle as its primary analytical framework. Kolb's learning cycle includes *Concrete Experience*, which refers to learners' direct engagement in meaningful situations; *Reflective Observation*, in which learners critically examine those experiences; *Abstract Conceptualization*, which describes the development of concepts and general principles from reflection; and *Active Experimentation*, where learners apply their newly constructed understanding in subsequent situations. While Kolb explains how experience is transformed into learning, it does not fully explain whether that learning fundamentally changes learners' perspectives. Therefore, this study also draws on Mezirow (1997) Transformative Learning Theory. Mezirow proposes that transformative learning begins with a *Disorienting Dilemma*, an experience that challenges existing assumptions and ways of thinking. This process continues through *Critical Self-Reflection*, in which learners examine their beliefs and underlying assumptions, and culminates in *Perspective Transformation*, a lasting change in how individuals understand themselves and the world. Together, Kolb's Experiential Learning

Cycle and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory provide complementary analytical frameworks for examining both the learning processes and their transformative outcomes in *Dead Poets Society*. As Tan & Koh (2018) argue, film serves as a valid cultural text for examining transformative, student-centered pedagogy, making *Dead Poets Society* an ideal case for the application of Kolb's framework.

Guided by these frameworks, this study repositions Keating's classroom as a site of structured experiential pedagogy worthy of systematic analysis. Drawing on Kolb's four-cycle model and supported by prior film-pedagogy scholarship the study offers a theoretically grounded reading of the film's educational practices (Nolan & Kurthakoti, 2026; Tan & Koh, 2018). This approach provides an analytical lens that bridges literary and film studies with experiential learning theory, revealing how cinematic narratives can illustrate complex pedagogical concepts. This study identifies two problems, (A) How is Experiential Learning depicted in Keating's teaching, and (B) To what extent does the Experiential Learning depicted in *Dead Poets Society* reflect Transformative Learning quality. Specifically, the study pursues two objectives: (A) to identify the experiential learning principles depicted in Keating's teaching, and (B) to examine the effects of those principles on the intellectual and emotional development of the students in the film.

This study contributes both theoretically and practically implications for educational practice and film-based teaching methods. From a theoretical perspective, this study builds on existing study on the analysis of film-based teaching by demonstrating how Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory can be combined into a single analytical approach to studying a film. In this process, the study strengthens the connection between experiential learning approaches and transformative educational outcomes while demonstrating the significance of film as a valid tool for investigating educational concepts. On a practical level, the results of this study provide teachers, particularly those involved in the fields of literature, media studies, and teacher training, with specific illustrations of how experiential and reflective teaching methods can be represented and analyzed using film. More broadly, this study presents a teaching framework for utilizing cinematic storytelling as an accessible educational tool to encourage critical thinking, personal reflection, and significant student engagement

Methods

This study employed a qualitative method using directed qualitative content analysis approach, in which existing theories guided the coding scheme prior to analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The primary data source was *Dead Poets Society*, which was viewed in full before coding(Peter Weir, 1989). Using purposive sampling, thirteen scenes were selected for Kolb's coding layer and seven for Mezirow's based on two criteria (a) the scene demonstrated learning behaviors consistent with the theoretical indicators, and (b) it contained sufficient dialogue and observable actions to support theoretical interpretation. Scenes lacking the required behavioral or dialogic indicators were excluded (Glaser & Strauss, 2009; Patton, 2015).

Data collection followed a directed coding procedure (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The film was viewed twice to identify relevant scenes to experiential learning and transformative learning theory then transcribed the relevant dialogues as evidences (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The scenes were coded using a codebook derived from Kolb's experiential learning cycle and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (D. Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1997). The analytic memos used to justify coding decisions by linking the dialogue and actions to the theoretical indicators (Miles

et al., 2014). For Kolb's framework, coding focused on the four stages of the experiential learning cycle, Concrete Experience (CE), representing direct involvement in meaningful experiences, Reflective Observation (RO) representing reflection on those experiences, Abstract Conceptualization (AC) representing the formation of new concepts or understandings and Active Experimentation (AE) representing the application of new understanding in subsequent actions. For Mezirow's framework, coding focused on seven core processes: Disorienting Dilemma (DD) representing experience that unsettles existing assumptions, Critical Self-Reflection (CSR) described examining one's own beliefs in light of disruption, and Perspective Transformation (PT) describes durable shift in identity and values following reflection.

The coded data were then analyzed using a thematic-matrix approach by comparing scenes within the same theoretical category to ensure consistency with the theoretical indicators (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Miles et al., 2014). For Kolb's framework, each scene was analyzed to identify the stages of the experiential learning cycle. For Mezirow's framework, scenes were analyzed to identify evidence of disorienting dilemmas, critical self-reflection, and perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1997). The relationships between the two frameworks were then examined to explain how experiential learning contributed to transformative learning outcomes. The results were organized in an analytical table and figure containing the quotation from the scene, interpretation of the scene that linking to theories indicators (Miles et al., 2014).

The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced through repeated viewing of the film and the consistent application of the coding framework (D. Kolb, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mezirow, 1997). Dependability is supported by applying a citable codebook and a complete coding matrix with scene quotations, interpretation and justifications as an audit trail (Miles et al., 2014). Peer debriefing was conducted through a second review of the coding process to verify that each coded scene was consistent with Kolb's and Mezirow's theoretical frameworks (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Finally, negative case checking was employed by excluding scenes that appeared relevant but did not clearly fulfilled the theory's indicators to maintain analytical rigor in line with the constant-comparison principle (Glaser & Strauss, 2009).

Results and Discussion

Description of Keating's Experiential Learning in Dead Poets Society

Concrete Experience

The analysis of Keating's experiential learning in *Dead Poets Society* begins with the first stage they are Concrete Experience (CE), which refers to embodied engagement without cognitive prior framework. The following scenes represent key instances in which Concrete Experience is identifiably enacted, each selected on the basis that it fulfills the behavioral and dialogic indicators of CE as defined in the study's codebook, including direct sensory engagement (CE-Sensory), affective surrender to the situation (CE-Openness), and unstructured lived experience occurring outside the boundaries of conventional instruction (CE-Spontaneous).

Table 1. Concrete Experience Kolb (1984)

No.	Quotation from the Scene	Interpretation of the Data
1.	Keating Introduced carpe diem (seize the day) to the	This scene represents a concrete experience where students engage physically without prior cognitive framing. Keating brings them outside the classroom

No.	Quotation from the Scene	Interpretation of the Data
	students through poetry	and recites poetry making them feel the urgency of living in the present moments.
2.	Keating's Desk-Standing perspective scene	This scene provides a concrete experience through willingness to be shaped by situation. Keating let the students climb on top of the desk to experience a new perspective and how a change in position can alter the way they see the world around them.
3.	Students make a poetry club on a cave	This scene provides a concrete experience through direct emotional involvement, where students actively participate and feel the impact of Keating's teachings in a real and personal situation, making the learning memorable and meaningful.
4.	Todd impromptu poem guide by Keating	This scene offers a concrete experience in which students physically face a real conflict or challenge, allowing them to personally encounter the tension between authority and individuality, which becomes the basis for deeper reflection.

Table 1 presents four scenes from *Dead Poets Society* that were coded as Concrete Experience (CE) in Kolb's experiential learning framework (D. A. Kolb, 1984; Peter Weir, 1989). Each scene is identified through a quotation from the narrative alongside an interpretation of the data drawn from the film's pedagogical content. The four scenes are: (1) Keating introduces carpe diem through poetry, (2) Keating's desk-standing perspective scene, (3) students forming a poetry club in a cave, and (4) Todd's impromptu poem guided by Keating. Together, these four scenes constitute a coherent pattern of direct, embodied learning experiences in which students engage physically and emotionally, which is the defining characteristic of the CE stage as described by Kolb (D. Kolb, 1984).

The findings demonstrate that the Concrete Experience (CE) depicted in *Dead Poets Society* reflects authentic experiential learning through sensory engagement, openness, spontaneity, and emotional involvement. The *carpe diem* lesson (CE-Sensory) supports Kolb's view that learning begins with experience and aligns with Dewey's emphasis on authentic experience as the foundation of learning, as well as Taufiq and Islam's interpretation of Keating's dialogic pedagogy inspired by Freire (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1997; D. Kolb, 1984; Taufiq & Islam, 2022). Likewise, the desk-standing activity (CE-Openness) requires students to experience alternative perspectives before constructing meaning. While previous studies interpret this scene primarily as resistance to institutional authority, the present study extends these findings by demonstrating its function as an experiential learning strategy that promotes openness to unfamiliar experiences, supporting Beard findings on embodied pedagogy while contrasting with Clark's argument that physical engagement without prior theoretical grounding may disorient adolescent learners (Beard, 2022; Clark, 2022; D. Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, the formation of the *Dead Poets Society* (CE-Spontaneous) illustrates students' autonomous construction of meaningful learning experiences beyond formal instruction, extending Nevil's interpretation of the scene as nonconformity and supporting Nolan and Kurthakoti's recognition of audiovisual narratives as educational evidence. Finally, Todd's impromptu poem demonstrates that emotionally challenging experiences become the basis for subsequent learning (Nevil, 2026; Nolan & Kurthakoti, 2026) reinforcing

Taufiq and Islam's conclusion that Keating's pedagogy facilitates transformation through dialogic engagement rather than knowledge transmission (Taufiq & Islam, 2022).

Overall, the four scenes demonstrate that Keating facilitates Concrete Experience through multiple forms of learning, including sensory engagement, embodied perspective-taking, autonomous participation, and emotionally challenging experiences. These experiences constitute a coherent pedagogical orientation that consistently places experience before reflection and conceptualization (D. Kolb, 1984). Consequently, the findings provide empirical support that *Dead Poets Society* systematically illustrates the Concrete Experience stage within Kolb's experiential learning cycle while extending previous film-based studies by explicitly identifying its underlying experiential learning mechanisms.

Reflective Observation

The analysis of Keating's experiential learning continues with Reflective Observation (RO), which involves reviewing and interpreting experience through critical reflection to construct meaning (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005; D. Kolb, 1984). Reflective Observation is enacted through learning situations that encourage students to examine experiences from different perspectives. The following scenes were selected based on the study's RO indicators, including self-reflection, perspective-taking, and experience interpretations.

Table 2. Reflective Observation Kolb (1984)

No.	Quotation from the Scene	Interpretation of the Data
1.	Students' small-group poetry discussion	This scene reflects Reflective Observation, as students exchange perspectives on poetry through collaborative reflection and consideration of multiple viewpoints, they deepen their understanding before developing their own interpretations of the experience.
2.	Keating instructs students to tear the textbook introduction	Keating's instruction to tear out the textbook introduction prompts students to critically question conventional approaches. This scene reflects Reflective Observation, as learners examine established perspectives through reflection before forming their own understanding.
3.	Charlie's "own voice" remark	Charlie's "own voice" remarks provides Reflective Observation as he interprets previous experiences to understand authentic self-expression. This scene demonstrates that reflection supports personal meaning-making, helping learners recognize their individuality and develop independent perspectives.

Table 2 presents three scenes from *Dead Poets Society* that were coded as Reflective Observation (RO) in Kolb's experiential learning framework(Peter Weir, 1989). Each scene is identified through a quotation from the narrative alongside an interpretation of the data drawn from the film's pedagogical content. The three scenes are: (1) students' small-group poetry discussion, (2) Keating instructs students to tear the textbook introduction, and (3) Charlie's "own voice" remark. Together, these scenes illustrate a coherent pattern of reflective learning, in which students examine experiences, question established perspectives, and construct personal meaning, reflecting the defining characteristics of the RO stage described by Kolb(D. Kolb, 1984).

The three scenes demonstrate Reflective Observation through the codebook indicators RO-Perspective, RO-Suspension, and RO-Articulation. The students' small-group poetry discussion reflects RO-Perspective, as learners consider multiple viewpoints before developing their own interpretations. Keating's instruction to tear out the textbook introduction represents RO-Suspension, encouraging students to suspend conventional assumptions and critically examine established authority. Charlie's remark about finding his *"own voice"* illustrates RO-Articulation, where learners verbalize their internal understanding and construct personal meaning. These findings support Kolb's conception of Reflective Observation as a process of constructing meaning from experience (Kolb, 1984). Recent studies also suggest that structured reflection promotes perspective-taking, critical thinking, and learner autonomy in student-centered learning environments (Karpin & Mahmudatussa'adah, 2022; Ogodo, 2026). While previous studies primarily interpret these scenes as representations of resistance to traditional education and dialogic pedagogy (Qaniu et al., 2024; Taufiq & Islam, 2022), the present study extends these interpretations by demonstrating that they systematically operationalize the codebook indicators of RO-Perspective, RO-Suspension, and RO-Articulation, revealing the specific reflective mechanisms through which experiential learning develops within Kolb's learning cycle.

These findings suggest that Reflective Observation in *Dead Poets Society* is not merely a process of reviewing experience but a pedagogical practice that enables learners to examine multiple perspectives, challenge established assumptions, and construct personal meaning. Through this reflective process, Keating transforms experience into a foundation for deeper understanding, illustrating the essential function of Reflective Observation in Kolb's experiential learning cycle (D. Kolb, 1984).

Abstract Conceptualization

The analysis continues with Abstract Conceptualization, in which learners transform reflected experiences into concepts, principles, or new ways of understanding. The following scenes were selected based on the study's codebook indicators comprising AC-Generalization, which refers to the formation of transferable principles, AC-Analysis, which describes the use of conceptual understanding to interpret experience; and AC-Schema, which refers to the integration of accumulated experiences into a new cognitive framework. Together, these indicators represent the process through which reflective experiences are transformed into conceptual understanding within Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

Table 3. Abstract Conceptualization Kolb (1984)

No.	Quotation From The Scene	Interpretation of the Data
1.	Neil's carpe diem philosophy leading to poetry club formation	This scene reflects cognitive transformation which aligned with abstract conceptualization. Neil transforms Keating's "carpe diem" teaching into a transferable principle that extends beyond the classroom.
2.	Knox's poem on courtship	This scene provides knox demonstrated abstracted keating's teaching. This scene aligned with kolb's abstract conceptualization which using abstract concept as a tool to analyze to interpret experience.
3.	Todd's first solo poem	This scene provides an integration of accumulated reflection and experience into a newly cognitive framework. Throughout his life todd has been

No.	Quotation From The Scene	Interpretation of the Data
		paralyzed by self-doubt and his solo poem marks the moment.

Table 3 presents three scenes from Dead Poets Society (Weir, 1989) that were coded as Abstract Conceptualization (AC) stage within Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. Kolb defines AC as the cognitive transformation of observed experience into generalizable principles or conceptual frameworks that can be transferred beyond the immediate situation. The three scenes identified Neil's carpe diem philosophy leading to the formation of the poetry club, Knox's poem on courtship, and Todd's first solo poem. Together, they trace a coherent and progressively pattern of conceptual transformation embedded in Keating's pedagogy, demonstrating that experiential learning in the film consistently generates transferable cognitive structures.

The three scenes demonstrate Abstract Conceptualization (AC) through the codebook indicators of AC-Generalization, AC-Analysis, and AC-Schema. Neil's adoption of the *carpe diem* philosophy represents AC-Generalization, as he transforms Keating's teaching into a transferable life principle beyond the classroom. Knox's use of poetic expression to interpret his relationship with Chris reflects AC-Analysis, demonstrating how learners apply abstract concepts to analyze personal experiences. Todd's first solo poem illustrates AC-Schema, as he reconstructs his self-understanding by integrating accumulated experiences into a new cognitive framework. These findings are consistent with Kolb's view that Abstract Conceptualization enables learners to generate abstract knowledge applicable beyond the original experience (D. Kolb, 1984). Kolb and Kolb further explain that conceptual understanding emerges through integrating Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation into transferable cognitive frameworks (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Likewise, Boud, Keogh, and Walker argue that reflective scaffolding supports learners in deriving general principles from experience, while Piaget explains this process as cognitive accommodation through schema reorganization (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 2013; Piaget, 1970). Previous studies characterize Keating's pedagogy as dialogic and emancipatory (Freire, 1997; Muro, 2018; Nevil, 2026; Taufiq & Islam, 2022). However, the present study extends these interpretations by demonstrating that students' cognitive development occurs systematically through AC-Generalization, AC-Analysis, and AC-Schema, revealing the underlying cognitive mechanism of Kolb's experiential learning cycle.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Abstract Conceptualization in *Dead Poets Society* is a progressive cognitive process, analytical reasoning, and reconstructed self-understanding. Abstract Conceptualization enables students to internalize experience as cognitive frameworks that guide future thinking and action. This synthesis reinforces D. Kolb (1984) experiential learning theory while extending previous interpretations of Keating's pedagogy by showing that students' agency and intellectual growth emerge through the systematic construction of conceptual knowledge grounded in experience.

Active Experiment

The analysis concludes with Active Experimentation, in which learners apply conceptual understanding through purposeful action. The selected scenes were coded using the indicators AE-Application, referring to the transfer of concepts into new actions, AE-Risk, referring to acting on internalized convictions despite potential consequences, and AE-Initiative, referring to autonomous action taken under institutional or social pressure.

Table 4. Active Experimentation Kolb (1984)

No.	Quotation from the Scene	Interpretation of the Data
1.	Neil's theatre audition and performance	Neil's decision to audition and perform in the school play reflects Active Experimentation, as he applies his newly formed convictions through purposeful action despite significant social and familial risks. This scene demonstrates learners' willingness to test their capabilities in authentic contexts.
2.	Charlie's publication in the school newspaper	Charlie's anonymous article demanding the admission of girls to Welton reflects Active Experimentation, as he applies his belief in intellectual freedom through purposeful action. This scene demonstrates learners' willingness to translate abstract principles into meaningful action despite institutional consequences.
3.	Collective desk-standing finale	The students' decision to stand on their desks reflects Active Experimentation, as they enact Keating's lesson of independent thinking through autonomous action. This scene demonstrates learners' willingness to apply internalized values despite direct institutional pressure and potential consequences.

Table 7 presents three scenes from *Dead Poets Society* identified as manifestations of Active Experimentation (AE) in Kolb's experiential learning cycle (D. A. Kolb, 1984; Peter Weir, 1989). Each scene is presented through a narrative quotation and its data interpretation. The three scenes are: (1) Neil's theatre audition and performance, (2) Charlie's anonymous article in the school newspaper, and (3) the collective desk-standing finale. Together, these scenes illustrate how students apply internalized knowledge through purposeful action, reflecting the defining characteristics of the Active Experimentation stage described by Kolb

The three scenes demonstrate Active Experimentation through the codebook indicators of AE-Application, AE-Risk, and AE-Initiative. Neil's theatre performance reflects AE-Application, as he transfers his internalized beliefs into purposeful action. Charlie's anonymous publication represents AE-Risk, demonstrating his willingness to act on personal convictions despite institutional consequences. The students' collective desk-standing finale illustrates AE-Initiative, as they independently enact Keating's values under direct institutional pressure. These findings are consistent with Kolb's view that learning is completed when conceptual understanding is tested in new situations (D. Kolb, 1984). Kolb and Kolb further argue that effective Active Experimentation depends on the successful completion of the preceding learning stages (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). While previous studies interpret these scenes primarily as acts of resistance against educational authority and as examples of dialogic pedagogy the present study extends these interpretations by demonstrating that they specifically represent AE-Application, AE-Risk, and AE-Initiative, revealing the pedagogical mechanism through which experiential learning is translated into autonomous action (Muro, 2018; Nevil, 2026; Qaniu et al., 2024; Taufiq & Islam, 2022). This interpretation is further supported by Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan (2012) Ryan & Deci (2018), and Moon (2013), who argue

that meaningful learning is evidenced through sustained behavioral change and self-directed action.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Active Experimentation is not simply the final stage of Kolb's experiential learning cycle but the observable manifestation of learning itself, where experiential knowledge, reflective understanding, and conceptual insight converge into autonomous action (D. Kolb, 1984). This extends previous interpretations of *Dead Poets Society* by identifying the pedagogical mechanism through which students' agency is translated into meaningful behavioral change.

Description of Transformative Learning Reflected in Keating's Experiential Learning

Disorienting Dilemma

Building upon the experiential learning findings, this subsection examines how the learning experiences depicted in *Dead Poets Society* reflect transformative learning using Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. The analysis begins with Disorienting Dilemma, represented by the codebook indicator DD-Disorientation, which refers to experiences that unsettle learners' existing assumptions. The selected scene, illustrates this indicator by challenging students' habitual perspectives through direct experience and prompting them to reconsider their existing beliefs. The following figure presents the scene and its interpretation.

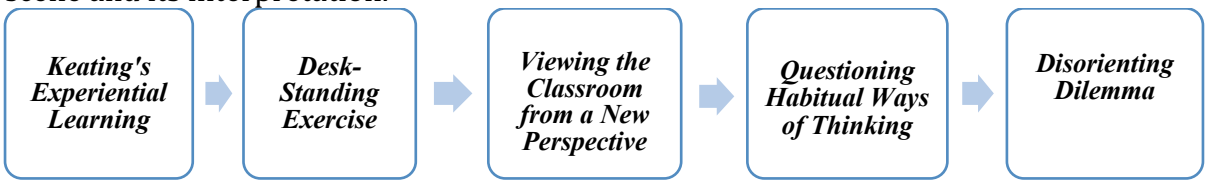


Figure 3. Disorienting Dilemma Mezirow (1997)

Figure 3 presents a scene from *Dead Poets Society* that was coded as Disorienting Dilemma based on Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997; Peter Weir, 1989). Mezirow defines a disorienting dilemma as an experience that challenges learners' existing assumptions and initiates the process of perspective transformation. The selected scene, Keating's "different point of view" desk-standing exercise, illustrates how an experiential learning activity encourages students to reconsider their habitual ways of thinking by viewing familiar situations from a different perspective. This finding suggests that John Keating's experiential learning serves as the catalyst for the emergence of transformative learning.

The finding demonstrates DD-Disorientation, in which the desk-standing activity unsettles students' existing assumptions by exposing them to an unfamiliar perspective through direct experience. This reflects the codebook indicator of DD-Disorientation, referring to an experience that disrupts previously held meaning structures. The finding supports Kolb's view that learning emerges through the transformation of experience and aligns with Mezirow's concept of Disorienting Dilemma as the catalyst for perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1997). Similarly, Cranton & King (2003) and Taylor (2008) argue that transformative learning begins with experiences that challenge habitual assumptions and stimulate critical reflection. While previous studies interpret this scene primarily as resistance to institutional authority or an example of dialogic pedagogy the present study extends these interpretations by demonstrating that the activity operationalizes DD-Disorientation, intentionally initiating the transformative learning process through experiential learning (Muro, 2018; Nevil, 2026; Qaniu et al., 2024).

The findings suggest that John Keating's experiential learning activities initiate transformative learning by creating disorienting dilemmas that challenge students'

existing assumptions. This demonstrates that meaningful learning experiences can become the catalyst for perspective transformation, reflecting the complementary relationship between Kolb's experiential learning cycle and Mezirow's transformative learning theory (D. Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1997).

Critical Self-Reflection

Following the Disorienting Dilemma, the analysis proceeds to Critical Self-Reflection, represented by the codebook indicator CSR-Reflection, which refers to examining one's own beliefs in response to a disruptive experience. Guided by Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, this stage is reflected in scenes where students critically reassess their self-perceptions, social conformity, and personal aspirations following Keating's experiential learning activities. The following table presents the selected scenes and their interpretations.

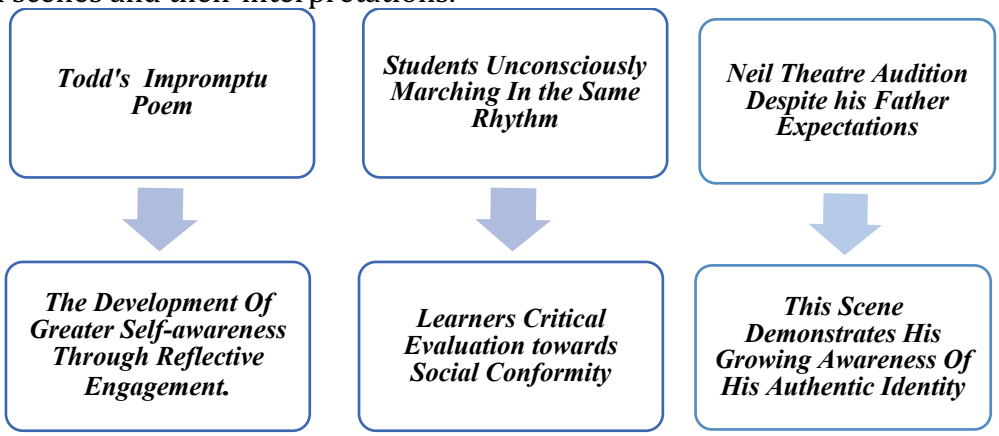


Figure 4. Critical Self-Reflection Mezirow (1997)

Figure 4 presents scenes from *Dead Poets Society* that were coded as Critical Self-Reflection (CSR-Reflection) based on Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997; Peter Weir, 1989). Mezirow explains that critical self-reflection involves examining one's assumptions, beliefs, and perspectives through thoughtful reflection on experiences. The selected scenes, Todd's spontaneous poem, the courtyard marching exercise, and Neil's audition, illustrate how John Keating's experiential learning activities encourage students to question their self-perceptions and social expectations. These experiences allow the students to recognize internal conflicts and reconsider their existing beliefs. This finding suggests that experiential learning facilitates critical self-examination as an essential stage toward perspective transformation.

The findings demonstrate the codebook indicator CSR-Reflection, in which learners critically examine their beliefs, identities, and responses to social expectations following disruptive experiences. Todd's spontaneous poem, the courtyard marching exercise, and Neil's audition each represent CSR-Reflection by prompting students to reassess their self-perceptions and personal values. These findings align with Mezirow, (1997) view that critical self-reflection enables learners to question previously unquestioned assumptions and with Kolb's (1984) argument that learning develops through reflection on experience. Similarly, Brookfield (2017) argues that critical reflection requires examining deeply held assumptions, while Cranton & King (2003) emphasize its role in reconstructing personal meaning. Although previous studies primarily interpret these scenes as expressions of resistance and dialogic pedagogy the present study extends these interpretations by demonstrating that they specifically operationalize CSR-Reflection, revealing how Keating's experiential learning prepares students for perspective transformation (Muro, 2018; Nevil, 2026; Qaniu et al., 2024).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that experiential learning in *Dead Poets Society* extends beyond active participation by fostering critical self-reflection. Through Keating's meaningful learning experiences students critically re-evaluate their beliefs and identities, illustrating how experiential learning facilitates the transformative learning process (D. Kolb, 1984).

Perspective Transformation

The analysis concludes with Perspective Transformation, represented by the codebook indicator PT-Transformation, which refers to a durable shift in learners' identity, values, and patterns of action following critical reflection. Guided by Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, the selected scenes illustrate how John Keating's experiential learning enables students to reconstruct their perspectives and translate their redefined beliefs into meaningful actions. The following table presents the selected scenes and their interpretations.

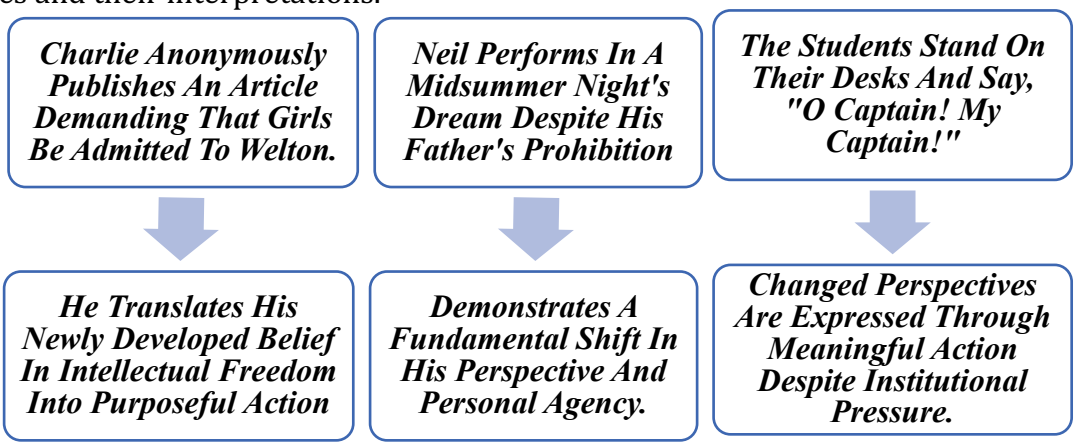


Figure 5. Perspective Transformation Based on Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory

Figure 5 presents scenes from *Dead Poets Society* that were coded as Perspective Transformation (PT-Transformation) based on Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997; Peter Weir, 1989). Mezirow explains that perspective transformation involves a fundamental change in individuals' beliefs, assumptions, and ways of interpreting their experiences. The selected scenes, Charlie's anonymous article, "Oh Captain, My Captain" collective desk scene and Neil's performance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, illustrate how experiential learning enables students to develop new understandings of themselves and their values. Charlie's rejection of conformity and Neil's pursuit of acting despite external expectations demonstrate the reconstruction of their perspectives. This finding suggests that John Keating's experiential learning activities contribute to students' transformation by encouraging them to act based on their newly developed perspectives.

The findings demonstrate the codebook indicator PT-Transformation, referring to a durable shift in learners' identity, values, and patterns of action following critical reflection. Charlie's anonymous article, the collective desk-standing scene with the declaration "O Captain! My Captain!", and Neil's performance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* each represent PT-Transformation by showing students acting upon reconstructed beliefs rather than conforming to institutional expectations. Charlie redefines his understanding of authority and responsibility, while Neil reconstructs his identity and aspirations through purposeful action. These findings align with Mezirow's view that perspective transformation involves changes in learners' frames of reference through the reinterpretation of experience (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Likewise, Kegan argues that transformative learning reshapes how individuals understand themselves and the world (Kegan, 2009). Although previous studies primarily interpret these scenes

as expressions of freedom, self-expression, and resistance to institutional authority the present study extends these interpretations by demonstrating that they specifically operationalize PT-Transformation, revealing how Keating's experiential learning facilitates enduring changes in students' beliefs, identities, and actions (Qaniu et al., 2024; Taufiq & Islam, 2022).

Overall, the findings indicate that PT-Transformation represents the culmination of experiential learning in *Dead Poets Society*. Charlie's anonymous article, Neil's performance, and the collective desk-standing scene demonstrate that Keating's experiential learning enables students to reconstruct their beliefs and translate transformed values into purposeful action, reflecting the ultimate outcome of Mezirow's transformative learning process.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Dead Poets Society* presents a coherent representation of Kolb's experiential learning cycle through John Keating's pedagogical practices. The findings show that student progress through the four interconnected stages of Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation, indicating that learning in the film develops as a continuous process rather than through isolated classroom activities. Keating's teaching consistently encourages students to engage directly with meaningful experiences, critically reflect on those experiences, construct new conceptual understandings, and ultimately apply those understandings through autonomous action. By identifying this complete experiential learning sequence, the study extends previous interpretations of *Dead Poets Society*, which have largely emphasized themes of nonconformity and institutional resistance, by revealing the pedagogical mechanisms that underpin students' intellectual growth and personal agency.

Beyond illustrating experiential learning, the findings further demonstrate that Keating's pedagogy reflects the qualities of transformative learning proposed by Mezirow. The experiential activities portrayed in the film create disorienting dilemmas that challenge students' existing assumptions, encourage critical self-reflection, and ultimately lead to perspective transformation expressed through meaningful action. This progression suggests that experiential learning serves not merely as an instructional approach but also as a catalyst for lasting changes in learners' beliefs, identities, and behaviors. The integration of Kolb's experiential learning cycle with Mezirow's transformative learning theory therefore provides a comprehensive explanation of how learning experiences in *Dead Poets Society* evolve into transformative educational outcomes. In doing so, this study contributes to the literature by bridging the two theoretical frameworks and demonstrating the value of cinematic narratives as rich pedagogical texts for understanding student-centered and transformative education.

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