



Teaching Entrepreneurial Mindset: Lessons from *Dead Poets Society*

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Abstract. Film captures the complexity of issues, of possibilities and of interactions among diverse people. It can be very effective in the classroom because it draws students into the situation and provides them with an engaging opportunity to grapple with concepts and theories. Building off of the work of van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003), we describe how *Dead Poets Society*, a non-business film, can be used with entrepreneurship students to facilitate a discussion on entrepreneurial thinking and behavior – the entrepreneurial mindset. We highlight eight lessons for entrepreneurs that emerge from viewing a series of film clips. Alternative pedagogical uses for the film are also discussed.

Keywords: pedagogy, film, movie, entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial behavior.

1. Introduction

Multi-talented Robin Williams delivers a brilliant performance in one of Hollywood's most compelling and thought-provoking motion pictures. Williams portrays passionate English professor John Keating, who, in an age of crew cuts, sport coats and cheerless conformity, inspires his students to live life to the fullest, exclaiming... "Carpe Diem, lads! Seize the day. Make your lives extraordinary!" The charismatic teacher's emotionally charged challenge is met by his students with irrepressible enthusiasm – changing their lives forever.

(Dead Poets Society Promotion, Touchstone Pictures)

How entrepreneurship educators teach should mirror *what* they teach; thus process and content collide to create a unique, perhaps entrepreneurial, classroom environment. The entrepreneurship classroom represents a culture of creativity, imagination, calculated risk taking, opportunity identification, rigorous analysis, spirited debate, and thoughtful planning. Above all an entrepreneurship classroom demands a teaching perspective that avows diversity in delivery methods through creative and innovative approaches to give students multiple lenses in which to

view the world. It is the breadth and depth of experiences that qualify entrepreneurs to identify opportunities in the environment that others do not or can not see (Fiet, 2001a, 2001b; Nixon, Bishop, Clouse, & Kemelgor, 2006).

While the body of knowledge related to entrepreneurship as a scholarly field seeking to inform practice continues to grow and flourish, our knowledge related to entrepreneurship education is limited – at least from a publishing perspective. However, started in 2002, the International Journal of Entrepreneurship Education (IJEE), has published a significant number of articles related specifically to entrepreneurship education. Articles have informed us of the state of entrepreneurship education (Solomon, Duffy, & Tarabishy, 2002) overarching teaching frameworks (Alberti, Sciascia & Poli, 2005), and specific cultural perspectives (Koch, 2003; Pittaway & Hannon, 2006). The IJEE has been a leader in publishing interesting entrepreneurship teaching cases (c.f. Laffey, 2005; Warren & Stephens, 2003; DeMartino, 2003; Pansing, Hagan, Cockrum, & Osborne 2004).

Moreover, filling a great gap in the literature, some authors have expanded our teaching repertoire and toolbox to help increase our innovativeness and effectiveness as educators in a unique business discipline. For example, Verduyn & Jansen (2005) use entrepreneurial biographies to facilitate building the entrepreneurial thinking skills of students. Kent & Anderson (2003) call for concepts related to social capital and social entrepreneurship to be added to curricula. Lerner (2003) opens up his venture capital course to a greater public. Nixon et al., (2006) use Fiet's (2002) notion of systematic search and discovery to create a powerful pedagogy to help students identify venture ideas. But it is van Gelderen & Verduyn's (2003) article on the use of feature films in entrepreneurship education that most aligns with the contribution of this paper. While van Gelderen & Verduyn used a series of films to illustrate entrepreneurial activities, we use one non-business film to help students understand the role and importance of an entrepreneurial mindset.

The use of film provides a rich backdrop from which to view the world of entrepreneurship allowing the student to be analytical and introspective – both of which are important in an entrepreneurship classroom where a career path in entrepreneurship often blurs the professional and personal sides of life. As a result, the more we can show the entrepreneurial mindset through non-business examples, students can see the pervasive nature of entrepreneurial thinking and the challenges related to separating life path and career path. More traditional pedagogies, such as case studies, cannot adequately portray this complex and real challenge in such an intense and vivid way as can film. This paper describes how on one particular movie, *Dead Poets Society*, can be used in entrepreneurship courses to illustrate and facilitate a discussion on entrepreneurial thinking and behavior – the entrepreneurial mindset.

We begin with a brief discussion of various perspectives on teaching entrepreneurship and then the use of film as a pedagogical tool. After a summary of the film *Dead Poets Society*, we describe how eight lessons for entrepreneurs

can be taught using the film as part of coursework. Concluding we provide some advice for alternative uses of the film in the classroom.

2. The “Entrepreneur” in Entrepreneurship Education

We and others (e.g., Gartner, 1989; Timmons, 1994) posit that teaching entrepreneurship should focus on what the entrepreneur does rather than who the entrepreneur is. From the inception of the field in the 1960s, much research has been conducted on the traits of entrepreneurs (e.g., DeCarlo & Lyons, 1979; McClelland & Winter, 1969; Miner, 1996). The trait approach, however, produced a set of characteristics that did not distinguish entrepreneurs from other populations. Later, Gartner (1989) argued that behavioral approaches provided a stronger foundation to the study of entrepreneurship. The behavioral approach views the organization as the primary level of analysis, but it is the individual entrepreneur that participates in a series of activities to create a new venture. Even from an economic perspective it is the individual entrepreneur (or entrepreneurial team) that is the creative destroyer moving markets into disequilibrium (Schumpeter, 1934) or the individual(s) finding inefficiencies in markets yielding commercial opportunities (Kirzner, 1973). Penrose (1959) further explained that entrepreneurs create their own productive opportunity – all of the productive possibilities an entrepreneur can see and take advantage of. The productive opportunity of a firm can be seen as both objective and subjective. While the objective productive opportunity is limited by what the firm is able to achieve, the subjective opportunity is limited only by the imagination of the founders (Penrose, 1959).

Whether one approaches entrepreneurship from a trait, behavioral, or economic perspective the entrepreneur takes center stage. As a result, entrepreneurship education has followed suit with a focus on building the entrepreneurial competencies of individuals (Fiet, 2001a). Alberti, Sciascia, and Poli (2005) identified eight objectives of entrepreneurship education, which we feel can be parsimoniously categorized as objectives relating to (1) competency building, (2) operating in entrepreneurial environments, and (3) understanding the entrepreneur role and mindset. Each grouping cites the importance of the individual with respect to the skills, actions, and cognitions respectively.

The focus on the individual entrepreneur in an academic setting tends to make students feel like they have to fit into a preset mold. The stereotypical view of entrepreneur as hero, risk-taker, adventurer, iconoclast, or maverick can be intimidating to those students that have a desire to study entrepreneurship but fear unable to look or act the part. Given the diversity of students enrolling in entrepreneurship classes across business and non-business disciplines, entrepreneurship education should first emphasize and unleash mindset, which of course should be followed by skill building and action. But it is the mindset that is a necessary antecedent of action. Therefore this paper focuses on the use of

film to help students understand and begin to cultivate their own entrepreneurial mindset. Before we discuss the specifics of *Dead Poets Society* and its uses in the classroom, we next address the use of film in an education setting.

3. The Use of Film as a Pedagogical Tool

Use of film is an effective pedagogical method for motivating students and stimulating their imagination. Film is multifaceted, presenting a variety of characters with different beliefs and desires and behaviors. In conjunction with standard texts, cases, and experiential exercises, film provides another medium by which to describe, analyze, illustrate and teach concepts. The benefits of using film in the classroom include increased students' understanding, motivation, and retention.

Advantages of the use of film in the classroom have been detailed and presented in several articles (Gerde, Shepard, & Goldsby, 1996; Kennedy & Lawton, 1992). First, because of the complexity and the intense context of film, students have to take several perspectives into account, not just the bottom-line mentality that so often accompanies a case discussion. Not only are the interests of the organization taken into account, also the interests of the decision-makers and those affected by the decisions. Kennedy and Lawton write: "...our students will see the effects of compassion, ruthlessness, and sensitivity; stories will stimulate their experience..." (1992, p. 190). Second, film can stimulate the moral imagination of students. Film can penetrate deeply and pervasively into the way we think about the needs of others and about our place in the lives of others. Robert Coles, renowned Harvard professor and psychiatrist, writes of the capacity of a play, novel, short story, or film to "...work its way well into one's thinking life, yes, but also one's reveries or idle thoughts, even one's moods and dreams" (Coles, 1989, p. 204). Third, in the chaotic world of entrepreneurship, film may help students see alternative behaviors or options and "to expand their scope of analysis" (Garaventa, 1998, p. 535). Finally, film is often well-received by students; Gerde et al. stated that "Students, employees, managers, and the public can relate to movies because film is an integral part of Western culture" (1996, p. 201).

The integration of business education and film has increased significantly over the last twenty years. Examples of such a marriage of teaching and film include *Management Live: The Video Book* (Marx, Jick, & Frost, 1991), a study in dialogue (McCambridge, 2003), analysis of social institutions (Scherer & Baker, 1999) and the use of film in classrooms as a narrative pedagogical tool (Bumpus, 2005; Gioia & Brass, 1985; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2004; Mallinger & Rossy, 2003). Film has been used to teach key concepts in management, from organizational behavior to leadership and power to business ethics (Baker, 1993; Champoux, 2006; Gerde, Shepard, & Goldsby, 1996; Harrington & Griffin, 1990; Kennedy & Lawton, 1992; Michaelsen & Schultheiss, 1987; Porter & McKibben, 1988; Serey, 1992; Stillman II, 2006).

van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003) introduced the concept of using feature films as a part of entrepreneurship education. The authors discussed how seven different films (*The Van*, *Rent-a-Friend*, *Big Night*, *Tucker*, *The Associate*, *The Fully Monty*, and *Startup.com*) were used in their “Entrepreneurship in the Cinema” course to illustrate entrepreneurial activities such as introducing a new product to the market, starting a new company, saving a failing company, and working in a family enterprise. Through illustrating these activities in film, van Gelderen and Verduyn were able to enrich the class discussion and encourage self-assessment. Not only could students visualize entrepreneurial action but they also experienced “emotions, social interactions, and moral dilemmas experienced by the main character” (p. 587). The authors give a thorough description of these films, the entrepreneurial components, and associated assignments used in the course. However, in choosing the seven movies among thousands, van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003) purposely excluded films that were *not* directly related to business and stated: “Movies depicting an entrepreneurial spirit (risk-taking, innovative, proactive behavior) without direct reference to starting or running a business were excluded (e.g. *October Sky*, *Dead Poets Society*)” (p. 588). Building off of the work of van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003), we fill a gap in the film as entrepreneurship pedagogy literature by describing how *Dead Poets Society*, a non-business film, can be used to help teach and unleash the entrepreneurial mindset of students.

We next provide a brief summary of the film *Dead Poets Society* followed by a more detailed discussions of the eight lessons for entrepreneurs. These lessons are not exhaustive – indeed the elements of the film provide a rich environment for a multitude of discussion paths. Yet we focus on one particular path – a discussion of the entrepreneurial mindset.

4. *Dead Poets Society*: An Overview

Cross and Mitchell (1995) summarize the powerful characterization of the film: “The entire film is a mirror constantly reflecting character motivation. All the main characters are well developed, displaying several personality traits, some of which may contradict each other” (p. 84-85). The film’s protagonist is Mr. Keating, a newly hired teacher at Wellton, an all-male college preparatory high school where Keating himself graduated many years prior. As a teacher Keating challenges the school structure known for its tradition and academic rigor. The boys are expected to become professionals and lead the life their parents directed. Conformity, caution and unchanging tradition are emphasized. Keating attempts to use the medium of an English class to facilitate not only the boys’ knowledge of poetry but also the self-directional skills necessary to succeed in life (Neck & Manz, 1996). As one may expect, Keating’s ideology was dissimilar than those of the faculty, which caused friction but also heavily influenced the boys’ thinking and behavior.

A particular group of boys impacted the most by the teachings of Keating, but who felt stifled by the rigid teachings and ideals of the school, recreated the Dead Poets Society, a society once led by Keating when he was a student at Wellton. These boys ultimately found their souls and passions when they immersed themselves in the words *carpe diem*, seize the day. These words became action, and for these boys, their lives were forever changed.

With some imagination many entrepreneurial lessons can be found in *Dead Poets Society*, but we highlight eight specific lessons that can emerge through an engaging discussion using specific clips from the film. Many behavioral attributes of entrepreneurs (c.f. Ryles 1963; Bird 1989) can be seen in these lessons – creativity, innovation, flexibility, autonomy, self-direction, and self-expression. In combination with academic texts, case studies, experiential exercises, and other pedagogy, *Dead Poets Society* can explicate entrepreneurial concepts particularly as they relate to the “fuzzy” concept of entrepreneurial mindset. Next, we discuss the eight lessons for entrepreneurs (see Table 1) and how these are derived from the film.

Table 1. Dead Poets Society’s Eight Lessons for Entrepreneurs

1	Conformity stifles creativity.
2	Don’t follow the leader.
3	Find your passion and bring it to life.
4	Make your life extraordinary.
5	Creativity can be unleashed – we all have it.
6	Looking at situations from different perspectives will allow you to see what others do not.
7	Carpe Diem (Seize the day).
8	There is a time for daring and a time for caution. The entrepreneur knows the difference.

5. Eight Lessons for Entrepreneurs

The eight lesson format is designed for using a series of six clips of varying lengths during one 90 minute class session. Table 2 identifies these clips by giving a scene description in addition to clip length, discussion remarks, and corresponding entrepreneurial lesson(s) as numbered in table 1. The lessons discussed below should be the output of a class discussion. The instructor’s role is to guide the student discussion in such a way that the students ultimately derive these lessons on their own. The eight lessons presented in table 1 are to be used as a summation at the end of the film if used in the way presented in Table 2. The explanation of each lesson that follows here represents possible areas of discussion. Though the lessons remain consistent evidence of each lesson may vary depending on the type of student involved in the discussion or clips used in the class. Our insights are based on actual classroom discussions when using the

clips in a general entrepreneurship course. It was not our intent to derive or support each lesson using the academic literatures; we simply wanted to encourage dialogue around the entrepreneurship mindset at the beginning of the course and give students the opportunity to think about entrepreneurship from a non-business, personal perspective. Furthermore, we acknowledge that there are alternative uses for the film and we discuss these in a later section; however, we focus now on the eight lesson format.

Table 2: Scene Descriptions for the Eight-Lesson Format

Clip #	Clip Description	Approximate Clip Length	Corresponding Entrepreneurial Lesson	Remarks and Possible Discussion Questions
1	At the end of the opening credits as the headmaster addresses the audience "Ladies & Gentlemen" until the scene of the first bells of the semester and the flock of geese.	7 minutes	Lesson 1	Clip sets the stage and tone of the movie. Conformity, tradition, and lack of creativity are evident. Opening discussion questions: Describe what you are seeing in this clip? Does what you see inhibit or enable entrepreneurial thinking? Why?
2	From the opening bells of the semester and geese flying (previous clip end) through Keating's first class and ending with the students walking out of the classroom discussing Keating's class	7 minutes	Lessons 3, 4, 7	Clip introduces many issues but the emphasis should be on creativity, passion, creating a life of impact, and "carpe diem." Discussion questions: Is Keating an entrepreneur? What behaviors indicate that he is (or is not) an entrepreneur? What do you think Keating is thinking?
3	Keating's classes when he has students stand on top of his desk and then proceed to jump off.	2 minutes	Lesson 6	Clip begins to show how Keating is encouraging his students to view situations from a different perspective and keep their eyes open for new opportunities. Discussion questions: How does this scene relate to entrepreneurship? How can you begin to see the world from a different perspective?
4	Students are reciting their original poems in class. Todd did not complete the assignment but Keating helps him create an improvisational poem.	4 minutes	Lessons 4, 5	Clip emphasizes how creativity can be unleashed and that fear is the primary factor limiting our ability to be creative. Every human has the ability to be creative in their own unique ways; this uniqueness can be the source of new ideas. Discussion questions: How would you describe Todd before and after the poem? Can we learn anything about creativity from this clip? What role does creativity play in entrepreneurship?
5	From the scene of Keating's class when they are in the courtyard walking in a circle through the scene where Todd throws his desk set off the roof.	4 minutes	Lessons 1, 2, 3, 6	Clips emphasizes that it's human nature to follow the leader and that many times we don't even realize we're following. Positive things often result from stepping away from the pack. Discussion questions: How does this clip relate to entrepreneurship? Does an entrepreneur always need to lead? Why or why not?
6	From the scene where Dalton receives a phone call from God during an assembly through the scene where Keating reminds the students that there are times for caution. (Note: The scene in the middle of the clip on punishment may be excluded.)	6 minutes	Lessons 2, 8	Clip shows a turning point in the film when the boys may have gone a little too far. Tradition and conformity seem to be winning. Not all entrepreneurial attempts are successful but the learning from the attempt can be powerful. By this point in the class the students recognize the line of inquiry and the directed nature of the instructor's questions. As a result, simply ask: What do you think?

Lesson 1: Conformity stifles creativity.

Life at Wellton revolved around the four pillars of tradition, honor, discipline, and excellence. Though philosophically admirable, these pillars, when bounded by conformity in thought, teaching, and action, can tend to limit growth and stifle creativity. For example, the Greek language was taught by repetition rather than by application (clip 1). Additionally, prior to Keating's arrival poetry was taught by understanding the beat or pentameter rather than understanding what is felt by the poet when such words are written. Students living in Wellton's structured environment knew only one way, and success at Wellton became a direct path to Yale or Harvard. Tradition in school and family dictated a student's fate without any regard to that individual's talent, skill, or passion.

The Wellton environment is characteristic of many large corporations where policy and process dictate behavior and action. The environment is safe and protected where conformity is encouraged for political purposes, risk is discouraged for unknown designs, and creativity is often inhibited by a traditional culture. The entrepreneur challenges this type of environment and creates a venture grounded in new thinking, creativity, and a drive to achieve beyond the expectations of the norm. Sexton and Bowman (1996) found that conformity was negatively related to entrepreneurs. Ryle (1963) and Raven (1983) also support the view that successful entrepreneurs resist conformity and embrace change to allow for innovation and opportunities others may not see. As a result entrepreneurs are more likely to have high individualism (McGrath, MacMillan, & Scheinberg, 1992) while also understanding associated risks.

The opening scenes of *Dead Poets Society* emphasize conformity, from the flock of geese flying in formation to the uniformity of the students as they move to the chapel and recite the ideals of Wellton (clip 1). There is no room for creativity; indeed, the institutional culture promotes conformity and obedience of the rules as a way to maintain control of the student body, minimize uncertainty, and produce good citizens that conform to society's standards. Keating, as an example for the students, is expected to conform to the time-honored tradition of recitation and conservative standards of conduct in the classroom. Instead, Keating has the students rip out the Introduction of their poetry text (clip 1), stand on the desk to recite poetry (clip 3), and other kinesthetic ways of learning (clip 5) – these methods of teaching are unheard of at Wellton. Keating shows his class through his teaching style that remaining in a predetermined comfort zone may stifle or prevent creative thought and expression.

Lesson 2: Don't follow the leader.

Conformity not only limits creativity, but it also creates a group of followers. The courtyard scene of the students walking is a prime example of individuals

following a leader only to conform. When instructed to walk around the courtyard, the students walked in unison and in a circle (clip 5). At first, the boys felt following was the easiest path or that following was the expected norm. Following was a defense mechanism resulting from the fear of “stepping out of the box.” Then each student was told to walk his own way and along his own path. The students tried to find their own gait and course, trying not to follow the leader. Dalton, one of the students, took these first two lessons to heart and chose not to walk at all. In always following the leader, an individual does not know or even reach his or her full potential; the unknown abilities and self are not brought to fruition.

It is evident that entrepreneurs do not always follow the leader. Entrepreneurs step out of the box and embark on a different path and journey. Some leave out of survival (corporate restructuring, layoff) while others leave to foster their individual potential (the desire to be an entrepreneur). Whatever the reason, entrepreneurs bring the words of Robert Frost (as quoted in the film) to life. “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all of the difference.” Entrepreneurs tend to prefer working alone versus working with or for others, and they tend to prefer having no hierarchy (Lau & Chan, 1994). Autonomy and self-achievement are also important attributes of entrepreneurs (Donaldson, 1985; Sexton and Bowman, 1986; Smith & Miner, 1984).

Throughout the film, Keating and some of the students choose not to follow the leaders. Realistically, some of the students also choose to follow the leader and to conform, and the film addresses both the positive aspects of ‘breaking out of the mold’ and the negative aspects of risk taking (examples ranged from the threat of expulsion to a teenage suicide).

Lesson 3: Find your passion and bring it to life.

The first day of class, Keating takes the boys to the ‘Hall of Fame’ where pictures of previous classes and their achievements are displayed (clip 2). He asks that they look at these alumni and see the person, who, just like they do, have hopes and fears and passions. What is their passion, he asks. What will make their life worthwhile? Writing their own poems is a start at self-awareness and their own passions (clip 4). The secret meetings of the Dead Poets Society are also an expression of what the boys are interested in – they are trying to find out who they are outside the context of the institutions of school and family.

In the face of challenge, what do you do? Individuals that fly rather than fight in times of confrontation are indifferent. Conversely, individuals that push ideas to the limit and fight to hold their ground are passionate about what they do. For example, Neil Perry (a student) asked Mr. Keating why he tolerated Wellton. Mr. Keating’s response was, “I love teaching.” At the other extreme, an individual

may find his passion, but finds it cannot be acted upon. In the case of Neil Perry, acting became his passion that was prohibited by his father. The result was suicide. Passion must be brought to life. If you kill the passion, you may kill the person behind the passion.

Entrepreneurs are passionate about what they do. As a result, new venture creation and growth is a lifestyle. Profit is very rarely the motive; rather, an entrepreneur's passion can be found in a product, a service, or the drive and challenge to do something new and different. Confidence and motivation are tied to the entrepreneur's passion. Garavan and O'Kinneide (1994) allude to this passion when they entreat the entrepreneur to know the "deeper aspects of self, emotions and values" as well as "encouraging the use of feelings, attitudes, and values outside of information."

The concept of passion permeates entrepreneurship and most students, especially undergraduates, have difficulty understanding and/or finding their passion. Even the courtyard scene (clip 5) where students are encouraged to walk in their own unique way represents the beginning of Mr. Keating helping students to think about their unique way of being and knowing. As such entrepreneurship is an introspective process and a classroom should encourage self-reflection in search of passion.

Lesson 4: Make your life extraordinary.

Keating seems to make a direct correlation between passion and life impact (clips 2 and 4). He states (clip 2), "Life is a powerful play and you may contribute a verse. What will your verse be?" All individuals have a part in life's play; furthermore, each person has complete control over his part size. During the scene where students must recite their original programs (clip 4) one student sarcastically delivers a poem about a cat sitting on a hat. After a roar of laughter from the class, Keating quickly retorts that there is nothing wrong with simplicity as long as it is not ordinary.

Each individual has a unique knowledge base that can be used to identify opportunities that others cannot or do not recognize (Fiet, 2002). Keating would likely argue that we must help our students identify and understand this unique knowledge pool in order to guide students along their extraordinary path.

Lesson 5: Creativity can be unleashed – we all have it.

Student creativity is unleashed initially by Mr. Keating when he assigns students to create and read aloud a piece of original poetry (clip 4). Perhaps one of the more dramatic scenes, Mr. Keating asks Todd Andersen to read his poem aloud; however, Todd did not complete the assignment mostly due to his low self-

confidence and fear of embarrassment in front of his peers. As a result Todd could not free himself to be creative. The creativity was there waiting only to be unleashed by Mr. Keating.

Fear is often cited as the primary emotional roadblock to creativity (Gurteen, 1998; Michalko, 1991; Hall, 2001) and creativity is central to entrepreneurship. Innovativeness and adaptability are problem solving outcomes for entrepreneurs (Begley & Boyd, 1987; Donaldson, 1985; McClelland, 1987; Reilly & DiAngelo, 1987; Schumpeter, 1934). Even a study of British entrepreneurs found that the degree of risk taking and innovation are related to success (Cox & Jennings, 1995). Furthermore self efficacy is considered an enabler of entrepreneurial activity (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994). Self efficacy is the belief in one's capability to do something such as start a new venture (Gist, 1987; Bandura, 1977). Throughout the film it is evident that Keating is encouraging students to face their fears, realize what they are capable of doing and have the confidence to act on their passions.

Lesson 6: Looking at situations from different perspectives will allow you to see what others cannot.

Mr. Keating instructed his students to stand on top of the desk and look around the classroom, and this exercise proved a very valuable lesson in perception (clip 3). Keating's point was that we must constantly look at things in different ways. From an entrepreneurial perspective, a opportunity exists when an individual sees something that others do not. It is at this point that the light goes on and new venture creation begins. Additionally, entrepreneurs are not bounded by corporate, bounded rationality. Rather, they are encouraged, and many times forced, to look at situations or problems and implement creative solutions.

Detecting opportunities that others may not see is characteristic of entrepreneurs. They are able to see situations from a different perspective or adapt to a changing environment (Reilly & DiAngelo, 1987). Lau and Chan (1994) characterize entrepreneurs, in general, as preferring innovation, preferring change, exploiting opportunities, and more likely to take risks and tolerance uncertainty. These elements can lead one to see what others may not; one is not constrained by fear and is more likely to see opportunities. This film encourages students to view situations through a variety of perspectives and to think for themselves.

Lesson 7: *Carpe Diem*.

Lessons 7 may be considered the "capstone" lesson, with Lesson 8 being a caveat. Mr. Keating says, "Don't wait until it's too late to realize your potential. To know

you have lived with meaning, to know who have existed with purpose, and to know you brought life to your passions...then you can say, 'Yes, I seized the day'." Perhaps *carpe diem* is a philosophy of entrepreneurs. Serey (1992) writing on the use of film in management education states, "Carpe diem is not so much about winning the larger prizes in life, as it is about owning up to quiet fears and anxieties" (p. 380). The successful entrepreneur must overcome not only institutional obstacles and societal pressures, but also his or her own individual fears and anxieties. Thus creativity as explored in lesson 6 may be necessary antecedent of this lesson.

Lesson 8: There is a time for daring and a time for caution. The wise entrepreneur knows the difference.

Dalton (a student) pretended to receive a telephone call from God in the presence of the headmaster (clip 6). Afterwards, Mr. Keating approached Dalton and stated, "There is a time for daring and a time for caution; the wise man knows the difference."

This is an important lesson for students of entrepreneurship. Students often believe the myth that entrepreneurs are extreme risk takers that act rather than plan, or do rather than think. On the contrary, entrepreneurs are superior learners that understand the importance of knowledge and timing (Timmons and Spinelli, 2007). Risk is based on perception and an experienced entrepreneur understands how to balance his own risk taking propensity with the external environment that can signal how or when to act (Petrakis, 2005; van Gelderen, Thurik, & Bosma, 2005).

Lesson 8 encourages students to consider the role of experience and acquiring the necessary knowledge base before embarking on an entrepreneurial path. Similarly students can be encouraged to use their existing knowledge based on previous experiences to identify new opportunities (Nixon et al., 2007) but use caution when exploring in completely unknown territories.

6. Alternative Uses of *Dead Poets Society* in the Classroom

The eight lesson format is only one of many ways that *Dead Poets Society* can be used in an entrepreneurship course. The authors of this paper have utilized the film in various manners; all yielding productive results. From informal student feedback the authors have learned that the film's examples have been retained by the student even after the course. Comments during class and afterwards indicate students remember the lessons and can apply the concepts in other situations. Serey (1992) used the film to illustrate general management topics and reported "...one student offered the opinion that the entire film is metaphor for organizations and their role in enforcing the status quo" (p. 379). Perhaps *Dead*

Poets Society is a case study in what entrepreneurial thinking is not as much as what entrepreneurial thinking is. Regardless, students will be impacted by the story. Given the age of the film (1989) the story will be a new story to most undergraduate students and many graduate students. Students will often approach the instructor after class to discuss further the film or to ask for more information about the situation. When students become this active in discussions, both in the classroom and in the hallways, they are certainly applying and learning the concepts for more than just an examination grade. We expand on this by identifying several methods beyond the eight lesson format for incorporating *Dead Poets Society* into an entrepreneurship course.

One method is to assign viewing of the film outside of class (towards the end of the semester) and have the students turn in a written report on how the movie illustrated key entrepreneurial concepts discussed in class during the course (some of the lessons they discover from the movie may be similar to those discussed above). This method allows the student to view the entire film, to contemplate, and to make connections with the material covered in the course. Such an assignment allows for independent assessment of learning and synthesis of course concepts and materials, and encourages students to individually express their reactions to the film and what they are likely to take with them after the course. One drawback of this method is that other students do not necessarily benefit from each other's analyses and insights. This can be attended to by posting ungraded papers online for other students to review. One of the authors has used this technique for small groups to read and discuss each others' papers to see what the differences are in the students' perceptions, consideration, and application of the concepts.

An alternative method is for the instructor to show a portion of the movie during class. For a 75-minute class, we suggest beginning with the first scene after the opening credits when the headmaster says "Ladies and Gentlemen ..." and continuing through to the scene after the phone call from God where Keating tells the boys there is a time for risk and a time for caution. Serey (1992) identified a 50-minute segment if the instructor is limited in time: from the scene near the beginning of the students filing down the staircase for the first day of class to the end of the scene where Keating helps Todd overcome his fears and create a poem. If the class meets again one or two days after the showing, students are better able to recall the film and specific scenes. If they do not meet to discuss it for several days, the recall may not be as vivid, but one way to address the delay is to have the students write out responses to questions about the film in preparation for the next week's discussion. For those courses that use online communication tools, a healthy online discussion can be developed on one or more of the specific seven lessons. One author has used online discussions of film in class by allowing students to view the film on their own and then discuss themes in a discussion board or blog format.

The approach of the instructor to the film can vary from explaining directly what is seen and conveyed in each scene as a lecture style to a more student-interactive discussion drawing out what the students saw and their interpretations. Discussion can be limited to the specific film or students can be asked to identify other examples in news articles of each lesson. This encourages them to synthesize the information and apply it in more than one context. Regardless of method used *Dead Poets Society* is a nontraditional case study of the entrepreneurial mindset.

7. Conclusion

Although there are other popular films that explicitly address entrepreneurs (e.g., *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* and *Baby Boom*), *Dead Poets Society* has a decidedly different plot, but it conveys the mindset so valued in entrepreneurs. Its themes of “conformity versus nonconformity, the power of the imagination, ... and life lived to its fullest” are ones to which our students relate (Cross & Mitchell, 1995, p. 85).

In short, we feel that using film in the classroom can be a powerful teaching tool to illustrate a theory or analyze an issue. Film captures the complexity of issues and possibilities and of the interactions among diverse people. We argue that it can be very effective in the classroom, because it draws the student into the situation and provides students with an engaging opportunity to grapple with concepts and theories in alternative contexts. However, we admit that film is not the perfect vehicle by which to communicate critical thinking (see McLaren & Leonardo, 1998); however, it serves to raise these issues for discussion and exploration in class.

Dead Poets Society is story of passion, challenging the status quo, seizing opportunities, feeling success and experiencing tragedy. The film allows students to analyze ideas and situations from different perspectives and experience the personal journey of entrepreneurship. Finally, the film depicts how challenging the environment to accept new ideas and using these ideas to improve society is not a task for the fainthearted. *Dead Poets Society* is a story of entrepreneurship and quite powerful in the classroom if one agrees that developing the entrepreneurial mindset of our students is a primary objective of entrepreneurship education.

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