

## Micro-Paper 27: *Slam Poetry*

*Raúl Alberto Mora*

Associate Professor, Education and Pedagogy Graduate Programs,  
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Sede Central Medellín | LSLP Chair

### Defining the Term

Slam Poetry is a genre of poetry (highly influenced by urban expressions such as hip-hop and rap) that is closely related to performance or spoken poetry. The first performances took place in bars and clubs in cities such as Chicago and New York during the 1980s. Since the last decade, Slam Poetry gained mainstream notoriety, in part thanks to HBO's TV show *Def Poetry* (produced by Russell Simmons).

One important distinction between Slam Poetry and other forms of poetry is the intensity of topics and the value of the actual performance. The performances in Slam Poetry are deeply emotional, with poets not being afraid to let their true feelings, whether sadness, rage, frustration, or utter happiness transpire. This intensity is a factor that has given Slam Poetry both its distinction from traditional forms of poetry and a niche among today's urban youth.

Topics in slam poems are always linked to personal issues impacting the performers' lives: race, minority status, politics, or sexual orientation, to name a few, have been fixtures among amateur and professional slam poets. Education and writing have also appeared as topics, as in the case of the work of school teacher turned Slam Poet Taylor Mali.

### Connecting it to LSLP

At LSLP, we have explored the use of Slam Poetry for communicative competence enhancement since 2014. We have experimented with the writing and performing of slam poems with our preservice teachers and have shared some of our discoveries in local and international presentations. In our presentations, we have valued how performance has helped our preservice teachers regain a

sense of confidence in the use of English and a sense of enhanced ownership of the second language.

Based on the initial successes, we are currently designing a follow-up study with some of our LSLP teacher-researchers. We intend to take Slam Poetry to high school classrooms to assess (via performances and interviews) the impact of this genre to help young learners develop more appropriation of English and improve their communicative competence.

### Expanding Second Language Research

The potential for Slam Poetry and other forms of spoken word poetry in English language education is enormous. Its interest in performance and an interactive dialog with the audience, the choices of topics, and the freedom to be creative are three areas where Slam Poetry can make a big difference in how we help our students to appropriate second languages.

In addition, since students may choose topics that matter to them, they are able to create texts to perform that are closer to their reality and therefore worry less about pronunciation. Slam Poetry is about ownership, which is what we ultimately want for students to reach regarding their language use.

### References

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