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Finding voice, bearing witness, and speaking truth: Spoken word poetry in Australia

Spoken word poetry offers individuals a real-world, authentic audience for their creative work and encourages them to see how 'identity and cultural politics are central to art' (Jocson, 2011, p. 155). It involves written text, freestyling, rapping, singing, and playing acoustic instruments. International research on spoken word poetry has found that it offers multiple emotional and social benefits, including increased self-confidence and self-efficacy, a sense of belonging and purpose, and the development of literate identities (Fisher, 2007; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2004).

By valuing both local experiences and global perspectives, spoken word poetry slams can create a 'Third Space,' where the formal and informal as well as the official and unofficial spaces of the community intersect. Drawing on sociocultural theories, this ethnographic study investigated spoken word poetry as a practice, a process, and a product. Situated in a linguistically and culturally diverse community in western Sydney, the year-long study examined how spoken word poetry can facilitate intercultural dialogue, support social transformation, and encourage creative expression.