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Kathryn Michalko
St. John Fisher University

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The following study examines the effect of Spoken Word Poetry on the development of voice in writing. For this action research project, data was collected in a variety of ways which entailed observations, interviews, surveys, and authentic work completed by participants. This study reveals that the use of Spoken Word Poetry in the classroom impacts the development of voice in writing. As a result, teachers should incorporate Spoken Word Poetry into their writing curriculum. Spoken Word Poetry is a writing tool that will help students breed confidence and discover their self-identities through the act of performing.

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The Effect of Spoken Word Poetry on the Development of Voice in Writing

By

Kathryn Michalko

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Supervised by

Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences
St. John Fisher College

May 2012
Abstract

The following study examines the effect of Spoken Word Poetry on the development of voice in writing. For this action research project, data was collected in a variety of ways which entailed observations, interviews, surveys, and authentic work completed by the participants. This study reveals that the use of Spoken Word Poetry in the classroom impacts the development of voice in writing. As a result, teachers should incorporate Spoken Word Poetry into their writing curriculum. Spoken Word Poetry is a writing tool that will help students breed confidence and discover their self-identities through the act of performing.
The Effect of Spoken Word Poetry on the Development of Voice in Writing

Students are taught the traits of writing through use of various types of writing such as narrative, expository, creative, descriptive, and persuasive. Spoken Word Poetry (SWP) is a branch of creative writing that uses free verse to express thoughts from a poet’s point of view. Point of view can be characterized as giving a perspective of the writer and interpretation of their voice (Daiute, 1998). Students learn the seven traits of writing (voice, ideas, organization, word choice, sentence fluency conventions and presentation), and when it is appropriate to use primary and secondary discourse in their writing. The teaching of Spoken Word Poetry is important because it addresses students’ critical thinking, democratic engagement, and empowers their voices through verse.

Spoken Word Poetry allows students to weave their primary discourse into their secondary discourse. Children feel as though their voices may not be heard if they aren’t controlling and using their secondary discourse. Rex and Shiller (2009) assert that power is “circulating,” where the movement of energy is transpiring between both the teacher and the students, resulting in a facilitated, ongoing, learning environment. Poetry is seen as a “democratic engagement”, where it serves a political purpose, creating a relationship between “oracy” and writing, literacy and democracy (Kinloch, 2005). Democratic engagement is inspired by poetry and involves students’ participation in code switching, peer performances, and actively taking part in collaborative assignments in which they are able to express their ideas and feelings through oral and written language. Spoken Word Poetry allows children to break free from power struggle and share the power with other classmates and the teacher by creating a socially just classroom environment and a personal empowerment to freely speak their mind. By
establishing this type of classroom environment, students would be able to use both primary and secondary discourses without feeling pressure to stunt their own voice in their writing.

A student’s point of view can be orally expressed through free-verse poetry. It allows the poet to have a personal connection to their writing when using their own life experiences. A poet’s voice appears in Spoken Word Poetry as a result of the choices that must be made to create each line of writing. Aspects of spoken word exploits what type of writer a student will be by allowing the writers to have the option of writing and performing poems that reveal their identity. Word choices and words written on a page, help to reveal whom a student is as a writer.

If exploration into the topic of Spoken Word Poetry does not occur, there will not be an opportunity in writing for students to experience self-identification. Camangian (2008) and Weinstein (2010) investigated the effectiveness of Spoken Word Poetry being used in the classroom. The issues that they have raised are going to be addressed from the question, what effect does Spoken Word Poetry have on the development of voice in student writing, will be answered through the teaching of Spoken Word Poetry.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of Spoken Word Poetry on voice in writing. I collected different forms of data to help convey literacy as a social practice and that the development of voice occurs between student interaction. Through interviews, surveys, observational notes, and graded rubrics, I was able to determine the effect of Spoken Word Poetry on student voice in writing. Prior research shows Spoken Word Poetry actively engages students to explore their identities and their voices through poetic devices. Research also pointed out that the performance aspect of Spoken Word Poetry encouraged self-confidence to prosper and continue to build in students. Therefore, teachers should use Spoken Word Poetry as an instructional tool to impact student voice in writing.
Theoretical Framework

Literacy is a control of our secondary discourse that is a “multifaceted set of social practices” where code breaking, participation with the knowledge of text, social uses of text and analysis of the text are used (Freebody and Luke, 1990). Code breaking is an essential part of literacy and helps to guide literacy development. The process of code breaking entails decoding and encoding language. Code breaking impacts oral language because one must be able to encode and decode what one wants to speak. Gee’s (2002) idea demonstrated that when using primary and secondary discourse, people can identify who they are and have control over acquiring their secondary discourse, without losing their primary discourse. According to Gee (2002), literacy is defined as a control of “secondary uses of language” (p. 23). Discourses are a socially acceptable association among ways of using language and can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or a “social network” (Gee, 2001, p.18). Gee also describes literacy as being acquired by both acquisition and learning. He states that students should be immersed in a structured learning environment in order to acquire literacy. Literacy should be seen as multifaceted and is an evolving cultural and social practice that is acquired by both acquisition and learning.

Oral development, as cited in Freebody and Luke (1990), is the process by which one acquires proficiency with a spoken language. Literacy acquisition occurs in both the oral and written language. Both language systems have sets of rules and structures. Written language helps to build upon oral language, yet does not replicate it. Spoken Word Poetry incorporates oral language into written language, which the poetry must be performed in order for it to be appreciated. Through both of these language systems, Spoken Word Poetry allows for the oral development and the written language to co-exist through the act of writing to perform.
Cultural and linguistic variation plays a large role in literacy acquisition as well. Oral language similarities can be associated with cultural and language variation. Cultural variations occur because children are raised within different communities with different cultures. Different communities create a variation in language and culture, which ultimately impacts the development of literacy acquisition. Language being acquired is impacted due to primary discourse used in a child’s cultural community. Poetry molds cultural variation into written form through the use of poetic devices to reveal language and cultural differences. Heath (1982) mentions how that the culture children grow up in is a way of taking meaning from the environment surrounding them. The meaning that is drawn from the environment impacts a child’s literacy acquisition and how their oral development and written language evolves.

There are many ideas of literacy acquisition. Relational, functional, and linguistic principles help to guide both oral and written language. Goodman (2001) describes these as the three main principles that help to guide our language system. These principles help a child develop through a process called constructivism. Through constructivism a child has active involvement in understanding how language operates linguistically, socio-culturally, and cognitively. A child’s active involvement in language is prominently used through poetry due to the incorporation of imagery and personal experiences that exist within a primary discourse. The linguistic principle deals with creating meaning in your own environment. The print that children encounter may be difficult to understand, so children use cues around them to help make meaning, which affects the development of their language acquisition. Children will begin to use invented spelling, punctuation, and spacing and directionality. As language acquisition continues to develop, children will be able to learn and perform in different areas of literacy, such as poetry. Relational, functional, and linguistic principles are major features to written language.
Each one of these principles will impact the way poetry will be crafted. While acquiring these skills, children begin to learn the fundamentals of language and it aids the development of literacy and the impact of knowledge has on acquiring literacy in multiple functions in different areas of literacy.

Literacy is crafted from the theoretical framework of socio-cultural theory. Socio-cultural theory is based upon how literacy is acquired through our social interactions within our primary and secondary discourse environments. Socio-cultural theory states that higher order learning and functions develop out of social interactions. Literacy instruction should be socio-cultural because literacy is acquired through our social interactions. Social interactions help to create a more diverse socio-cultural society where children should be given opportunities within the classroom and the community to use their primary discourse as an outlet for expression. Spoken Word Poetry can be highlighted as a socio-cultural environment due to the call for identity to be revealed through the art of poetic form and performance. Larson and Marsh (2005) found that the use of our primary and secondary discourses creates social interaction; to which people encounter vast differences that includes one’s language and dialect.

Socio-cultural theory brings up the idea of social constructivism within the classroom. Social constructivism instills the idea of social justice being used within a classroom environment (Rex and Shiller, 2009). The social justice within our school systems have revealed that children could feel as though their voices may not be heard if they aren’t controlling and using their secondary discourse. Poetry gives children a chance to break free from a power struggle and share the power with classmates and the teacher by creating a socially just classroom environment. Children who come to school with little knowledge of secondary discourse can create a barrier into literacy acquisition. Teachers, who find a way for students to
use their primary discourse while still being expected to use their secondary discourse in their writing, allow students to use their primary discourse as to create a voice in their writing.

According to Rex and Shiller (2009) “interdiscursivity” have discourses that “intersect, overlap, and intertwine” (p.28). Socio-cultural theory encourages students to explore critical thinking and political purpose of developing democratized forms of classroom engagements. Spoken Word Poetry is one way that students can find a unifying voice to project their inner emotions. According to Goodman (2002), oral language is used to express concepts and life experiences of children may have across a variety of concepts. The experiences and interactions of children influence their attitudes and beliefs about literacy and how literacy functions in their daily lives. Heath (1982) describes how the culture children grow up in affects how they take meaning from the environment surrounding them, and each community has “literacies” that surround them. Students are able to use their vernacular dialect to convey critical thinking about issues that are prevalent in today’s world through Spoken Word Poetry.

Critical literacy is a branch of socio-cultural literacy where literacy is used to analyze the social world and connect reading the written word to the world. It allows people to use language to exercise power and question practices of critical issues. True critical literacy should allow students to read a variety of texts on critical issues and then have meaningful discussions on those issues. It also allows students to question, debate, and form their own opinions on critical issues. Students are able to take control of their own learning when socially interacting with other students while examining critical issues. Critical literacy helps students to read not just the word but also the world and how authors can position readers to develop our own independent views on critical issues. This type of learning is considered authentic. Poetry gives these students a chance to create a voice in their writing through what they know from their cultural
environment. When children attempt to try and identify their voice within their own writing, they should be encouraged to take from their primary discourse and weave throughout their secondary discourse within their writing.

**Research Question**

Given that voice is an essential writing trait in poetry, this action research project asks, what effect does spoken word poetry have on the development of voice in student writing?

**Literature Review**

The following literature review examines many perspectives on the issue of Spoken Word Poetry aiding the process of voice development in writing. First, I will identify the seven traits of writing and explore the purpose of voice in a student’s writing. Following this further, the concept of voice will be investigated through theoretical perspectives and action based research that acknowledges voice as a lens for the written language. Secondly, I will investigate Spoken Word Poetry as a written literary art form. In addition, research reveals a growth of voice through the use of Spoken Word Poetry. Lastly, the performance aspect of Spoken Word Poetry is thoroughly investigated in response of voice development in writing.

**Seven Traits of Writing**

Manzo (2011) indicated that teachers should instruct students to write in multiple genres, allow time for writing and revising, allow students to write with choice on topics, encourage creativity, and incorporate writing conventions. The 6 +1 traits of writing were established as a foundation of a writing model and as a basis for descriptive criteria to define qualities of good writing. According to Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2004), there are six essential qualities used to define strong writing. These qualities are ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Through the use of 6+1 traits, students learn what to
revise of their own writing to make it purposeful and focused. Incorporating the seven traits of writing into the process of writing will teach students to practice their own process of writing (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006; Manzo, 2011).

In addition, Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2006) conducted an Internet search of the fifty states and found that to some degree 6+1 traits are incorporated into writing standards and are used for state assessments. This research also found that the traits would help students meet the standards for these assessments and that it is an effective tool in developing skills for writing. Fry and Griffin (2010) reported that with the incorporation of the 6+1 traits into the teaching of writing, students’ written work would become more detailed, objective, critical, and supportive. Manzo (2011), Fry and Griffin (2010), and Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2006) researched student scores for writing state assessments through state test scores and the explicit teaching of the traits into writing workshop lessons.

In contrast, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2004) implemented the 6+1 traits as the foundation for a writing assessment model and descriptions of criteria for good writing. James, Abbott, and Greenwood (2001) conducted a study, in which fourth grade students were evaluated on the effectiveness of the instruction of using 6+1 traits to meet the writing standards. Furthermore, Spandel (2008) suggested that these traits of quality writing are not only inherent in text but also to be considered universal and eternal.

**Voice**

The term voice accompanies the concepts that encompass language and literacy. Writing style, authorship, language register, rhetorical stance, written and spoken prosody, the self in text and discourse, and scores of others provide a foundation and structure of identifying one’s voice in writing (Appleman, Sperling, Freedman & Gilyard, 2011). Students may speak, write, and
read in many voices. Social, cultural, political, and personal perspectives impact these voices, whether they are considered complimentary or conflicting. In developing one’s voice, one must form one's own identity. Appleman, et al. (2011) indicates that identity is connected to voice and self in writing. In addition, Kerr (2006) states how transitioning from the oral mode to the written is more complex for students. The process is not merely mechanical, yet a cognitive process in which speech become more abstract and an explicit mode of writing.

The importance of identity appears in all styles and genres of writing. Identity can explicitly and implicitly help shape a student’s writing (Williams, 2006; Appleman et al., 2011). Similar to Fraser’s (2006) idea that metaphors facilitate creative exploration that can surface writers’ original voices, voice evolves from an identity. Lastly, Lopez (2011) performed action research on a teacher and her classroom in which the teacher would facilitate discussions and from the conversations, students’ voices and experiences become essential to learning and the construction of knowledge. Weinstien (2010) proclaims that youth experience a literary identity by establishing a sense of belonging and feeling connected to others who are composed of differences. The idea that literate identity is shared between youth brings commonality in developing identities together. Literary identity occurs when students are learning the craft of the language and application of elements to poetic writing.

Appleman et al. (2011) and Kerr (2006) both conducted action research in classrooms where the researchers focused on voice in writing. Appleman et al. (2011) looked at how dramatization text helps students to imagine a novel world and become a part of it. By students finding character identity, they will shift and meld perspectives into their own and overall development of self. Through the process of development of self, a child will discover their voice. Kerr (2006) looked at the relationship between speaking and writing in a writing
classroom. This study found that speech from a child provides the basis for the written language and leads to the teaching of written structures and the comprehension of structure and concept of writing. As a student achieves familiarity of the different requirements to writing, one will start to experiment with the different types of voice one uses to express oneself through writing and speech. Voice is a re-interpretation of the language that is used in speech (Kerr, 2006). Following this further, the New York State English Language Arts Learning Standards ask students to use both oral and written language for self-expression. In order to promote this self-expression, teachers must involve students in their own composing processes and discuss these processes (Appleman et al., Gulla, 2007; Kerr 2006).

Gulla (2007) found that teaching writing through poetry helps students to develop a sense of ownership in their own writing. Poetic writing can allow for writing to go through the process of writing development that helps the writer to access both their thoughts and feelings through words. In the development of voice, poems can offer a perspective on the writer’s voice and provide life to the writing. Poetry demands that a reader or a listener respond to the world that the writer has created. Similarly, Kerr (2006) examined two students’ writing in particular, to find how students control their meaning, through the tools of grammar and genre. While looking at one student’s writing, it was discovered that the student drafted a dialogue between two characters and was able to successfully contrast both characters’ identities by the way the student structures the plot and character identities. Both Kerr (2006) and Gulla (2007) found how ownership over one’s writing can help to go through the writing development process and acknowledge the writing tools, such as grammar and genre, to assist in creating one’s identity in writing.
Poetry has been seen as a place where one can find a voice, both literally and metaphorically (Wilson, 2007). Poetry is the story of individual experience (Boudreau, 2009; Gregory 2008; Kinloch, 2005; Wilson, 2007). Poetry allows ability for discovery of one’s voice is in result of poetry allowing to redefine the world while at the same time stand on its own as a highly polished performance that is celebrated for its form and language of the poem (Wilson, 2007). In comparison to Kinloch’s (2005) stance that poetry serves a purpose to attend to, students struggling to master the conventions of Standard American English and academic writing with voice being one of those conventions. In comparison, Gregory (2008) implies that while writing poetry, students try to create an identity for themselves, which contrasts the academic image of poetry. Therefore, a distinctive identity is created and the images of academic standards are stunted.

Wilson (2007) implied that the aim for poetic writing for children is for the child to become independent in their own writing. Both in the choice of their own meaning, and the decisions they may make while writing. The end result was for children to find their own distinct voices. With a writing experience such as poetry, imagination, personal expression and emotional knowing, can assist in children finding their own voices as well as inventing multiple new voices (Fraser, 2006).

Fraser (2006) examined how metaphorical writing in poetry and other styles of writing can impress a concept or idea through a powerful image of expression and also portray the inexpressible. Metaphors take ideas and juxtapose them in unique ways that formulate images in the mind (Fraser, 2006). Creating metaphorical language helps children to convey a sense of feeling or identity within their own writing. As May (2001) explained, “one’s individual and social identities and their complex interconnections are inevitably mediated in and through
language” (p. 132). Metaphorical writing provides a wide range of comprehension of emotions, dreams, fears, and beliefs that a writer identifies with. It encourages exploration of one’s emotions to develop voice that otherwise may be difficult to express ideas from (Fraser, 2006). Through these voices each student discovers that they all have something important to say, in which spoken word poetry enables voices to be heard (Fraser, 2006; Reyes, 2006)

**Spoken Word Poetry**

Spoken Word Poetry can be identified as a form of poetry that gathers oral traditions, call- and - response, home languages, storytelling, and resistance. Spoken Word Poetry is usually heard and performed in front of an audience (Desai and Marsh, 2005). Furthermore, Herndon and Weiss (2001) explain Spoken Word as an expression of a shared language with an audience and create a bond between the audience and the poet through insights to society. Sparks and Grochowski (2002) view Spoken Word Poetry as a language for youth to define themselves and serve as testimonies of their own realities and experiences they live through. Also, it allows youth to not only be critical on shaping their own identities, but by manipulating language and making it customizable to encourage self- expression. In relation to youth spoken word, it falls under the category of a specific Discourse where adolescents can identify with desire and learn how to observe how their peers talk, act, dress, and perform within the set Discourse.

Desai and Marsh (2005) implied that spoken word poetry focused on the world of the poet and other oppressive structures. Gregory (2008) argues that slam poetry is acting as a quiet revolution inside the literary world where it is rising from the foundation of poetry as something controversial and new. It is allowing poets to alter perceptions and applications of poetry and
fuse together the traditional with the spoken word poetry. Lastly, Fisher (2005) points out that the use of spoken word poetry is a strong pedagogical tool for literacy teachers.

Fisher (2005) implies that critical literacy provides a route for teachers to build culturally relevant and socially just pedagogies, specifically refereeing to spoken word poetry. In relation, Lopez (2011) researched a classroom and how the teacher deconstructed and reconstructed their views of different forms of poetry, knowledge that is known or unknown, and understandings of people who are of different racial backgrounds. This study reinforced how critical literacy is a way of understanding and engaging students into a culturally relevant pedagogy. Critical literacy allows spoken word poetry to develop critical voices to be heard and communicate ideas to others (Lopez, 2011). Additionally, Camangian (2008) states that critical writing draws on poetic writing as a process, which documents and names a student’s reading of the world. Developing a critical voice means to have the power to be heard, felt and understood while being able to communicate ideas to effectively impact and challenge audience members. Camangian (2008) found this through using June Jordan’s “Poetry for the People” program, and used the poetry-writing guidelines to help facilitate the students’ writing. These students were able to pay close attention to descriptive verbs, detailed descriptions and the overall consistency of voice that helped strengthen the poetic sound. The students also could identify and reconstruct their voices by speaking up, talking back, and making sense of a socially in-just world. For example, one student mixed Spanish with English into his poem to show the contrast of voices inside his written work (Dyson, 2005). Students were able to listen to the world around them and use voices to construct their own voiced response.

The language and imagery of poetry can help the writer and the reader see the writer’s ideas and experiences that are expressed in written form. The passion and intimacy that poetry
can create allows students to access their thoughts and feelings (Camangian 2008; Gulla, 2007). Gulla (2007) found that the nature of creating poetic image, rhythm, and meter offers opportunity to develop a grasp of language and emotional comprehension.

In another study, Smith (2010) found that while working with her students she found that her students were able to meet the school’s expectations for high-test scores in the field of language arts. Spoken word poetry taught students to analyze text, author and purpose from a more critical lens and poetry also created a safe place for students to express and redefine themselves as individuals (Smith, 2010). This research further indicated that critical literacy methods need to be valued by the educator in order to engage students in poetry performances in which student identities and poetic voices can coexist. Additionally, Grochowski and Sparks (2002) research on the study of two students’, Chinaka and Kass, poetry writing, provided story, history and a critical examination of different working ideological systems. These systems consisted of patriarchy, racism and capitalism. The ideological systems convey that the students are the subjects of their own lives and weave it within their poetry.

The use of performance poetry gave the students the ability to use words and offer critical analysis to peers who are struggling to find their own critical thought to connect to their own lives. Additionally, through Smith’s (2010) study of three different sections of language arts classes, she found that if students believe they have the power to produce knowledge, they would have the ability to critique and evaluate texts effectively. In addition, Smith (2010) found more recently that students suggest that creating and performing this type of literacy allows students to challenge beliefs on literacies and literacy within the academic learning sanction. Through her study of Mrs. Ryan’s classroom, students were valuing both oral and written literacies by understanding how multiple literacies can effectively work together.
In comparison, Desai and Marsh (2005) researched graduate students who used spoken word poetry as a bridge for connecting different theoretical frameworks that are apart of everyday life experiences they went through both in and outside the classroom. These researchers found that the development of student voice is key to the struggle against oppression and is vital in addressing critical literacy topics, such as social inequality and other oppressive structures. Spoken word poetry allows an audience to better understand the issues students are facing, what subjectivities students identify with and how students persevere through it. Furthermore, Camangian (2008) found a pedagogical process towards student self-actualization. This process of self-actualization allows students to critically think, write and voice their subjectivities in correspondence to the worldly issues they are involved in. Gregory (2008) stated that slam poetry could engage youth who may “fall through the gaps of the education system” and benefit from an alternate way of teaching literacy and other subjects that are taught in the classroom (p.72).

While utilizing spoken word poetry as a critical literacy, teachers and students are able to actively engage in discussion that connects their own life experiences to the creation of dialogue and world meaning making (Desai and Marsh, 2005). Ginwright, Noguera, and Cammarota (2006) pointed out that educators have presented a focus on test preparation rather than allowing students the freedom to critically analyze and contribute to their own lives by using a creative output. Critical analysis allows social justice to become incorporate into writing with the use of spoken word poetry. Ciardiello (2010) added how reading and writing poetry is not only a civic responsibility but also a social justice of literacy learning. This type of poetry helps students learn empathy towards other students and provides students to understand social, political, economic, and cultural factors. Using critical literacy leads students to the progression of
making “activist art” (Dewhurst, 2011, p.371). With the knowledge and instruction of spoken word poetry students learn how to use their voices to speak of what they know. Literacy instruction and curricula must be responsive to culture. Teaching students to question ideologies that shape the text they read, write, and discuss will in essence highlight for educators the importance of Spoken Word in providing a critical educative space (Grochowski & Sparks, 2002). In relation, Kinloch (2005) implied that students’ embrace their writing through a critical lens of the power and meaning of words. Through Kinloch’s study, students were able to speak to the significance of how spoken word poetry created an environment that was supportive of imaginative explorations, freedom of idea expression and generation, and the creative writing process.

Darder (2002) presents another perspective on social justice, by stating that empowered students develop an awareness of social realities that shape their lives and learn how to redefine them. This student will develop the skills the critically reflect on one’s own life as well as examine how it connects to others’ lives (Darder, 2002). This act of creating social justice through the use of spoken word poetry will develop critical discussion, reflection, and action surrounding inequality and injustice. In relation, Smith (2010) found that the power of the “I” helps students to identify oneself and through their poetry help to redefine literacy as a form of social power.

Lopez (2011) constructed a conceptual model for deconstruction of the writing process of spoken word poetry. First, students will experience the deconstruction phase. Students will examine the position of the author, their own biases and relationship to their own experiences. Second, students take part in the critique phase, in which there is discussion on the cultural and political world through multiple viewpoints. Third, the collaborative phase takes place. Students
will share ideas and shed ideas tensions from cultural groups and their own experiences. Fourth, students will take part in the action phase. Students develop ideas to put into action by brainstorming ideas on what to write about. Lastly, students will reflect, by thinking about the process and the insights that they have gained (Lopez, 2011). Through this study, students were assessed on poetic literary devices such as imagery, voice, structure, and organization. The results stated that the students passed the unit, and overall grades improved. Additionally, Fisher (2005) used parts of this deconstructing conceptual model through her own action research. When examining one of her student’s poems, Fisher found that her students had the ability to give one another feedback on their poetic writing. When students are able to share their writing and actively listen to give constructive feedback to other poets, helps students to learn and master writing standards as well as identifying who they are as writers (Fisher, 2005). Boudreau (2009) implies that slam poems use rhyme and free verse to create the mood, beat, and meter of choice. It was found that this “Power Writing community” forces student voice and experiences to come out in the open and foster awareness amongst one another (Fisher, 2005, p. 122).

Spoken word poetry allows students to explore how artistic conventions can develop to incorporate the discourses and conventions of the poetry world while offering resolution to social injustice in forming their own identities or voices (Gregory, 2008). However, Spoken Word Poetry can challenge dominant discourses and can create a struggle for power (Desai and Marsh, 2005). Desai and Marsh (2005), state that there are three different types of discourses that are presented in Spoken word poetry. Written, oral, and bodily discourses are all aspects that can be seen as a tool for creating a link between a student’s home, local and academic literacies. Written discourse is utilized while students are writing in their journals or notebooks and oral discourse occurs while students recite and read their poems out loud. The incorporation of bodily
discourse occurs during the performance aspect of Spoken word poetry. The act of using voice, gestures and props accents key ideas that are mapped throughout a poem. Additionally, Kinloch (2005) stated that access to switchable codes, or discourses, helps students to appreciate linguistic variances while they craft thoughts into sentences, poetic lines, short stories, and essays. Gregory (2008) stated that slam poetry (spoken word poetry) teaches students literacy, nurtures creativity, provides a space for self exploration and identification, create and maintain a community, and participate in formal education. She found that poetry could be a way of creating enthusiasm among students into the form of poetry by improving their creativity and literacy levels. Through Gregory’s (2008) research of 44 poets and educators, she was able to study how slam poetry should be viewed as a collection of dynamic social and international processes.

**Performance**

Performance can be identified as a mode of communication that can move poetry from a quiet experience between the reader and the written page to an interactive experience between the actual poet and audience (Boudreau, 2009). Spoken Word Poetry can be defined as a poetry that is written to be performed as opposed to literary, academic or page poetry where the writing is confined to the page. All types of poetry still draw on poetic devices, such as metaphor, imagery, allusion and other poetic terms to enhance the writing (Weinstein, 2010). Spoken Word differentiate in the aspect that it is seen as a physical and vocal text.

Fisher (2004) describes speaking as “natural outgrowth” of reading and writing (p. 292). Performance literacy activates potential to engage students of different backgrounds and identities (Smith, 2010). Performance poetry allows students to perform identities and create their own authorial voices for their audience. Writing and performing poetry are vital for
students in both constructing literate identities and improving their writing skills (Jocson, 2006). Somers- Willet (2003) looks at the written and spoken word as the goal of teaching language arts. The critical perspective is intensified with the performance, rather than just reading the poem (Boudreau, 2009). Smith (2010) describes oral language and presentation of poetry as a social practice where the poetry invites audience participation and other discourses within the classroom. Students do not perform identities out of context but which their surrounding cultures and communities, the way meaning is embedded within culture creates, and how identities are constructed through what is socially acceptable (Smith, 2008, p. 205-206). Gulla (2007) implies that oral poetry is more sophisticated than written poetry. With gestures, expressive tones, and pace, the meaning of words brightens and develops a new sense of meaning.

A poetry slam is considered a movement, a multi-faceted creature, providing multiple meanings to different people. Slam is an oral poetry competition where poets are required to perform their own poetry in front of an audience (Gregory, 2008). In contrast to a slam, Gregory (2008) points out how a poetry slam differs from formal poetry readings. Formal poetry readings indicate that the audience members should remain silent during the poetry reading; only applauding once the performance had clearly come to an end. Any type of theatrical actions or devices, such as gestures or props, should not come into play during a formal poetry reading. The poet tends to read directly off the page and audience members typically are given their own copies to follow along with the oral performance. Although formal poetry readings tend to be common in an academic setting, the emphasis relies more heavily on the written text to be instructed and executed (Gregory, 2008). In contrast, spoken word poetry cannot exist without both the written and oral presentation occurring. In addition, Smith (2008) identifies slam as the
“revival of the oral tradition of poetry” and is about both the written word and the performance (p.208). A poetry slam calls for the poet to perform with emotion and depth.

Both Gregory (2008) and Smith (2008) stated that spoken word poetry does not follow the traditional definition(s) of academic writing. Spoken word poetry allows students to critique transgress and explore the oral heritage of academic writing. Furthermore, Gregory (2008) states that academic poetry is established by a set of conventions that determine the foundation of this form of poetry and allows poets to follow a path where the poems are easier are to produce. Spoken word poetry aids a new set of conventions that created new genres within the dominant literary world. Slam poetry lends itself to artistic conventions, which are based around music and the arts. Compared to Smith’s (2010) point on students writing or performing their own writing in front of the class, students learn that writing is a social act and that speech and writing depend on different oral codes and conventions or literacy.

Performance poetry has been labeled as a dialectical art that emphasizes the communication between the poet and the audience (Smith, 2008). Gregory (2008) also points out slam poetry to have a strong didactic quality when it comes to discourses that surrounds students. Wheeler (2008) and Gregory (2008) state that poetry is a social, dialogic poetic form. A slam encourages audience members to become vocal during the performance by participating in the poem itself with utterances of praise towards words or phrases the poet chooses to use. Poetic words and praise is coined a call-and-response technique (Gregory, 2008). Praise that the audience gives towards the poets are based upon how poets use sound to convey mood and meaning and audience contribution can give oral poetry a different literacy plateau (Boudreau, 2009). Slam poetry is explained as “an emotional punch; the generation of authentic, personal experience laid bare as spoken word poetry. One’s reaction to the experience is communicated
during the performance; the listeners respond to the force of the words and the performance” (Boudreau, 2009, p.4).

The mixture of performance and free-verse poetry generated what is formally known as Spoken Word Poetry or “Slam Poetry.” If SWP is introduced to students in a safe classroom environment, students will begin the process of self-identification and critical thinking. The poetry will help develop student voice in writing. In addition, SWP will engage students in the use of poetic devices and incorporate ideas that are inspired by students’ lives.

**Method**

**Context**

Braves Middle School (pseudonym) is a small, suburban city just outside a larger city in Western New York. The size of the community is approximately populated with 25,000 residents. The median household income is estimated to be around $43,308 when compared to New York’s state average of $46,766, and 38 percent of parents over the age of 25 hold college degrees (Public School Review, 2012). The Braves Central School District is populated with approximately 3,889 students and Braves Middle School containing 904 of those students (School report card, 2010). District wide, 14 percent (544 students) of the student body is eligible for free lunch and 6 percent (235 students) are eligible for reduced-price lunch. The Braves community is made up of a limited ethnic, diverse student body. The student body is made up of approximately 3,638 white, non-Hispanic students. Three percent (100 students) are Black or African American, two percent (71 students) Hispanic or Latino, one percent (49 students) Asian or Native Hawaiian, and one percent (22 students) is identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (School report card, 2010).
District wide, 567 students were enrolled at Braves Central School District as students with disabilities, according to the New York State Special Education profile. 13.3 percent of those students were classified as students to receive special education services. 49.3 percent of Students with disabilities were recorded as spending 80 percent or more of the day in a general education program, while two percent were in separate schools or facilities (Special Education, 2010).

The teacher to student ratio at Braves Middle School is one to twelve with a total of seventy-four classroom teachers (Public School Review, 2010). Average class size ranges from fifteen to twenty-one students, which is relatively lower when compared to state averages. Additionally, five other professional staff makes up the overall count of staff at Braves Middle School and three principals (two assistant) are a part of that professional staff (School report card, 2010).

The community in which action research took place is with a group of seven students during lunch periods and after school sessions. The student ethnicity make up of the group includes four white females, two white males, and one Hispanic female. Six out of the seven students do not receive special services, while the Hispanic student receives language special services for being an English Language Learner.

Participants

Buffy (pseudonym) is a thirteen year old, seventh grade white female. Buffy does not receive any additional services. Buffy scored a three on her ELA state assessment and a four on the Math state assessment. Buffy participates in sports outside of school and enjoys reading and writing. Buffy is outgoing and enjoys spending time with her friends and family.
Willow (pseudonym) is a twelve year old, seventh grade white female. Willow does not receive any additional services. Willow scored a three on the ELA state assessment and a four on the Math state assessment. Willow participates in swimming, track, and basketball at the Braves Middle School. Willow enjoys reading young adult novels and writing short stories. Willow likes to be in front of an audience and enjoys making new friends. She is outgoing and is eager to learn.

Dawn (pseudonym) is a twelve year old, seventh grade white female. Dawn does not receive any additional services. Dawn scored a three on the ELA state assessment and a four on the Math state assessment. Dawn enjoys shopping and hanging out with friends. Dawn likes to do well in school and independently seeks extra help after school to better prepare for state exams. Dawn does not like being in front of crowds. She is always eager to learn and for trying something new.

Any (pseudonym) is a twelve year old, seventh grade white female. Anya does not receive any additional services. Anya scored a three on the ELA state assessment and a four on the Math state assessment. Anya plays soccer in the fall and runs track in the spring. Anya likes making new friends and enjoys helping people. Anya is outgoing and has a passion for learning.

Cordelia (pseudonym) is a fourteen year old, seventh grade, Hispanic female. Cordelia receives AIS (additional instructional services) for English and Math. Cordelia also receives English Language Services with an ELL teacher once a day. Cordelia scored a three on the ELA state assessment and a three on the Math state assessment. Cordelia was adopted from South America. She enjoys playing sports and reading. Cordelia likes to learn and is always eager to meet new people.
Xander (pseudonym) is a twelve year old, seventh grade white male. Xander receives AIS Math and English, along with a reading and math clinic. Xander received a two on the ELA and Math state assessment. Although Xander struggles with English and Math, he enjoys learning about those topics. Xander enjoys listening to music and playing basketball.

Angel (pseudonym) is a twelve year old, seventh grade white male. Angel receives no special services. Angel received a three on the ELA state assessment and a four on the Math state assessment. Angel enjoys performing on stage and being involved in any creative writing activities. Angel is outgoing and is always eager to learn. Angel enjoys reading and has a passion for writing.

**Researcher Stance**

I am the teacher in this action research study. I am a first year English teacher at Braves Middle School and am certified in Childhood Education with Middle School Extension grades first through ninth. I am also certified in Special Education first through sixth grade. My educational background is in childhood English and Special Education. Before becoming a 7th grade English teacher at Braves Middle School, I previously held long term substitute positions within the Braves City School District. Additionally, I am currently a student in the Saint John Fisher College childhood literacy program. I was the active observer in this study because I implemented the instruction and assessments to the group of students (Mills, 2011). As an active participant observer, I ensured to record observations throughout my teaching practices. According to Mills (2011), “We may be so fully immersed in what we are doing that we don’t have time to record our observations in a systematic way during the school day” (Mills, 2011, p. 75). My role as an active researcher incorporates both the active observer and the active participant role in this study (Mills, 2011). My role as an active participant observer entails
being “actively engaged in teaching, teachers observe the outcomes of their teaching” (Mills, 2011, p.75). As the active observe, I recorded the necessary observations of my own instruction. While taking on the role of the active participant, I instructed the different aspects of Spoken Word Poetry and giving pre and post assessments.

**Method**

This action research required multiple forms of data to be collected. First, I conducted interviews with each student to find out their prior knowledge on voice, writing, poetry, and Spoken Word. This interview drove the instruction for teaching about poetry and components of Spoken Word poetry. These observations demonstrated student involvement and participation within the study and overall learning from themselves and their peers. Throughout the course of three weeks, students met during lunch everyday and after school on Mondays and Fridays to participate in the study. The lunch sessions were 30minute sessions while the after school meetings ran for sixty minutes.

Throughout each session, we met as the entire group for the direct instruction of Spoken Word and then broke into one-on-one meetings to further examine each student’s poetry. Throughout the necessary instruction of Spoken Word poetry and the different poetic devices to use within poetry, students participated in whole group poetry writing exercises. Each Friday session, I took one poem that the students have written thus far and score it on a grading rubric created for this study. The focus of the rubric was on the increase of voice in writing.

**Quality and Credibility of Research Validity**

In qualitative research has two systems of measurement that are based upon trustworthiness and understanding (Mills, 2011). In comparison with Guba’s (1981) idea that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are all aspects of “trustworthiness”
in a qualitative inquiry study, Mills (2011) found that each of these four characteristics of trustworthiness must be set in place in order for the research to be considered valid. I have designed my action research to be measured by each of the four characteristics that compose a qualitative inquiry study.

Through triangulation, credibility can be justified. Triangulation “compares a variety of data sources and different methods with one another in order to cross-check data” (Mills, 2011, p. 104). The use of experiential data, enquiry data, and examination data triangulated this study. Interviews were conducted with the students at the beginning of the study to gather data on how much knowledge each student possessed on the topic of Spoken Word Poetry. Surveys were given at the end of the study to gather data on what each student learned. The interviews and surveys over the four and a half week period of the study allowed for prolonged participation at my study site. The copious amount of time was allotted for testing of biases and perception (Mills, 2011). Also, my collection of rubrics and film documenting the progression of each student’s individual growth accounted for triangulation of this study, Peer debriefing and structural coherence helped to ensure that internal conflicts or contradictions will subsist (Mills, 2011).

Transferability is stated as being context bound and not being accessible to generalize for large groups of people (Mills, 2011). Transferability was found throughout this study by detailed descriptions of both the data and context. I went into detail with my data collected, such as the filmed observation of a data collecting session and on the interviews and surveys conducted. I also was descriptive on the rubric being used to mark progression with their poetry writing. Detailed descriptions were taken on both the data and context to allow for recipients to understand the setting for themselves (Mills, 2011).
Dependability refers to the overlapping of data to make it unbiased and to make the study accessible for an “external auditor” to examine the overall process of the study (Mills, 2011). In this study I used triangulation to ensure dependability occurs. The overlapping of methods step, which is similar to triangulation, is important to ensure that if one method is weak than the strength of the other method will compensate for the other (Mills, 2011). Since my data collection used interviews, surveys, video taping observations, and rubrics, I have varying degrees of methods to collect data and ensure that the use of multiple methods will compensate for one weaker method. A graduate student, who has been involved with my study since the beginning of this research action study, conducted an audit trail. The graduate student examined the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Mills, 2011). Lastly, confirmability is the neutrality of the data, which has been collected throughout the study. Through the practice of triangulation and reflexivity will ensure reliable data (Mills, 2011). Data was crossed checked to ensure that data is accurate and that the neutrality and objectivity has been collected (Mills, 2011). Reflexivity will exist by revealing assumptions or biases that I have established throughout the study. Before beginning the study, I revealed any assumptions or biases that I may have so it will not interfere with my interview questions, teaching, and presentation of findings (Mills, 2011).

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of Participants

Upon conducting my study, I asked for informed consent from all seven students’ parents. In a letter, I explained the purpose behind the study and what will be asked of the child involved in the study and how that child would remain anonymous. All parents gave consent for their child to participate in the study. I also acquired written assent from each of the seven
students. I have created pseudonyms for each of the children involved in the study to ensure protection of each individual.

**Data Collection**

As previously stated, I observed how the seven students interact with their own poetry and respond to their peers’ poetry readings through anecdotal notes and video taping each session. Each video session I tape, I recorded any behaviors that I examined from all seven students in their interactions to the poetry and their peers. I videotaped the students during the last session to observe the performance aspect of Spoken Word poetry. I looked at how students interact with their peers while performing their poetry. There was also a voice-recording interview that took place in the first and final session that we meet as a group.

The interviews were conducted individually, in which I asked 10 questions encompassing writing, poetry, and Spoken Word poetry. The topics that will be covered in the interview questions will be on what the students may already know about poetry, voice in writing, spoken word poetry, and performance. I later transcribed what the student orally said aloud and compared the first and final interviews to one another.

During each session where I taught Spoken Word poetry, I made observational notes on student behavior and physical actions towards the poetry. With each instructional session, I changed my teaching instruction depending on how the previous poetry lesson went. I assessed my own teaching from lesson to lesson by student feedback on the areas of instruction they feel less comfortable with. I modified my lesson plan daily to ensure students are getting appropriate instruction of Spoken Word poetry at the pace each student needs.

During the session where I received each student’s first piece of poetry, I used a rubric, based on the 6-+1 traits rubric, to evaluate where they are in the writing process. I focused on
how developed each student’s voice is. I then assessed their poems towards the final session that we met at to compare both rubrics. I was able to look at each scored area on the rubric and notice the difference in score by the numeric value of the rubric. I focused mainly on how much each student increased his or her development of voice in writing.

Data Analysis

Upon collecting all of the data, I organized and scored the 6 +1 traits writing rubric and the Spoken Word Poetry rubric from both the first drafts and the final copies of each poem. After scoring each rubric, I made a chart of students’ scores from the 1st draft and the final copy on an excel spread sheet. Next, I listened to my interviews and transcribed all seven interviews on the computer. After my interviews, I watched my recording of a poetry session to type up field observational notes on the behaviors consisting in the poetry session. Lastly, I sorted and organized my surveys that the students took on the last day of the study.

Once all my data was typed and organized, I went through my interviews and surveys and begin to code to find my themes. The first time I coded, I went through and coded all seven interviews. I circled and underlined pieces of data that stuck out as possible ideas for themes. Words or phrases that kept reappearing were ones that mentioned students building confidence, their own self identities, learning about metaphors and similes, and how Spoken Word Poetry is about the performance aspect. The second time I read through the interviews I began to code and identify initial themes and categories. I pinpointed my themes as being self identification and expression, poetic devices, and performance. I also put other key words underneath these themes. The last time I read through, I looked for disconfirming evidence and any additional questions that may have been brought up. As I was reading through my interviews and surveys, all seven interviews and surveys pointed me in the same direction as to what my original themes
were to be. Therefore, the themes will be self-identification and expression in writing, exploration of identity and voice through poetic devices, and performance breeding confidence.

**Findings and Discussion**

Upon comparing first and final copies of each student’s poetry and analyzing all interviews, surveys, and field observations, several themes surfaced. These themes are self-identification and expression in writing, development of voice and identity with use of poetic devices, and performance breeding confidence. These three themes are relative to all of the data collected and to the discussion on how Spoken Word Poetry impacted the development of a student’s voice in writing. The discussion of these themes explores how Spoken Word Poetry can positively impact a student’s voice in poetic writing and developing student voice.

**Self-Identification and Expression in Writing**

Spoken Word Poetry’s purpose is to allow students to find their own identity through the use of poetic words and personal experiences (Sparks and Grochowski, 2002). Interviews that were conducted prior to the teaching and writing of Spoken Word Poetry with each of the seven students showed repetition of the words, self-expression, and self-identification being used in their answers to interview questions. All seven students noted how expressing one’s own thoughts is part of Spoken Word Poetry. Anya stated “I think when you have your own voice in writing it’s like more about you and it’s not like about a whole group, like it explains your personality and like who you are” (Student Interviews, 2012). Anya’s statement about developing voice in writing implies that Spoken Word Poetry reveals identity by telling a story through personal and intimate connections and feelings the poet has. In comparison to Gregory’s (2008) study of how Spoken Word Poetry can foster self-identification and exploration, all seven students identified Spoken Word Poetry as being a source of writing that promotes exploring
one’s self. Dawn went on to state that “you can express what you think and people can agree or disagree” (Student Interviews, 2012). Dawn’s response indicates the connection of the individual to self-expression and sculpting one’s own identity. Identity can be shifted and represented through the choice words a poet may choose to outline their inner feelings and convey those personal beliefs and ideas to an opinionated audience. In relation, Gregory’s (2008) idea that poetry calls for own personal opinions and beliefs to take written form for audience members to react to. Each student also reflected on being able to express one’s self through writing.

After comparing each student’s first draft of their poems to their final copies, it can be stated in Table 1 students increased their overall voice in writing by one to two points. When looking at Xander, whose first draft score was three, ended up increasing his overall score by two points when submitting his final copy of his poem. Xander he was able to write with a personal tone, flavor, or feeling, be completely involved in the topic, and engages the reader using a voice that stands out from others (see A1). The development in voice may suggest that Spoken Word Poetry facilities a development of a critical voice which stands out from others and while critically reflecting on one’s own life (Darder, 2002).

Table 1

6 +1 Traits Rubric on Student Poetry

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<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
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<th>V</th>
<th>WC</th>
<th>SF</th>
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Note. Rubric scaled from 1 to 6; I= Ideas; O= Organization; V= Voice; WC= Word Choice; SF= Sentence Fluency; C= Conventions; P= Presentation.

While observing students during an after school poetry session, each student stood in front of the classroom and read aloud their poems for student feedback. As each student read aloud their poem, students would clap at the end and raise their hands to give the poet critical feedback on their poem. Students were able to speak up, and talk back to the poet about their
poem, which allowed for identifying and reconstructing their own voices (Camangian, 2008). Each time a poet went up to orally deliver their poem to the group of students, students would clap, snap, and rejoice over the deliverance of the poem. The interaction between the audience members and the poets implies that students are creating a environment where criticism could be given and taken as positive feedback. Positive feedback from the audience would help poets revise poem to better represent the idea being expressed. Students would treat the commenting as a conversation and give constructive criticism to each poet to develop critical voices to be heard and communicated to others (Lopez, 2011). As an example, Buffy read her poem entitled “The Silent Killer”, which was about cancer. Willow stated to Buffy “I really enjoyed the way you said cancer was “The big C” and didn’t say that it was cancer” (Field Observation, 2012). Willow was able to give constructive feedback on a specific line that Buffy used within her poem to give positive feedback and examine her poem with a critical voice. In relation to Smith’s (2010) study, the student’s critical feedback suggests that students were able to feel safe and comfortable in reforming and critically examining each other’s poetry.

After looking at the surveys that were completed at the end of the study, Angel stated, “Spoken Word Poetry is used to get a reaction from the audience” (Student Survey, 2012). Angel’s comment suggests that through opinions and ideas stemming from a poet’s voice can have a positive or negative effect on an audience’s feelings towards a poem. Spoken word poetry allows an audience to better understand the issues students are facing and how students identify and persevere through it by causing an audience reaction (Desai & Marsh, 2005). Buffy went on to state, “poetry can be about anything, sad things or happy things. You can make your poem funny or sad” (Student Survey, 2012). Spoken Word Poetry can surface experiences one has had about anything one wants to write about.
Development of Voice and Identity with Use of Poetic Devices

Poetic devices are used throughout Spoken Word Poetry to build upon a student’s voice in writing. Some of the poetic devices that were mentioned in student interviews were rhyme, rhythm, and incorporation of stanzas. Students also varied in opinion on rhyming occurring in poetry. Anya states, “It doesn’t have to rhyme, but it can rhyme” while five out of the seven students expressed that poetry includes rhyming (Student Interviews, 2012). Anya’s statement indicates that students did not realize that poems don’t have to include rhyme. Spoken Word Poetry combines rhyme and free verse to create a melodic form of writing. Fraser (2006) furthers this idea by stating how the use of metaphorical language creates a melodic and powerful expression of ideas and viewpoints a poet captures through metaphorical images.

Comparing the interviews that were conducted at the beginning of the study to the surveys taken at the end, all seven students incorporated poetic devices into their poetry. Angel stated “Spoken Word Poetry can be more serious than rhyming poetry, while fun and silly at the same time. You can also use the lack of rhymes to come up with tricks to make it more interesting” (Student Surveys, 2012). It is implied that Angel learned that rhymes don’t have to be the only poetic device used in poetry.

Throughout the Spoken Word Poetry lessons taught after school, students were taught to use similes and metaphors that enhanced their poetry. Table 2 states that five out of the seven students increased the use of poetic techniques being used in their poems.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>PT</th>
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<th>WU</th>
<th>LC</th>
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Spoken Word Poetry Rubric
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<td>Cordelia</td>
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<td>Willow</td>
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<td>Angel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Rubric scaled 1= Beginning; 2=Developing; 3 = Accomplished; 4= Exemplar; PT= Poetic Techniques; I= Images; WU= Word Usage; LC=Language Conventions; P= Performance
One student went from a three to a four from her first draft to her final copy of the poem. Increasing her score indicates that the student used similes and metaphors to enrich her poem to help create more imagery. When metaphors are used in writing poetry, it can take a concept or idea and create a powerful image that may otherwise be inexpressible (Fraser, 2006). Table B results showed that all seven students used poetic devices in their writing with the use of smiles and metaphors. Dawn used multiple metaphors and smiles throughout her poem. For example, from her poem about friendship, a line that showcases use of a metaphor is:

“Almost as useless as the dried
Up expo marker sitting in the garbage can” (Student Work, 2012)

Dawn was able to not only use a simile, but also take a leap and extend her simile. Dawn’s use of a simile indicates that figurative language can formulate an image to reveal a idea in a unique way. Table 2 also conveyed results of all seven students capturing more than two images throughout their poems. Students’ use of figurative language encouraged them to explore how to use language to project a powerful image through comparisons and descriptors. Different types of poetic devices, such as personification, metaphor, and similes, convey images that students each try to express. In Willow’s poem about her mother, she incorporates different images to capture her mother. For example:

“like a roller-coaster that twists and turns
and makes me laugh,
and at times,
makes me scared”
Willow proceeds to describe her mother as another metaphor.

“You are a crazy Chihuahua,
hopping up and down and “barking”
along to ever word in the song that’s play as loud
as you possibly can” (Student Work, 2012).

Willow’s use of a metaphor created a powerful image that causes a reaction to the audience with the extension of the comparison of her mother to an animal. The extended metaphor helps to stream descriptive pieces of imagery which reflect upon the poet’s ideas. Students using multiple similes and metaphors throughout their poetry may suggest that through metaphorical language students are able to develop voice and self identity (Fraser, 2006).

**Performance Breeds Confidence**

Another central focus of Spoken Word Poetry is the performance aspect. Spoken Word Poetry not only calls for students to write their own poetry, but also to perform their poetry in front of an audience. Spoken Word Poetry is seen as a type of poetry that cannot be confined to paper, yet needs to have an outlet through performance (Boudreau, 2009). Upon interviewing the seven students, six out of the seven felt comfortable performing in front of others (Student Interviews, 2012). Angel stated, “I think performing in front of an audience will help me feel more comfortable, and give me confidence because of the experience with it” (Student Interviews, 2012). Angel’s response implies that students will build confidence while performing their own poetry in front of an audience. Anya states “Um, performing. It like, is nerve racking but like I can do it, but you just have to be confident, I think” (Student Interviews, 2012). Student interviews help to point out that Spoken Word Poetry is a social practice where identities are molded. Developing confidence builds within the practice and participation within
the act of performing poetry. Since Spoken Word Poetry incorporates performing one’s own work in front of an audience, encourages students to practice their poetry readings to gain more confidence each time it is performed.

During the observation poetry session, Buffy was documented as starting off her performance of her piece with a trembling voice. Her body was stiff and she made no eye contact at the beginning of her poem. About thirty seconds into her performance, Buffy began to speak more clearly and added inflection into her voice. She began to loosen up her body and unlocked her knees (Field Observational Notes, 2012). Buffy’s gradual build up of confidence indicates the student needed to make that connection with the audience before gaining the confidence and becoming more comfortable sharing her words with the audience. Spoken Word Poetry uses expressive tones, pacing, and gestures to enhance the meaning behind the words that the poet is speaking (Gregory, 2008).

Toward the end of the study, all seven students performed their individual and group poems in front of one another. Each student added gestures, expression, and different tones to their voice to present their poems to one another. Each student also invited audience members to clap, snap, or voice how they may have felt about the words from the poetry aloud (Field Observational Notes, 2012). Willow stated, “I feel like I learned how to trust myself while presenting my poem” (Student Surveys, 2012). Willow’s remark suggests that students built confidence by continuously practicing and becoming more comfortable with their own personal poetry. Willow went on to state, “I found that I am more confident performing my work in front of other people” (Student Surveys, 2012). Students began to feel more comfortable with their identities being revealed through their poems by performing them in front of one another.
Spoken Word Poetry encourages poets to reveal their identities through the power of their words to an audience.

My findings were consistent with studies done by Gregory (2008) and Fraser (2006) who found Spoken Word Poetry to be an effective tool to encourage the development of voice in writing through the incorporation of figurative language and performance. My study also stayed consistent with research that suggested performance poetry gives students ownership over their poetry and their identities. Gulla (2007) found that through the process of writing Spoken Word Poetry, students were able to take ownership of the thoughts and feelings being expressed through free-verse poetry. In comparison, my findings pointed out that Spoken Word Poetry pushed students to examine their own identities in order to capture images through the use of figurative language and be expressed through a performance in front of an audience.

**Implications**

Through observations and assessments of seven middle school students, it has been found that Spoken Word Poetry positively affects voice in student writing. After the collection and the analysis of various forms of data, it was found that through Spoken Word Poetry, self-identification and expression fostered students to explore and develop their own voice in writing. It was also discovered that the use of poetic devices aids the development of voice in writing. Lastly, through the act of performing poetry in front of an audience, one’s confidence will blossom and allow comfort with one’s own poetry.

The first implication from my study is that Spoken Word Poetry is a writing tool that can be used to help foster self-identification and expression in student voice. Students will incorporate personal views and thoughts into their writing by having the freedom to write free-verse poetry. Teachers should allow students to have choice on topics to write about. Spoken
Word Poetry facilitates instruction for student choice and self-learning to occur. Through choice, students will allow their own identities to be incorporated throughout their writing. Gulla (2007) found that through Spoken Word Poetry, students were allowed to take ownership of their writing. Therefore, students had the ability to manipulate their writing to fit their own voice.

The second implication from my study is that poetic devices should be taught and encouraged in order for student voice to be enriched with powerful images. In order for students to enrich their use of language in writing, teachers should teach students how to construct different types of poetic devices, such as similes and metaphors. For instance, research completed by Fraser (2006) found that student use of metaphorical and other styles of writing to express emotions and personal ideas could be conveyed through imagery.

The third implication I drew from my study was that confidence is either supported or born through the performance of Spoken Word Poetry. Students allow themselves to be vulnerable by exposing their poetry to an audience. It is vital that students have the ability to perform their poetry in front of some type of an audience. In Fisher’s (2004) study, she found that students were able to establish authoritative figures by performing their poetry in front of people. Therefore, in the act of teaching Spoken Word Poetry, teachers should allow students to perform their poems to instill confidence within each one’s identity and voice in writing.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of Spoken Word Poetry on voice in writing. I collected forms of data to help convey literacy as a social practice and that the development of voice occurs between student interaction. Through interviews, surveys, observational notes, and graded rubrics, I was able to determine the effect of Spoken Word Poetry on student voice in writing. Prior research shows Spoken Word Poetry actively engages
students to explore their identities and their voices through poetic devices. Research also pointed out that the performance aspect of Spoken Word Poetry encouraged self-confidence to prosper and continue to build in students. Therefore, teachers should use Spoken Word Poetry as an instructional tool to impact student voice in writing.

The research that I conducted was limited in a couple of ways. First, the research conducted was limited by size and time. Throughout this study, I had the opportunity to work with seven students. This limitation lead my findings to only exist within a small number of students rather than a larger population to find a positive trend over a larger amount of students. Looking at a larger number of students may have proven that Spoken Word Poetry may have not had a positive effect on student voice in writing. My study was also limited by time. This study was conducted over the course of three and a half weeks. Although within that amount of time students were able to write poems, a longer study was needed to see a progression of student voice over time. This study would have needed a year to see the development of student voice from day one to the final days of a school year.

These limitations leave me with a few questions that have yet to be answered. For instance, how would this study have impacted the voices of an entire grade level at a school? Would there be a dramatic difference in the numbers of students who had Spoken Word Poetry positively impact their voice in writing? I would also like to know if I would have seen a greater change in development of voice if this study were conducted over an extended period of time.

To conclude, I would like to conduct this study on a larger quantity of students. I would also like to have this study conducted over the course of one school year. Also, I would like to compare the use of Spoken Word Poetry with other styles of writing in order to find the best instructional tool to encourage development of voice in writing. In light of these limitations, this study proves
that Spoken Word Poetry impacts the development of voice in student writing. Using Spoken Word Poetry as an instructional tool will allow students to explore self-identification and expression through the use of different poetic devices. Teachers will find that performance of student poems will increase self-confidence and will positively impact student voice. In all, teachers should consider the incorporation of Spoken Word Poetry to impact voice in student writing.

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# Appendix A

## MESA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### 6+1 Traits™ Writing Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas</strong></td>
<td>The writer is searching for a topic.</td>
<td>The writer may have chosen a topic that is too big or one that he does not know a lot about.</td>
<td>The writer sticks to the topic most of the time, but it might be better if the topic was smaller.</td>
<td>The writer understands the topic and narrows it fairly well.</td>
<td>The writer has a well-defined and manageable topic.</td>
<td>The writer has an extremely clear and focused topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The writing does not have a main idea or tell a story.</td>
<td>The main idea or story is hard to figure out. The reader is left wondering what the writer was trying to say.</td>
<td>The reader can probably guess what is the main idea.</td>
<td>The reader can tell what is the main idea.</td>
<td>It is easy for the reader to figure out the main idea.</td>
<td>The main idea is obvious to the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is little information, maybe just a list of facts or events.</td>
<td>Much of the information does not relate to the main idea.</td>
<td>Some of the information is not related to the main idea or story.</td>
<td>Information is sometimes presented in a new and interesting way.</td>
<td>Information shows insight into the topic.</td>
<td>The information makes connections and shows significant insight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Details are either vague or not included.</td>
<td>Details are limited, repeated, or off topic.</td>
<td>The writing may not have enough details, or the details may be general information everyone already knows.</td>
<td>The writing has some well-chosen details that clearly explain the main idea.</td>
<td>The writer has utilized relevant and precise details that go beyond the obvious.</td>
<td>The writer has utilized relevant and precise details that go beyond the obvious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The writing is of random thoughts, rambling.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>There is no pattern to the organization; it's all jumbled together.</td>
<td>There is not a clear structure or pattern; the writing goes off in many directions.</td>
<td>There is structure to the writing, but it may be too obvious and distract from the meaning.</td>
<td>There is a structure to the writing that fits the purpose.</td>
<td>The organizational structure works well for the topic, purpose, and audience.</td>
<td>The organizational structure enhances and showcases the central idea or theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is no lead or conclusion.</td>
<td>The lead and conclusion are either missing or need work.</td>
<td>A lead and conclusion are attempted, but they need work.</td>
<td>A lead introduces the reader to the paper and the conclusion wraps up the main points.</td>
<td>The lead introduces the reader to the paper and the conclusion wraps up the main points.</td>
<td>An inviting lead draws the reader in and a satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of closure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ideas and details are hard to follow; the writing does not make sense.</td>
<td>There are some attempts to sequence, but the writing is hard to follow.</td>
<td>The sequence helps the reader understand the message.</td>
<td>The sequence strengthens the message by having something out of sequence.</td>
<td>Transitions smoothly connect ideas.</td>
<td>The sequence is logical and effective with well-controlled pacing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transitions are missing.</td>
<td>A couple of transitions are used, but they don't really connect things clearly.</td>
<td>Transitions connect most ideas together.</td>
<td>Transitions connect most ideas.</td>
<td>Transitions smoothly connect ideas.</td>
<td>Thoughtful transitions clearly show how ideas connect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voice</strong></td>
<td>The writing is flat, lifeless, and uninteresting.</td>
<td>Most of the writing is flat, lifeless, and uninteresting. There could be a moment of voice.</td>
<td>The writing is safe and only hints at who the writer is behind the words.</td>
<td>The writing evokes a personal tone, flavor, or feeling but not all the time.</td>
<td>The writer evokes a personal tone, flavor, or feeling.</td>
<td>The writer evokes a personal tone, flavor, or feeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The writer may not have understood the topic or may not have cared about it enough to write something purposeful.</td>
<td>The writer doesn't care much about the topic or is unsure of the purpose.</td>
<td>The writer is not always involved or excited about the topic.</td>
<td>The writer is involved with the topic making the writing engaging and informative.</td>
<td>The writer is completely involved with the topic making the writing compelling and engaging.</td>
<td>The writer crafts the setting with an awareness and respect for the audience and purpose for writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The writer has no purpose and fails to connect with the audience.</td>
<td>The writer makes an attempt to connect with the audience and has some awareness of the purpose.</td>
<td>The writer occasionally engages the reader using a voice that matches the audience with the purpose.</td>
<td>The writer engages the reader using a voice that stands out from the others.</td>
<td></td>
<td>The writer connects strongly with the reader using natural, engaging language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### THE EFFECT OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOICE IN WRITING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The writer uses words that are hard to understand.</td>
<td>The writer uses words that are clear; the writing makes sense.</td>
<td>The writer chooses words that will make the message clear and interesting to the reader.</td>
<td>The writer chooses words that reflect the writer's inner world.</td>
<td>The writer chooses powerful words that create a clear message and engage the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vague words or phrases do not create pictures in the reader's mind.</td>
<td>Strong verbs, sensory words, and precise nouns are used.</td>
<td>Strong verbs, sensory words, and precise nouns are used in clauses that help create a picture in the reader's mind.</td>
<td>Strong verbs, sensory words, and precise nouns are used in clauses that help create a picture in the reader's mind.</td>
<td>The writer chooses powerful words that create a clear message and engage the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words may be used over and over.</td>
<td>The writer uses words that give the message a sense of reality.</td>
<td>The writer uses words that give the message a sense of reality.</td>
<td>The writer uses words that give the message a sense of reality.</td>
<td>The writer chooses powerful words that create a clear message and engage the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words are used incorrectly.</td>
<td>The writer uses words that give the message a sense of reality.</td>
<td>The writer uses words that give the message a sense of reality.</td>
<td>The writer uses words that give the message a sense of reality.</td>
<td>The writer chooses powerful words that create a clear message and engage the reader.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Word Choice

- Sentences are confusing and difficult.
- The reader has to fill in missing words.
- The writing is monotonous, short, choppy sentences or long, rambling sentences.
- Dialogue, if used, doesn't sound like real conversation.
- Sentences are difficult to follow or read aloud.
- The writing includes some choppy sentences, run-ons, fragments, and repetitions.
- The writing is choppy or rambling.
- The writer uses some simple connections incorrectly but does not use a variety.
- There are enigmatic mysteries in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, and paragraphing that the reader must solve to read and understand.
- The writing is too difficult to read and understand.
- There are frequent and significant errors in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammar, and paragraphing.
- The writer uses simple connections incorrectly but does not use a variety.
- There is no need for significant editing.
- The writing is not readable because it is not clear or has an unclear format or spacing.
- Handwriting is not readable because it is not clear or has an unclear format or spacing.
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### Sentences Fluency

- Conventions

### Presentation

- Handwriting is difficult to read because it is not clear or has an unclear format or spacing.
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### Editioning
### Appendix A2

<table>
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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary 4</th>
<th>Accomplished 3</th>
<th>Developing 2</th>
<th>Beginning 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poetic Techniques (Rhyme, Rhythm, similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration, etc.)</td>
<td>Variety of poetic devices used throughout to reinforce theme, purpose, and mood.</td>
<td>Uses poetic techniques to reinforce theme, purpose, and mood.</td>
<td>Uses some poetic techniques to reinforce theme, purpose, and mood.</td>
<td>Uses few or no poetic techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>All images match poem’s theme and enhance meaning.</td>
<td>Some images match poem and the theme.</td>
<td>Few images match poem’s theme.</td>
<td>Images poorly selected or missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Usage</td>
<td>Rich vocabulary, vivid, paints a picture in the readers mind.</td>
<td>Use of vocabulary is somewhat descriptive and use of figurative language.</td>
<td>Vocabulary is more telling than showing, little description.</td>
<td>Vocabulary is very basic, Little or no figurative language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Conventions</td>
<td>No Errors</td>
<td>Almost no errors</td>
<td>Some errors, does not interfere with meaning</td>
<td>Multiple errors, meaning is confusing at times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Interview Questions

1.) How do you feel about poetry?

2.) What do you know about poetry?

3.) What do you know about Spoken Word Poetry?

4.) What do you think it means to have your own voice in writing?

5.) How can someone tell that you used your own voice in writing?

6.) What topics do you think you can write about?

7.) How can poetry help you become a better writer?

8.) How do you feel about performing, in general?

9.) How do you feel about performing something you wrote in front of an audience?

10.) Do you think the performing aspect in Spoken Word Poetry may help you feel more comfortable in front of an audience or do you think it’s going to make you feel more self-conscious?
Appendix C

Survey Questions

1.) What do you now know about Spoken Word Poetry?

2.) What do you feel you learned?