Slam Poetry, Voice of Identity and Resistance: Possibilities in Socioeducation

Débora Cristina Fonseca, UNESP–São Paulo State University, Brazil
Sueli de Fátima Caetano Coppi, UNESP–São Paulo State University, Brazil
Joyce Adam, UNESP–São Paulo State University, Brazil

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Abstract
This article discusses the processes of research that sought to analyze the contribution of Slam poetry to recognizing and understanding Human Rights and to building political and emancipatory life projects for adolescents and young people in compliance with socio-educational internment measures. We carried out the research in a Socio-Educational Assistance Center for Adolescents in the State of São Paulo/Brazil; anchored in the assumptions of historical and dialectical materialism. To develop the investigation, we used action research, in which workshops were held using Poetry Slam techniques. The action research included 17 workshops, which were structured into 4 phases. To analyze the data, we used the methodological procedures of the Meaning Cores (Aguiar & Ozella 2006, 2013). Given this, this article aims to discuss the triggers of movements that occurred in the fourth phase of action research. At this stage, teenagers and young people, in possession of their original poems, constructed their performances to be presented in a great poetic event, a Soiree! In this scenario, the fourth phase proved to be significant, as the adolescents revealed their existence through their bodies and words in a unique way. This process contributed to breaking stigmas that inferiorize, marginalize and segregate these social groups, opening spaces for emancipatory movements of being.

Keywords: Slam Poetry, Socio-Education, Life Projects

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Introduction

This article aims to discuss the triggers of the 4th phase of the research that analyzed the contribution of Slam poetry for us to recognize and understand Human Rights and for the construction of political and emancipatory life projects for adolescents and young people in compliance with a socio-educational measure of internment.

Initially, it is worth explaining that Poetry Slam is a competition movement for poetic performances (spoken poetry battles), which originated in the United States of America at the end of the 20th century. Marc Kelly Smith was looking for a welcoming and accessible poem reading environment when he became responsible for creating the Slam poetry event. The word Slam "is an onomatopoeia in the English language used to indicate the sound of a door or window slamming, whether this movement is light or abrupt. Something close to our "pah!" in Portuguese" (Neves, 2017, p.93). Marc Kelly Smith, appropriated the term Slam from baseball, tennis, bridge and basketball tournaments to name his poetic event.

In this context, we created three main rules for the construction of poems and for the performance in Slam battles, they are: the poems must be unpublished, written by the slammer (poet) who will present it, the presentation must have at most three minutes and no costumes, props or even musical instruments must be used during the performance. In the beginning, public demonstrations did not directly interfere with the results of the poets' performances, which changed over time, as currently the audience's evaluation was placed as paramount in slams, mainly for the appreciation of the poems" (Martin & Bueno, 2021).

In the first decade of the 21st century, Poetry Slam entered Brazilian territory on the initiative of slammer Roberta Estrela D'Alva, also responsible for creating the first Slam in Brazil, the Zona Autónoma da Palavra (ZAP) in 2008. In view of this, other Slams emerged on national soil, such as the so-called Guilhermina Slam and the Resistência Slam. It is important to note that these collectives are held outdoors in a public square, without any type of facilities to help carry out the event.

In this scenario, young people, especially those from peripheral regions, begin to occupy public spaces where they seek to coexist, dialogue, poetize and fight for their literary, political, economic, social and cultural rights. "Setting up in environments of sociability and critical and creative cultural production" (Martin & Bueno, 2021, p.60).

In view of this, the mobilizing force of the Slams movements becomes evident. Therefore, it was decided to appropriate the techniques of poetry battles to hold a poetic event in a Socio-Educational Service Center for teenagers in the interior of the state of São Paulo with the aim of provoking (re)meanings, providing new forms of being and being in the world.

For the construction of this poetic event with teenagers and young people deprived of liberty, it was guided by issues involving Education in Human Rights and the construction of a Life Project, with which we dared to carry out an experiment with the Poetry Slam, having considering that it is an authorial writing, which triggers the triggering of identity processes, bringing awareness and new needs to the subjects, guaranteeing means for a human life with mastery regarding the history of life (past-present-future), preventing things from reaching them in a coercive way (Boutinet, 2002).

Therefore, during the investigative processes, we sought to build political and emancipatory life projects that, like Slam, were revolutionary and insurgent, causing a break with the inhumane frameworks and stigmas imposed on peripheral bodies in the exclusionary contexts of neoliberal capitalism. Since Slam poetry is significant in terms of the processes of recognition and affirmation of peripheral identities and powerful for the development of citizenship (Freitas, 2019), as it drives a connection between art and activism, guaranteeing a creative and poetic political intervention from stigmatized sectors of society.

Action Research – Methodological Issues

The understanding of the phenomenon under study took place through the method of historical and dialectical materialism, with which it becomes possible to overcome superficiality to reach the reality of the facts. In this way, adolescents and young people in hospitalization began to be seen within a historicity, as individuals develop in a dialectical relationship with the social and with history, constituting themselves simultaneously as unique, singular and historical (Aguiar & Ozella, 2006).

In this context, we sought through action research, in which participants are involved in a cooperative, active interactive, dialogical and dialectical way in the investigative process (Thiollent, 1997), to develop workshops with the techniques used in poetic battles of Slam in a Socio-educational Center for Adolescent Services, jointly undertaking issues related to Human Rights, identity processes and the construction of a life project.

Given these foundations, the action research was structured into 4 phases, as shown in the table below:
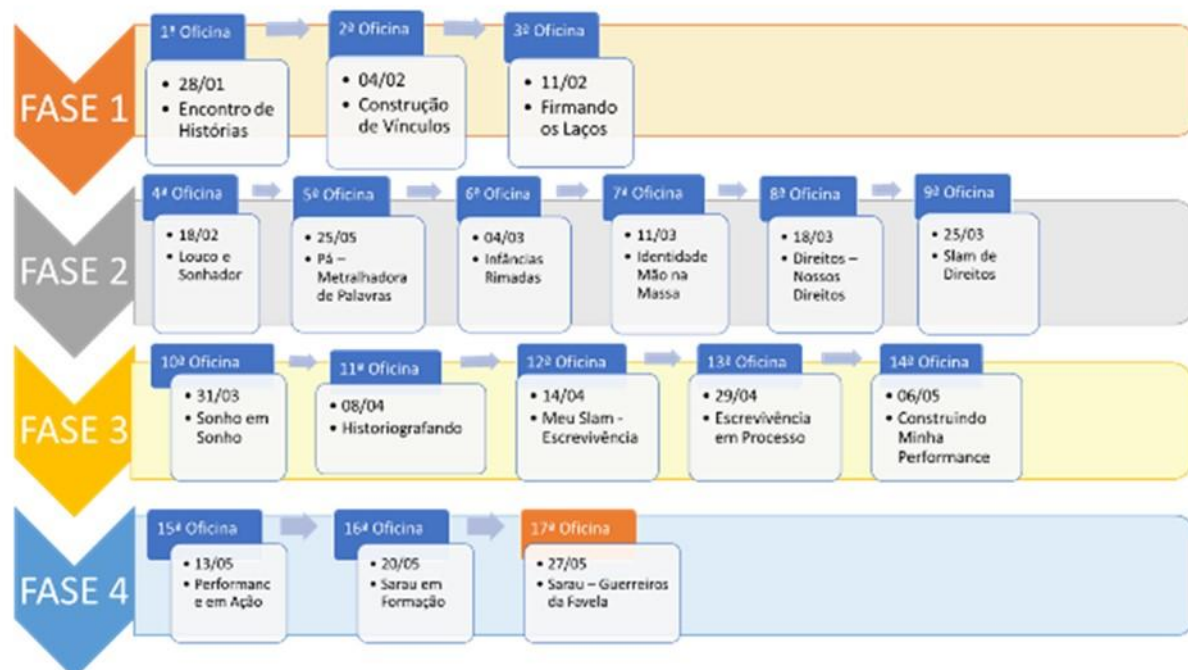

Figure 1: Source: Personal archive. Prepared by the authors.

The first phase included 3 workshops and aimed to build bonds between research participants. At this stage, exploratory questionnaires were also administered to the teenagers with the aim of getting to know them and creating strategies for the next workshops. The

second phase included 6 workshops and was intended, initially, to present the Poetry Slam to teenagers and young people. Later, at this stage, activities related to identity construction and issues related to Human Rights were carried out.

The third phase consisted of 5 workshops, which were dedicated to writing Slams (poems). These productions were built based on the life stories (writings), dreams, desires, future perspectives and life projects of the participants. The fourth phase consisted of 3 workshops aimed at building the participants' poetic performances, ending with the big soirée. At that moment, the boys performed their slams to the audience. At the end of each phase, a focus group was held. These moments were powerful, as they guaranteed the systematization of knowledge constructed at each stage, as well as the apprehension of the meanings constructed by adolescents and young people.

To analyze the data, data analysis procedures called meaning cores were used. These procedures were developed by Aguiar & Ozella (2006, 2013), who sought to build a means in which one could have coherence and basis for analyzes through historical and dialectical materialism, something that was not merely descriptive or classificatory, but that could account for of apprehending reality in movement, going beyond the limits of appearance. In this sense, the processes for elaborating the cores of meaning were constructed linked to historical and dialectical materialism, in the assumptions of socio-historical psychology.

For this, the poems constructed by the adolescents were a reference to guide the data analysis, as they represent a document summarizing the meanings of the research process of young people and adolescents, enabling greater consistency for analysis. However, other materials collected and produced during the research were also considered to construct the meaning cores.

Given the analytical corpus, the procedures for constructing the meaning cores began. Firstly, a floating reading/re-reading of the researched materiality was carried out. At that moment, with the research objectives in mind, the speeches and sentences written by the adolescents were extracted, with which the pre-indicators were created. For this, the criteria of similarity, complementarity and contradiction were used.

With the pre-indicators organized, the elaboration of their respective indicators (theses) began and subsequently the construction of the meaning core of each adolescent, paying attention to the contradictions in the processes of constitution of the subjects.

The 4th Phase: Poetic Performance

In this space, our focus is to discuss the triggers of the 4th phase of this action research, a moment in which, with all the knowledge built throughout the 14 workshops and, mainly with their poems (slams) in hand, teenagers and young people began the construction of their performances to be presented at a Soiree that marked the end of the investigative processes.

Thus, during the course of the workshops prior to this phase, there was the appropriation of Poetry Slam techniques, the main one being the authorial production of the poems that were presented in the poetic battles, with this, the productions were composed of the experiences of the slammers (poets) who strongly expressed their constructions.

Therefore, Poetry Slam can be identified as a contemporary performance art, as it is the performance that gives life to the Slam, being the performance of poets (slammers), encounters of bodies, expressiveness and life stories. In this sense, performance consists of full poetic realization, as it is in the body and through the body that poetry is entirely realized (Cardoso, 2009, p.62). Configuring itself in living and transformative action (Zumthor, 2007). In this way, it enables an experience that involves a truly poetic energy, which requires openness and surrender to the movement, both by the poet and the audience.

It is worth mentioning that there is no fixed rule for performance, with each presentation being unique, "each new performance puts everything into question. The form is perceived in performance, but with each performance it changes" (Zumthor, 2007, p.35). In this action, the presence of the voice goes beyond the linguistic sense of communication through speech, as it emerges from a vivid body in the context of full action, as Zumthor points out:

> [...] The voice is a subversion or a rupture of the body's enclosure. But it crosses the limit of the body without breaking it; it means the place of a subject that cannot be reduced to personal location. In this sense, the voice dislodges the man from his body. While I speak, my voice makes me inhabit my language. (Zumthor, 2007, p.83-84)

Therefore, the main function of the voice is not to inform, but rather to seek attention through all the senses, both as a voice and as a bodily presence, in each tone, in each word, in each gesture and in each silence, demanding attention and concentration. Therefore, the sound that emanates from the body is essential for the plenitude of the poem, as it only becomes a finished work when the voice lends it its authority (Cardoso, 2009). The mediation of the voice, in the orality scenario, enables the concreteness of poetic making, which is carried out by "the person and the interpreter's game, the audience, the circumstances, the cultural environment, the intersubjective relationships between what is represented and what is experienced, at the moment of performance" (Zumthor, 2007, p.18).

In this context, we sought to guarantee poetic plenitude, promoting the breaking of the dark atmosphere of the prison at the Socio-Educational Center: "overcoming the real world, favoring the creation of new worlds within the world" (Zumthor, 2007). In order to provoke this overcoming, a scenic environment was created with a carpet, light globe, speaker, microphone and many poetry books.

Figure 2: Researchers' collection.

The construction of this environment ensured the enthusiasm for teenagers and young people to get involved in the poetic atmosphere for the creation of their performances. At that moment, the microphone was the big highlight, the teenagers lined up to have access to the instrument to vigorously recite their verses, "freely" expressing their bodies in that space of deprivation, which was a contradiction that the young people took advantage of with intensity.

In this process, the teenagers began a powerful movement of reading and re-reading their Slams (poems), a moment that they took advantage of to make some changes, mainly adding new rhymes that sprouted all the time from their powerful minds.
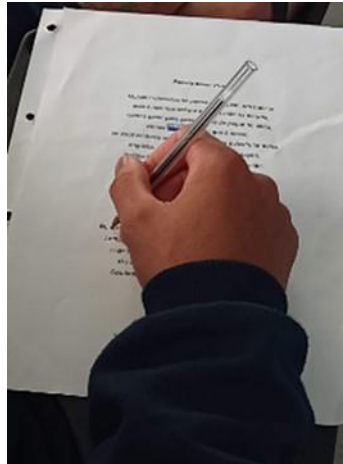

Figure 3: Source: CASA Foundation Social Communication Department
– Photo taken during the workshops.

In this process of writing and rewriting their poems (slams), when they felt confident with their verses, they energetically went to the center of the carpet amidst the play of light, grabbed the microphone and read their slams, building their performances in a unique way, which little by little gained pace. As a result, teenagers increasingly had control over their bodies. This represented a dynamic and significant movement, in which teenagers were able to reflect on their authorial poems marked by their own life stories and enlivened by their bodies.

Given this, the force of poetic mobilization was so intense that even young people with a higher level of shyness did not surrender to inhibition and gave themselves over to the creativity and energy of rhymes. Even teenagers who were not fully literate performed powerfully.

As the writing of a Slam is part of the experience of the Slammer (poet), spaces were opened for teenagers and young people to reflect, know and understand their own existences in the contexts in which they develop humanly. This process was linked to recognition regarding human rights, specifically the Rights of Children and Adolescents provided for in the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA), (Article 121 of Law No. 8,069, 1990).

In this scenario, through art, poetry and the performance of their bodies, they turned their gaze towards themselves, stripping themselves of the frames that stigmatize them and those inferior, opening gaps for emancipatory movements of the being. In view of this, the possibilities for "dreaming" increased and consequently for new needs in and for life, opening up to a new social birth: the subject of law.

Therefore, Slam assumes a sociopolitical function, insofar as "the slammer, when giving his testimony, is situated in a performative instance in which art and life are part of the same plane and there is no dissociation between ethics and aesthetics" (D'Alva, 2011, p.122). And, this movement allows subjects to understand the forces in disputes in the contexts in which their "self" is being formed. In this sense, when teenagers create a Slam production, they are at the same time (re)constructed by this production. With this, Slam poetry carries, in every written and proclaimed word, human lives marked by movements of identity construction, in a dynamic collective intertwining between the performer and the audience who recognize each other dialectically. As we can see from the report of a reference professional for teenagers after participating in the Soiree (performances) for young people in the cafeteria of the Socio-Educational Center:

> It was important to observe the movements of reflection and playfulness that made the teenagers feel comfortable speaking, listening and reflecting. Thank you for allowing us to be present. I was moved by each poem read (recited). It was a wonderful experience.

Through the words of this employee we can see the importance of the performance, as a living and active presence, which overflows with energy that also reaches the listener. The performance "exists to be seen and during this existence all factors contribute and show themselves completely, making a performance an unparalleled visual, sound and sensorial spectacle for both the performer and the spectator" (Cardoso, 2009 p.32).

Therefore, in a poetic Slam battle, bodies become living machine guns of words. Sharp expressions that cut, wound, scar and mark bodies. In this context, adolescents deprived of liberty expressed their learning in relation to Human Rights, their life stories and future perspectives. Without a doubt, a powerful moment of collective reframing in which everyone present was strongly affected.

Conclusions

In view of the above, it is clear how those who go through the experience of a Slam poetry battle, through the completion of a performance among other performances, come away modified, as they enter into a powerful movement of self-reflection and self-knowledge, processes that provoke the construction of a social and historical conscience.

Process built from writing and orality, configuring poetic completeness, in which full realization occurred through the word, the body, the voice, the presence, the living and active force of adolescents and young people deprived of liberty. The pulsating expression of subjects who break with the dispositions of things, turning erasures, compulsory silencing into poems, which when recited out loud, resonated vibrations of identities and resistances, a collective force, which drove trans(formation).

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Contact email: debora.fonseca@unesp.br

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8427-5973
https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0731-6499
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2576-2194