

Open Mic Night: Campus Programs That Champion College Student Voice and Engagement, edited by Toby S. Jenkins, Crystal Leigh Endsley, Marla L. Jaksch, and Anthony R. Keith, Jr. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2017. 145 pp. \$27.50, paperback.

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“Spoken word” is a phrase used to describe a form of poetry, intended for performance, that emphasizes rhythmic expression and intonations. Writers and performers utilize the genre as a vehicle to communicate personal declarations and social commentary to a wide range of audiences, often in settings called Open Mic Nights. Open Mic Nights often take place in social settings such as cafes, and musical lounges that include spoken word performances by various authors/performers. Spoken word practice has traditionally been characterized as an out-of-school literacy exercise (Fisher, 2015); however, researchers are now examining its value for instruction within school classrooms.

Open Mic Night: Campus Programs That Champion College Student Voice and Engagement provides a compelling argument for the use of spoken word performance in K-12 schools and on college and university campuses. The authors demonstrate how spoken word performance, when used as a pedagogical tool, can be used to foster students’ critical engagement with sociopolitical matters and personal expression. Toby S. Jenkins, Crystal Leigh Endsley, Marla L. Jaksch, and Anthony R. Keith, Jr. serve as both editors and contributors to the book, with additional chapters by Robb Ryan Q. Thibault, Wilson K. Okello, and Stephen John Quaye, and bring to the volume extensive and varied experiences with campus programming, writing poetry and spoken word performance. They also hold a wide range of professional positions within colleges and universities. Specifically, Jenkins, Endsley, and Jaksch currently hold faculty positions at University of South Carolina, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY, and The College of New Jersey respectively, and Keith is currently a PhD student at George Mason University. *Open Mic Night* contributes to professional literature about social programming on college and university campuses, particularly through its unique perspective on the impact of student-centered and justice-oriented approaches to student development.

In the introduction, Thibault provides a brief history of the Slam poetry movement by comparing it to the origins of college unions, which traditionally housed debates. The first two chapters provide support for both educators’ use of Open Mic Nights in educational programming and the utilization of critical pedagogy, critical literacy, and hip-hop pedagogy to inform instructional design. The authors present findings from empirical studies that highlight the benefits of using spoken word in primary and secondary classrooms. Endsley uses chapter three to develop a case for educators’ use of spoken word as a tool for activism in classrooms, and in chapter four, Jenkins explains how performance art can cultivate cultural leadership and social action. Endsley’s work appears again in chapter five, as she uses Jenkins’ explanation of the significance of performance art to cultural leadership and social action, providing a framework for student-artist development. In chapter six, Jaksch explores the potential of hip-hop feminist pedagogy and other justice-oriented pedagogies as lenses for viewing spoken word performance, as well as its possibilities within primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. Finally, chapter seven describes a study of three participants’ experiences with spoken word in their high school and college education classrooms. Although citing additional empirical evidence within the post-secondary settings may have strengthened the case for spoken

word in campus programming, the editors provide a compelling argument that supports the use of spoken word as a form of personal expression and as a tool for classroom engagement.

Across the volume, the authors provide theoretical explanations, as well as specific suggestions for structuring safe and open community spaces for practicing and sharing spoken word. Their suggestions for praxis include setting community rules, encouraging audible feedback, and providing an outline for debriefing. Ultimately, the authors and editors have provided educators and all interested readers with a user-friendly text that facilitates the understanding, envisioning, and maintaining of open mic nights and spoken word programming with students across educational levels.

Although the intended audience is student affairs professionals at colleges and universities, primary and secondary classroom educators, and post-secondary teacher educators, amateur and professional artists may find value in the theoretical explanations of art as activism, pedagogy for critical civic engagement, and privileging student voice. *Open Mic Night: Campus Programs That Champion Student Voice and Engagement* provides an argument supporting the use of spoken word performance in schools and on college and university campuses, as well as the necessity for educators to attend to students' needs for self-expression and critical engagement within their classrooms and communities.

REFERENCES

Fisher, M. T. (2015). *Writing in rhythm: Spoken word poetry in urban classrooms*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.