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THE IMPORTANCE OF PERFORMANCE POETRY PEDAGOGY IN THE GRADE 11 ENGLISH FAL CLASSROOM: WHAT IS LOST IN ITS ABSENCE?

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ABSTRACT

This article spotlights the interconnection between poetry as performance arts and adolescents' identity as performance. It does this through an analysis of four lesson observations conducted in a Grade 11 English First Additional Language (FAL) classroom in a black township school in Gauteng province, South Africa. The analysis aimed to assess what was lost when a teacher failed to apply a performance poetry pedagogy in the English FAL poetry classroom. Using Erikson's work on adolescent identity development as a theoretical framework and drawing insights from existing literature on poetry as a performance art, the article demonstrates that a non-performance poetry pedagogy kills the dialogic quality of poetry, inhibits the political expressiveness of poetry, nullifies the enjoyment of poetry in the classroom, and provokes learner resistance. These findings point to a need to transform poetry education in South African schools by making the performance arts an integral part of teaching English FAL.

KEYWORDS: Adolescents' identity; English FAL classroom; loss; performance arts; performance poetry pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

A major problem with the teaching of poetry in South African schools is the failure of teachers to recognise poetry as fundamentally a performance art. Like music, dance and drama, poetry attains its full potential when it is communicated through a symphony of voice, words and body movements. These different modalities are essential to conveying poetic messages. It is not just the language of a poem that matters; it is also the musicality of that language – its lyricism, tempo, rhythm and rhyme – which is conveyed effectively through voice projections that work in harmony with carefully selected gestures to create imaginative invocations of meaning for the listener/audience.

In South Africa, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for English FAL in the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase (Grades 10-12) recognises this performative dimension of poetry. For example, in the Grade 11 Teaching Plan, CAPS stipulates prepared reading of a poem in Weeks 7 and 8 and urges the teacher to "pay attention to expression, tone, pauses, pace, eye contact, pronunciation and gestures" (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 62). These elements are what makes poetry a performance art and must be conveyed to learners through an embodied pedagogy; they are not simply elements that learners must identify in the poem. Sadly, teachers of poetry in the English FAL classroom pay little attention to these elements when they teach the prescribed Grade 11 poems. As several South African studies have shown, they leave the poems frozen on the page (Newfield & d'Abdon, 2015; Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020; Newfield & Byrne, 2020). In many cases, they simply read the poems *to* learners rather than perform them *with* the learners. Learners are then turned into bystanders observing the spectacle of poetry teaching as if it has nothing to do with their lives.

Significantly, in the English FAL classroom across many black communities, there are mainly learners who come from backgrounds in which oral poetry performances at weddings, funerals, initiation ceremonies, divination events, healing rites, ancestor worship rituals, cleansing ceremonies, and political rallies are a central part of community life (Newfield & d'Abdon, 2015; Bila & Abodunrin, 2020). These learners bring into the classroom their indigenous conceptions of poetry as an oral art form. Orality entails taking the words of poetry off the pages of the poetry anthology and acting them out on a classroom poetic stage to give these words life and meaning. When learners experience a disconnection between poetry as spoken word that they grow up knowing and poetry as written word that remains cold on a page, they develop a resistance to poetry. This resistance is an expression of their developing sense of identity.

In the Grade 11 English FAL poetry classroom, learners are between the ages of 16 and 18 years which are the adolescent years – a time of identity formation. Thus, poetry pedagogy that does not reflect the performative nature of poetry comes through to these learners as something to be rejected, because it creates dissonance between their out-of-school poetry literacy and their in-class poetry learning experience. The failure to teach poetry as performance art leads to learners enacting classroom behaviour that shows a resistance to pedagogy that does not meet their identity needs. In addition, such non-performance pedagogy fails to affirm learners' indigenous knowledge of poetry as a social practice, an everyday experience that brings the individual into interaction with the community (Anyidoho, 2013; Musvoto, 2017; Bila & Abodunrin, 2020; d'Abdon, Byrne & Newfield, 2020).

In this article, we draw on data from a case study conducted in a Grade 11 English FAL poetry classroom in a Gauteng school to illustrate the fundamental link between poetry as a performance art and adolescent identity as performance. We pose the question: what happens when poetry is taught in ways that do not recognise it as a performance art? In other words, what is lost in such a classroom? We draw on several bodies of knowledge – literary poetics, poetry pedagogy, and psychology – to argue in this article that teaching poetry through performance is necessary for the identity development processes of adolescent learners,

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because involving adolescent learners in poetic performances affirms their individuality, enhances their sense of self, and creates for them an educational space of social justice.

POETRY AS PERFORMANCE ART

While poetry exists in both written and oral forms, the value of any poem lies in its performativity. In other words, one cannot fully appreciate a poem without vocalising it in ways that bring out its sound effects. From the seminal work of Richard Bauman "Verbal Arts as Performance", we deduce an "understanding of performance as a mode of speaking" (Bauman, 1975: 290). Bauman later uses the term "oral poetics" to refer to the notion of verbal performance, and with this he highlights "the relationships that tie poetic form to social function and interpretive meaning" (Bauman, 2002: 94). The poet, the audience and the poetic message are inseparable in this relationship. Performance in the context of poetry then refers to two things: (1) the act of expression which shows that the poet is aware of the value of their own message; and (2) a display of enjoyment in the act itself, for the enhancement of the experience of the audience (Bauman, 1975; Bauman, 2002; Steele, 2014; d'Abdon, 2016). This means that a poetic performance is an investment in a two-directional communicative act: the poet invests in themselves by transmitting an important message to their audience in the most *affective* way possible. Simultaneously they invest in their audience by conveying the message in a manner that creates *enjoyment* for them. Enjoyment in this context should not be understood in the reductive sense of entertainment but rather in the sense of audience involvement, immersement and/or co-participation in the message. The enjoyment of poetry is crucial to making poetry illuminating and to developing learners' pleasure in reading poetry (Steele, 2014). Poetry as performance art offers to both performer and spectators what Mda (2009: 129) calls "the freedom of time and place" where spectators can join in the performance at any time during the performance act, and through this co-performance spectators can feel the emotions that the poem seeks to communicate.

Through the verbalisation of poems to a listening/participating audience, poems become "multimodal texts inviting interaction with the *voice* of the poem" (Blake, 2013: 138, emphasis in original). In Africa, oral poetry predates written poetry. African societies used oral poems to narrate their histories, document their mythologies, transmit their belief systems, and teach about morality (Gunner, 2007; Hoffmann, 2012). Poetry as performance art forms a rich part of Africa's oral traditions that have survived into present-day and continue to be adapted into different forms to express the hopes and fears of current generations of Africans (Gunner, 2007; Gromov, 2012; Anyidoho, 2013; Lo Liyong, 2018). In contemporary times, oral poetry performances are understood as subversive tools that offer a counter-discourse to colonial narratives framing African indigenous cultural productions as low art, with such counter-discursive tools overturning colonial modernity's logic on high, low and pure art (Musvoto, 2017; Phalafala, 2019).

Historically in South Africa, poetry performances offered artists a platform to stage public resistance to apartheid ideologies of racial segregation (Chapman, 2011; Decker, 2016). While

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written poetry of the protest tradition was censored by the apartheid state, black poetry flourished in the townships through performances that drew various audiences – mine workers, school children, religious communities – into the struggle. The performance arts – poetry readings, theatre, storytelling, jazz music, song and dance – were all lobbied into the protest movement in the belief that cultural nationalism will inevitably lead to political nationalism (McClintock, 2007). Today, poetry performances attract younger, enthusiastic audiences who find in the spoken word resonances with their everyday lives (Chapman, 2011; d'Abdon, 2016; Cooper, 2020). Several poetry festivals held around South Africa, including Poetry Africa in Durban, provide a nurturing space for poets as they get to perform their art in front of poetry lovers, thereby establishing enduring relationships with audiences.

PERFORMANCE POETRY PEDAGOGY

In his seminal work "Poetry as Dramatic Performance", Anyidoho (2007) describes three different levels of poetic performance. The first level is dramatic reading: here, the poet and the poem are still largely bound to the printed text but the poet makes good use of gestures, voice, tempo and other paralinguistic techniques to get the poem off the page and make it a living experience which the audience can identify with and also participate in (Anyidoho, 2007). Level two performance is a fusion of poetry, music and action: in this case, the poem is largely liberated from the coldness of print as the poet performs it with little or no reference to the text, using elaborate body language and some music to convey the message to the audience (Anyidoho, 2007). In level three performance known as total art, poetry is completely liberated from print technology and becomes a communal art form produced by an ensemble of artists, including singers, drummers, actors/actresses, dancers and technical resource persons, and enjoyed by an audience that is free to join in the performance at any time (Anyidoho, 2007).

These three levels of poetic performance can be deployed in the English FAL classroom to teach poetry. A performance poetry pedagogy can thus be defined as an approach to teaching poetry that involves dramatic reading, the fusion of poetry, music and action, or the enlistment of multiple performance arts (music, song, theatre, dance, and drumming) for the service of poetry. Performing a poem as a song, for example, "enriches the texture of the poem as a system of codes" and helps bridge the gap between the visual and the auditory (Anyidoho, 2013: 185). Phalafala (2019: 131) argues that in the poetic histories of Afro-Arabia, song and poetry are inseparable: "song constitutes poetry; there are no demarcations between the two". Similarly, poetry shares an interface with music, theatre and dance as each influences the other's meaning. Since poetry is a spoken word art form, which means one cannot separate its *spokenness* or voiced dimension from its written form (Blake, 2013; d'Abdon, 2016), teaching poetry necessarily demands performing it. A performance poetry pedagogy is therefore indispensable in the English poetry classroom. While the performance of a poem by the teacher using natural voice projections and body movements would be ideal, there are alternative approaches made possible by advanced technology. As d'Abdon (2016: 46) notes, "the rapid development of technology has fuelled the creation of manifold, eccentric and complex poetry performances that incorporate a multiplicity of media, such as digital music, performance and visual arts, and

experimental theatre". English teachers can therefore make use of these technological resources to bring performance into their poetry lessons. Recorded dramatic readings of contemporary poets performing canonical poems as well as their own poems are available through The Poetry Archive (www.poetryarchive.org) which is an online platform that helps audiences to connect with the voices of poets (see Blake, 2013; Bila & Abodunrin, 2020).

The benefits of implementing performance poetry pedagogy in English second-language classrooms are enormous. Studies from Nigeria show that it helps to improve learners' academic performance in English literature, encourages learners to like poetry, assists them to gain critical analysis skills as well as performance skills, and ultimately helps them to understand poetry by demystifying it (Olagundoye & Owolewa, 2019; Akinkurolere, Adewumi, Aminu, Olowu & Adetoro, 2021). Similar positive results have been obtained in South Africa where it has been found that applying performance poetry pedagogy in the English FAL classroom not only gives learners access to the taught poems but also encourages them to respond to the poems using different modalities, which include writing their own poems, writing short stories, painting drawings and creating models (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006; Newfield & d'Abdon, 2015; d'Abdon, 2016; Cooper, 2020; Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020; Newfield & Byrne, 2020). International studies such as Camangian (2008), Khatib (2011), Gordon (2013), Blake (2013), Steele (2014), Gudjonsson (2018) and Creely (2022) suggest that poetry writing and performance boosts teenagers' self-esteem, helps them to be proud of who they are, develops their feeling for form, allows them to articulate their responses to poetry in a personal way, and enables multiracial learners to perform their resistance to social expectations of race.

While the gains of implementing performance poetry pedagogy in the English classroom are well documented, what is missing in the literature are the losses incurred when teachers employ a non-performance poetry pedagogy. What is lost may not be quantifiable, but is identifiable through a careful analysis of the ways in which adolescent learners react to non-performance poetry pedagogy. Learning poetry as an adolescent has implications for identity development. We therefore look to Erikson's (1968, 1977) theorisation of adolescent identity development processes to make sense of Grade 11 learners' reactions to non-performance poetry pedagogy in the English FAL classroom.

ADOLESCENTS' IDENTITY AS PERFORMANCE

Erik Erikson's two seminal works, *Childhood and Society* ([1950] 1977) and *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) are central to our understanding of the identity formation processes of Grade 11 learners. At Grade 11, these learners are a unique category of learners within the school system because they are *almost* completing the adolescent phase but are still bound by its demands. Erikson (1968) argues that the adolescence stage is very important to an individual's identity formation. This adolescence stage is the stage between childhood and adulthood when young people begin to desire a sense of individuality and yet want to be seen as part of a group (Erikson, 1968). What is unique about this stage, according to Erikson (1968), is that it

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synthesises the earlier stage of life (childhood) and gives anticipation for the future (adulthood). Erikson (1968) describes identity as a fundamental organising principle which develops constantly throughout one's lifespan.

Erikson's theory of identity development has been criticised for being biased towards boys, and therefore has been extended over time to include other aspects of adolescent identity development such as gender, race and class (Marcia, 1966; Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Smits & Goossens, 2008). What we take out of Erikson's work that is relevant to this article is the idea that adolescent identity development is deeply performative. The notion of identity as performative is largely linked to Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), which draws on the fields of philosophy and gender to show that gender is not to be seen as an essence but rather as a series of performative acts conditioned by our social contexts. Butler's work, as valuable as it is, is limited to the performance of gender and sexual identities by adults as they navigate largely heterosexual contexts; it says little about the adolescent age as a factor influencing identity performance. How do we explain the identity development processes of adolescents more generally, without privileging gender and sexuality above all their other psychosocial experiences? To do this, we have to look to Erikson rather than Butler, because Erikson's work, which draws from psychology, centres exclusively on children and their identity development processes from childhood through adolescence to early adulthood.

Erikson (1968) talks about the ego identity which he defines as the conscious sense of self which adolescents develop through social interaction. This development changes constantly depending on new experiences and information which they acquire in their daily interactions with others. The idea of a 'conscious sense of self' suggests identity as performance as adolescents begin to act in particular ways, in line with social expectations. They become concerned about how they appear to others, whether they fit in with their peers (Erikson, 1968). Thus, at this stage "the adolescent looks most fervently for men and ideas to have *faith* in, which also means men and ideas in whose service it would seem worthwhile to prove oneself trustworthy" (Erikson, 1968: 128-129). Adolescents' quest for role models to model their behaviour after indicates an identity formation process that is fundamentally performative. In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson (1977) speaks about the centrality of play in forming adolescents' sense of identity. Erikson, however, does not idealise adolescents; to him, the adolescent stage is a phase of much confusion for young people as they are trying to figure out their place in the world. It is only through a series of performative acts – testing out values, accepting some and visibly challenging others – that they will eventually achieve a sense of who they are by the time they reach adulthood. In the next section, we describe the methodological process that was followed in understanding adolescents' identity as performance in a Grade 11 English FAL classroom.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data for this article emerged from a larger study which aimed to explore the effect of pedagogy and canon on adolescents' identity development in the Grade 11 English FAL poetry classroom. The study adopted a case study design which is defined by Page and Meyer (2000) as an in-depth description of an individual, group or organisation either to determine who makes a case superior or inferior, or to determine similarities and differences across cases. Two schools were purposively selected as case studies: one where the English FAL teacher used traditional pedagogy (i.e. poetry pedagogy that was textbook-centred) and another where the teacher used a multimodal and multiliteracies pedagogy. The two schools were in the same quintile and same district and they worked with the same prescribed poems, although the teachers for the selected classes used different pedagogies. The two classes were purposively selected in order to ascertain the affordances and limitations of each pedagogy on adolescents' identity development. Qualitative data were collected through participant lesson observations, semi-structured questionnaires, and reflective journals. The study was approved by the University of the Witwatersrand ethics committee (Protocol Number H20/11/38). Written informed consent was obtained from the participating teachers and learners after a briefing about the study's aims. Parents/guardians of learners below 18 years signed assent forms. All participants' identities were safeguarded in the data analysis through the use of pseudonyms.

For this article, we analysed the data collected in the English FAL classroom where the teacher used a traditional poetry pedagogy, in order to assess what was lost when the teacher failed to teach poetry as a performance art. The 45 learners in this classroom came from the townships and informal settlements around the school. The school itself was located in a black township in the Ekurhuleni municipality within the Johannesburg district. For these learners, English was a second language, and sometimes even a third or fourth language. The data consist of four lesson observations conducted between March and April 2021. Four prescribed poems were taught during the four lesson observations. All poems taught were in the 2021 prescribed anthology for Grade 11 English FAL titled *Vistas of Poems,* compiled by Blanche Scheffler (2015). We acknowledge that this is an investigation that explores the subject of poetry in a curriculum that has not been decolonised, as d'Abdon (2016), Bila and Abodunrin (2020) and Mavhiza and Prozesky (2020) have argued, since most of the poems that were taught, when the research was carried out, were western poems. However, we see our project as part of the intervention to decolonise the pedagogy employed in teaching these poems. The lesson observations were audio recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The thematic analysis followed a process that involved familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts, identifying significant details in the observations, organising the details into clusters, noting patterns emerging from the clusters, and generating themes based on the patterns (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

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PERFORMANCE POETRY PEDAGOGY, LOSS, AND ADOLESCENTS' IDENTITY

As a reminder, the key question guiding the data analysis was: what happens when poetry is taught in ways that do not recognise it as a performance art? In other words, what is lost in the English FAL classroom in the absence of a performance poetry pedagogy? In this study, performance was a missing component in the poetry pedagogy employed by the teacher in the classroom observed. Our analysis of the four lesson observations reveals four important consequences of non-performance poetry pedagogy in the English FAL classroom: (1) the pedagogy kills the dialogic quality of poetry; (2) the pedagogy inhibits the political expressiveness of poetry; (3) the pedagogy nullifies the enjoyment of poetry; and (4) the pedagogy provokes learner resistance.

Poetry pedagogy and dialogic engagements

According to Wainaina (2012), poetry initiates dialogue between the poet, the text and the audience. Such "dialogue is concerned with the communicative practices that make it possible for other positions and interests to emerge and address one another in complementing and contesting discourses" (Wainaina 2012: 255). Therefore, poetry pedagogy that fails to centre performance kills possibilities for these varied discourses to emerge. This has grave consequences for adolescents' identity development as it is through expressing their ideas and responding to counter-arguments that adolescents develop their self-confidence.

The loss of dialogic engagement in this classroom was evident in Lesson Observation 3. During the lesson, the teacher told the learners to take out their prescribed anthology, open the page on the poem "This Letter's to Say" and read the poem individually. This poem was written by Raymond Wilson, a British poet who lived between 1874 and 1942. It is a deeply satirical poem which addresses a common problem that came with urban development in Britain: the displacement of people from their homes. During the lesson, however, the teacher did not engage learners in conversations about the consequences of urbanisation on individuals and their sense of rootedness in a place. She did not do a dramatic reading that could help learners experience the sarcasm in the speaker's voice. Instead, she made the learners to read the poem *silently* while she walked around the class checking on them and saying, "You have five minutes to read the poem". After some minutes, the teacher asked the learners the questions that were included in the textbook as a post-reading activity.

Transcript 1: Lesson observation 3

Teacher: I guess you are done. Let's discuss the poem. What is emphasised by the repetition of "No" in stanza 4 and 5? (*There is silence in the room and the teacher pauses for a while*). *Bathong, kanti* you read the poem, guys. You should know the answer. OK, let's move to the next question: state the difference between flat number Q6824 'on the thirteenth floor' and the present home of the recipient. (*No answers from learners. Others are heard whispering*.) Well, guys, you don't want to talk so now take out your classwork books and answer questions number 1 to 5. (*Few learners start writing. Some take their phones while some of the learners who had moved closer to those with textbooks start chatting*).

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The questions in the transcript above focused on technical aspects of the poems, which did not appeal to the learners or give them a chance to draw on their real-life experiences. Consequently, the learners were not drawn into the discussion of the poem that the teacher tried to initiate using the questions. In addition, the teacher did not explain any words in the poem, neither did she contextualise the poem. With no responses from learners, the teacher simply asked the learners to answer the questions in their workbooks.

We argue here that the absence of performance in the teacher's poetry pedagogy led to learners' disengagement with the poem being taught. The teacher's non-performance poetry pedagogy correlates with the banking system of education which Freire ([1972] 2018) describes as an oppressive teaching method that makes learners passive recipients of information, rather than transforming them into critical thinkers with problem-solving skills. In this English FAL classroom, a performance poetry pedagogy involving the teacher and the learners could have put the learners in a position to engage in meaningful dialogic activities about state policies and practices that shape people's daily lives. Obied (2013: 145) argues that poetry performances allow "teachers to move across boundaries and take poetry back into the community, or to bring pupils' sense of poetry and identity into the classroom". For learners in this class who came from black townships still riddled with the legacy of apartheid's forced evictions of black people from the cities into locations, such *transcendental* poetic movements between the classroom and the community, through dialogism, were sorely needed for learners to see poetry as an expression of identity.

The loss of dialogism in this classroom, owing to the absence of performance poetry pedagogy, resulted in learners enacting what Erikson (1968: 136) calls "a deep sense of isolation". Erikson (1968: 135-136) notes that adolescents experience "a deep sense of isolation" when they cannot connect with their "inner resources". If we understand "inner resources" to mean their feelings and thoughts, then it means that in a classroom where poetry pedagogy fails to elicit learners' feelings and thoughts about the subject of a poem being taught, learners inevitably suffer from a sense of isolation. This is synonymous to a sense of loss, not knowing what to do or why it is necessary to do it. Thus, the Grade 11 learners' refusal to participate in the discussion perfunctorily initiated by the teacher using the given questions in the prescribed anthology can be understood as a performance of their sense of isolation from the teacher, from the poem, and from each other. Effectively, by utilising a 'reading-in-silence' approach to poetry teaching, the teacher silenced the learners' voices, plunging them into an abyss of total loss from which they did not recover until the lesson ended.

Poetry pedagogy and poetry's political expressiveness

One of the intrinsic qualities of performance poetry is its political expressiveness – its ability to enlist audience support for a political cause. Political expression is a defining ethos of South African poetry and writers have enlisted poetry combined with elements of drama, prose narratives and oral performances over the years to protest against the colonial domination of black peoples in South Africa as well as to challenge the hegemony of the English language in

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poetic discourses (McClintock, 2007; Chapman, 2011; Decker, 2016; Mkhatshwa, 2017; Phalafala, 2019). This context of poetry in South Africa must influence the way poetry is taught in the English FAL classroom, precisely because these learners have inherited a legacy of political expressionism. Cooper (2020: 9) warns against "caricaturing African and South African poetry as only engaging with politics". While this is an important caution to remember, it is also important to note that politics is at the heart of poetic expression, because even seemingly a-political poems contain politicised messages (see Msila, 2022). Poetry pedagogy that is devoid of performance lacks the power to move learners into a state of political contemplation. What happens in an English FAL classroom that ignores performance poetry pedagogy is a loss of learner relatability to matters of social injustice. This was evident in Lesson Observation 1 and Lesson Observation 4 which featured politically rich poems.

In Lesson Observation 1, the anonymously authored poem "Shantytown" was taught. The teacher requested learners to take out their poetry anthologies. However, some of the learners did not have the textbook. Because this was during the Covid-19 pandemic, learners could not move closer to their classmates who had the textbook as they had to observe social distancing. So the lesson proceeded with several learners not having the poem in front of them. Even though the writer of this poem is anonymous, the poem has been categorised as a South African poem because of its representation of life in South Africa's urban townships and informal settlements.

The teacher told the learners that they were going to discuss the poem. She went on to read the poem and asked the learners to take out their pens and notebooks and write down the notes she was dictating. The teacher read the notes verbatim from the textbook. The Grade 11 poetry anthology has notes and activities for each of the poems included in it. After reading the notes to the learners, the teacher wrote questions on the chalkboard and instructed learners to answer them in their class workbooks. The questions were as follows:

1. Identify the figures of speech used in the poem and give examples.
2. Discuss the theme of the poem and give evidence from the poem.
3. What does Jabavu symbolise in South Africa?
4. State three things that will be different for Shantytown in the future.
5. Explain if the words "awake" and "asleep" are being used literally or figuratively. Provide reasons for your answer. (Lesson Observation, 21 March 2021)

The five questions above centre on figures of speech, thematic concerns, symbolism and diction in the poem. As in Lesson Observation 3 discussed in the preceding subsection, these questions tested learners' mastery of technical aspects of the poem rather than stir their emotions about the issues raised in the poem. The lesson ended without the teacher engaging the learners in the discussion she had promised them.

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Analysing the observed lesson, we argue first that the teacher's non-performance pedagogy paradoxically created the very same social injustice evident in the poem "Shantytown". Since some of the learners did not have the textbook in front of them, a joint performance of the poem by the teacher and the learners would have made all learners equal participants in the production of meaning in the poem. Mda (2009: 129) notes that within a performance, the stage becomes "a single site as the line of demarcation between actor and audience diminishes". In this English FAL classroom, the absence of poetic performance resulted in the loss of communal learning, as well as a socially just education, as the line between teacher and learners remained visible, enforcing a hierarchy that placed power in the hands of the teacher and objectified learners as empty vessels who had to be read to (Freire, 2018). Secondly, we note the loss of a political aesthetics as learners failed to relate to the poem owing to the absence of performance to help them connect with the political message of the poem. After reading the synopsis of the poem from the anthology, the teacher stated that "this poem talks about poverty and the harsh living conditions during winter for the people that stay in the informal settlements". Learners' response to this was a shuffling noise and some mimicking of the teacher's voice, suggesting a passive response, even though they were intimately familiar with poverty and harsh living conditions. Thus, the political ethos of the teacher's statement was lost on the learners. Anyidoho (2013) asserts that performance poetry is able to transform our consciousness into an arena of contending forces and challenge us to serve as jurors in a historical drama of social injustice. Social injustice was clearly presented in the poem "Shantytown", but the teacher's pedagogy, which sidelined performance, obviously could not create politically conscious learners with the confidence to give their verdict on the injustice. Significantly, there were more than three informal settlements around the school and some of the learners in this class actually lived in those settlements. The note-taking exercise, however, did not allow learners to engage personally with the poem's scathing attack on apartheid and its resultant legacy of inadequate housing in post-apartheid South Africa. With the absence of any kind of performance of the poem "Shantytown", learners' then lost out on developing their political consciousness.

In Lesson Observation 4, the poem "I Sit and I Look Out" was taught. This poem was written by Walt Whitman in 1860. The poem criticises the oppression of human beings by fellow human beings, presenting a surreptitious attack on slavery in the United States of America in the years before its abolishment. In addition, Whitman raises concerns about neglect of the elderly, the abuse of women, exploitation of the poor, famine, tyranny, pestilence, and war. These are all issues that should incite a politically charged conversation in the classroom. Interestingly, the teacher made an effort this time to read the poem with enthusiasm, raising her voice as she read some of the lines. The learners, however, did not pay much attention, evidently because it was unusual for them to hear her read in this way. Some giggled when the teacher stammered on a few words. The teacher then read the activity questions one by one and tried to initiate a discussion with the learners, but this did not work as there were no responses from the learners. Immediately, she then asked the learners to answer the questions in their workbooks. Few learners took out their workbooks to write. The rest were doing their own things. For example, two girls were helping each other to cover a book. The teacher showed no

interest in what the learners were doing as she stood by the door for the whole duration of the lesson, which was 45 minutes.

The issues raised by Whitman in this poem around human oppression and suffering were not alien to the everyday experiences of these English FAL learners, many of whom lived in poverty-stricken locations. Shame, self-damnation, unrequited love, unwanted pregnancies, gender violence, depression and hunger were part of their everyday experiences. The political expressiveness of this poem could have been heightened through performance (mimetic, musical or dialogic), thereby releasing the poem's potential to ignite the emotions of these learners and incite them to speak about possibilities for resolving these challenges in their own lives. Chapman (2011) notes that poetry is about possibilities, not impossibilities. For Irele (2007: 77), the "possibilities of orality" are precisely that they enable the poet to convey the "intimate relationship between language and consciousness, between expression and experience". The ideas of these two scholars are reminiscent of Freire's idea that liberatory education can create a world of possibilities for learners, as opposed to the oppressive banking education which imprisons naturally inquiring and curious minds in cells of silence and submission (Freire, 2018). Even though the teacher made an effort to read the poem using voice projection, her effort was lacking other elements of performance spelt out in the CAPS document, such as rhythm, pace and gestures (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Consequently, the learners, not being used to seeing her in performance, simply ignored her. What was lost in this classroom therefore were possibilities for learners' self-reflection that would have enabled them to define their own roles as young people in post-apartheid South Africa.

Based on Lesson Observation 1 and Lesson Observation 4, we argue that the non-performance poetry pedagogy is valueless in terms of adolescents' identity development because it does not stimulate their ego identity (Erikson, 1968) – their conscious sense of self, which should grow as they act out different roles in class performances. In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson (1977) notes that play offers children an opportunity to escape oppression through fantasies in which they adopt the roles that they desire e.g. the role of the liberated rather than the oppressed. Erikson (1977: 190) states: "play, then, is a function of the ego, an attempt to synchronize the bodily and the social processes with the self". As noted earlier, Erikson's use of the term play evokes the notion of performance or acting. We argue then that performance poetry pedagogy plays an important role in the Grade 11 English FAL classroom as it fosters the development of adolescents' ego identity. As learners act out different roles in poetic performances, they are able to synchronise their multiple identities – racial, social, cultural and religious – to develop their unique sense of self. By contrast, the absence of performance causes adolescent learners to experience "a pervading sense of stagnation, boredom, and interpersonal impoverishment" (Erikson, 1968: 138) since they do not get a chance to play, direct or choreograph poetic performances.

Poetry pedagogy and poetic enjoyment

Poetry performance is ultimately about enjoyment. Anyidoho (2007: 384) states that "the audience is anxious to be offered the pleasure of performance, just as the performer experiences a sense of personal satisfaction over a successful performance". When a poem is taken off the page and given life through a performance, both performer and audience experience poetic enjoyment, because "the dramatized poem is more deeply appreciated than the printed poem" (Anyidoho, 2007: 388). Reading a poem out loud with relish and enjoyment results in learners taking pleasure in listening and wanting more (Steele, 2014). In addition, the performance of a poem is "not mere entertainment, but a process that invests the poetic text with new meanings" (d'Abdon, 2016: 50). Such new meanings will not emerge in a poetry classroom where performance is absent. Where performance is absent, the classroom takes on the metaphor of a graveyard where poems are buried in print rather than a productive space where poems are cultivated, nurtured to growth and consumed with enjoyment. We draw evidence for this assertion from Lesson Observation 2.

In Lesson Observation 2, the poem taught was "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" by William Wordsworth. When the teacher walked into the classroom, learners were busy finishing up the previous lesson's work while others were talking to classmates sitting near them. Some learners did not quickly respond to the teacher's presence until she greeted them and asked them to take out their poetry textbooks. The teacher read the poem and asked the learners to answer the activity questions from the textbook.

Transcript 2: Lesson observation 2

Teacher: Today we are looking at the poem titled "Composed upon Westminster Bridge". Take out your *Vistas* and open page 23. (*Teacher reads the poem and the analysis notes while learners are quiet, but the facial expressions of some show that they are not focusing on what is happening in class.*) Now you can take out your classwork books and answer questions 1-5.
Learners: (*Some look at each other. Others keep staring at the teacher. Some pull out their books slowly from their bags. Others maintain the same postures they had while the reading was done.*)
Teacher: (*Walks around quietly*.)

As the transcript above shows, the teacher did not discuss the poem with the class and most learners sat quietly without writing. There was a palpable lack of interest in the poem from both the teacher and the learners.

This poem is a sonnet, with matching rhyme that gives it a lyrical quality. If one looks at this poem with African eyes, one would realise that it is a praise poem: Wordsworth was in awe of the city of London while standing on Westminster Bridge on an early morning and therefore sang its praises using beautiful imagery. In an English FAL poetry classroom with learners

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coming from backgrounds where oral poetry is common, as noted earlier, the orality of the African praise poem could have been enlisted in a dramatic rendition of this poem to help learners enjoy and appreciate the poem. According to Gunner (2007), praise poetry in Africa is not only used to narrate the genealogies of rulers and the histories of their kingdoms but also to capture close observations of the natural world. This sonnet which praises the natural world therefore offers learners ample opportunities to enjoy poetry. Lo Liyong (2018: 25) asserts that as Africans we have "poetic forms that the English could emulate" and that art forms lend themselves to rendition in other languages which open up the minds and hearts of the speakers of these languages to the realities conveyed by the original inventors. With a poetry pedagogy infusing music as prelude, background, refrain or epilogue (Anyidoho, 2007), or utilising a call-and-response tradition that engenders dialogue between performers and audience (Wainaina, 2012), or even translating the poem into an indigenous African language, this poem can be given life. However, this did not happen in the English FAL classroom observed and the result was a loss of poetic enjoyment for both the learners and the teacher.

Erikson (1977: 190-191) links play to enjoyment when he states: "when a man plays … he must feel entertained and free of any fear or hope of serious consequences". This suggests that play enables humans to rejuvenate their minds and bodies. Transposed to the English FAL classroom, it suggests that play in the form of poetry performances enables adolescent learners to access entertainment while learning at the same time. Drawing on Erikson (1968), we argue that poetic enjoyment can serve as one form of therapy for adolescents undergoing an identity crisis and assist them to deal with identity confusion, which Erikson identifies as a leading cause of school drop-out among adolescents. Combined with other useful pedagogies such as Freirean critical pedagogy, performance poetry pedagogy can become a mechanism for winning the minds of adolescent learners.

Poetry pedagogy and learner resistance

In all four lesson observations analysed in the previous subsections, learners were passive to what was being taught. The teacher's choice of pedagogy – the textbook-centred pedagogy – failed to arouse learners' interest in the poems. Learners' negative reactions to poetry have often been attributed to the difficulty of the language of poetry as well as the technocratic line-by-line reading approach to teaching it (Newfield & Maungedzo, 2006; Cooper, 2020; Newfield & Byrne, 2020). However, this understanding ignores an important consideration, namely, that adolescent learners are agentive citizens whose responses to educational processes are largely determined by their need for identity formation. These learners are going through processes of identity development and a significant part of this is their resistance to teaching and learning that does not enhance their identities or help them to figure out their place within their families, communities and society.

Erikson (1968) notes that the adolescent mind is an ideological one and it is constantly looking for inspiration from its environment. However, "should a young person feel that the environment tries to deprive him too radically of all the forms of expression which permit him

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to develop and integrate the next step, he may resist with the wild strength encountered in animals who are suddenly forced to defend their lives" (Erikson, 1968: 130). Based on Erikson's theorisation of adolescent identity development, we argue here that learners' passivity in the English FAL poetry classroom observed was a performance of their resistance to pedagogy that did not meet their identity needs. Identity performance, we note, are acts of self-expression – verbal and non-verbal – aimed at a target audience, consciously or subconsciously.

In the English FAL classroom, the learners communicated their resistance to non-performance poetry pedagogy through verbal and non-verbal performative acts. During Lesson Observation 1, while the teacher was dictating the textbook notes for the poem "Shantytown", some mumbling was heard showing that there were some learners who were complaining about the task that the teacher was giving. Some learners took down the notes in silence while others imitated the teacher's voice. Other learners stretched and yawned. Some girls played with their hair while others played with their pens. Many voices were only heard when the teacher posed a question which indirectly encouraged a chorus response, for example, "I hope you all know what is a frost, nee?" A thunderous response was heard, with most learners responding "Yes". We note that this type of response was not an indication of learners' immersion in the lesson but was intended to get the teacher to move on. Some learners even showed an element of boredom and mischief in the way that they dragged their "Yes". These reactions validate Freire's claim that when learners realise the contradictions in the deposits of knowledge that the teacher has made on them, "these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality" (Freire, 2018: 48). Such rebellion against teacher "domestication" is a performance of learners' identities.

Besides offering chorused, disengaged responses, learners also expressed their resistance to the pedagogy frankly. During Lesson Observation 3, a male learner was writing Maths during the English class. When questioned by the first author why he was doing that, he responded in isiZulu and explicitly said "*nginesithukuthezi*", meaning "I am bored". The learner did not want to be asked any further questions because after saying that he placed one hand on his left ear and continued writing Maths. Several studies have problematised the prescribed poetry in South African schools as largely western, old and male-dominated (Newfield & d'Abdon, 2015; d'Abdon, 2016; Bila & Abodunrin, 2020; Mavhiza & Prozesky, 2020). However, in this instance, it was the uninspiring pedagogy that made the learner to see poetry as boring. The teacher left the poem on the page and as a result learners felt alienated and lacked a sense of belonging in the poetry classroom. Poetry pedagogy that does not open up spaces for adolescent expressions of emotions and experiences – that simply requires learners to take notes or listen to bland readings of poems rather than involve them in the process of meaning-making through live performances – triggers in adolescents what Erikson (1977: 237) calls "a fear of ego-loss", which inevitably leads to "a deep sense of isolation and consequent self-absorption". Thus, the learners in this English FAL poetry class resisted the pedagogy by enacting behaviour that could be seen as rude.

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CONCLUSION

The findings presented above underpin a need for English FAL teachers to align poetry pedagogy with adolescents' identity needs, as this is crucial to affirming learners' sense of self. Performance poetry pedagogy has been presented as important in the English FAL poetry classroom where learners' indigenous cultures are enriched with oral performances. Without some form of performance, learners become disengaged from the lesson and in turn resort to verbal and non-verbal forms of resistance. This article has argued that while Grade 11 English FAL learners' passivity to poetry may be influenced by their apathy to the canon, their passivity must also be understood as a performance of their resistance to pedagogy that does little to enhance their linguistic and social identities. We also argue that the performed resistance of these learners points to a need to transform poetry education in South African schools by making performance poetry an integral part of English FAL. Teachers should enrich their pedagogies with slam poetry, spoken word poetry, recitals, musical poetry and other poetic performance forms to aid learners' comprehension and enjoyment of prescribed poems, to encourage learners' political engagement with poetry, and to minimise learners' passivity and resistance to poetry. It is in the power of performance poetry pedagogy to attract adolescent learners into the art of discourse making. The intersection between poetry as performance art and adolescent identity as performance is located precisely in poetic expressions of emotions and experiences that give young people a voice and sense of identity. Beyond the need to train English FAL teachers to practice performance poetry pedagogy in their classrooms, teachers also need to be self-motivated to create a learning environment that is not only enjoyable but also promotes social justice.

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