Training Actors' Voices and Decolonising Curriculum: Shifting Epistemologies

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Abstract

This chapter aims to add to ongoing conversations about the future of training actors' voices after #BlackLivesMatter protests [2020-2022] in the UK and US. In addressing the urgent call to 'decolonize curriculum' in UK actor training programmes, this chapter argues that voice training curriculum can/should begin at the grassroots, individual level. First, this chapter challenges voice trainers to critically reflect on their motivation for a 'decolonized curriculum' as the starting point for effective change. Next, co-authors advocate *co-authoring* a new curriculum, in part by centering lived experiences of the students and tutors that make up a given training space, instead of adapting pre-built training systems brought in from outside the classroom. Through a 'cultural voice' approach, each voice classroom can be understood as a uniquely developed composite of cultural knowledge. The shifting cultural knowledge of the individuals that make up the learning/teaching strategies is an ongoing, ever-changing, dynamic co-authorship of training curriculum between students and teachers. In this way, 'culture' becomes one of the fundamental 'materials' of training. Finally, co-authors call for a (re)valuation, an epistemological shift, in current mainstream popular voice training approaches and ask trainers and the institutions they work for to (re)consider the dynamic relationship of co-creating 'decolonized curriculum' together.

Introduction

In 2021, during the height of the BlackLivesMatter protests in the UK, an important book on a popular, certificate speech training approach was published: *Experiencing Speech: a Skill-based, Panlingual Approach to Actor Training: A Beginner's Guide to Knight-Thompson Speechwork®* (Caban et al. 2021). Its aim is 'to see this work taken up across languages and cultures, translated and continually reimagined as a panlingual approach' (ibid: xiv). It was marketed on the back cover as 'a method that focuses on universal and inclusive speech training for actors from all language, racial, cultural and gender backgrounds and identities' (ibid). During a moment when UK and US drama students were calling for their actor training to address the intricacies of intersectional identities and the multiplicities of positionalities, can/should one training approach address 'all language, racial, cultural and gender backgrounds and identities'? Why should a voice/speech curriculum be 'a universal approach' (ibid: preface)? Carefully pinpointing this key premise and using it as a *departure point*, we argue here that this value is not unique to this one text, but can be linked to other mainstream, popular training approaches that also value applications of 'universalism' in contemporary voice training practice.[1] The

premise of the book is deeply problematic: the idea that universalism invites inclusivity. This is also a key principle rooted in Anglo-American voice and speech training since the 1960s and embedded in some of the most popular voice training approaches in the UK and US, voice training manuals and voice teacher certification programmes.[2] The premise of this speech training manual emerges out of a larger epistemology that embraces this value.

This training text is also an example of a growing trend towards certification of voice teaching methodologies, some of which are trademarked like Knight-Thompson Speechwork. Other private certifications, such as Linklater and Rodenburg teacher training certifications also incorporate applications of 'universalism' in their pedagogical and business models. Here, universalism is used as a business model in which values embedded within teaching practice are framed by their monetary value in the context of private practice (McAllister-Viel 2019: 159). This essay argues ethical concerns surrounding access when these private business models are introduced into public training institutions. Also, there is a concern that when independent certification programmes create intimate relationships with academic institutions, voice and speech training becomes homogenized at an institutional level. Building on Gurkiran Kaur Wariabharaj's study into voice certification programmes (Wariabharaj 2021), co-authors argue that training institutions will struggle to 'decolonize curriculum' when a large part of the curriculum build happens off-site of the institution within a certification programme that may have no external oversight, validation requirements, Equality, Diversity, Inclusivity, and Accessibility+ code of practice in place, or student support services to mediate student voice trainers' complaints.

This essay aims to unfold how 'universalism' functions as a key principle underpinning many popular voice training practices within UK conservatoires and by extension any program in universities and drama schools beyond the UK that also places applications of 'universalism' at the centre of their curriculum. Another aim is to challenge conversations surrounding popular voice training approaches which write into their histories the myth of inclusivity and diversity of methods, in which 'today's actors, singers and performers have a wealth of techniques to choose from' (Gener 2010: 33). Finally, this essay calls for an investigation into the relationship between voice certification programmes and training institutions, asking 'do institutions really understand what they are asking for when they request a particular certification?' (Burke in Hampton & Acker 1997: 57).

As co-authors who specialise in training actors' voices within conservatoires (both in the UK and the US), we locate ourselves within the contexts of our current posts at actor training institutions. We also bring our intersectional identities as a lens through which we critically examine our intimate subject knowledge of voice pedagogy, specific educational practices in voice within institutional settings, and the current call to 'decolonize curriculum' in actor training. In positioning ourselves we offer these descriptions: Brown identifies as a black, cis-gender, gay,

neurodiverse male in his early sixties. McAllister-Viel is a white, cis-gender, queer, neurodiverse female in her late 50s that identifies as a feminist. Both co-authors work in highly competitive actor training conservatoires in public institutions and work professionally as actors in both the UK and the US. Our teaching language is English within our training studios.

Ultimately, the co-authors hope to add to ongoing transatlantic conversations on 'decolonizing curriculum' through provocations for discussion with targeted questions on the possibility and nature of epistemological shifts within institutional voice training for actors.

Conversations surrounding change in actor training

During the 20th century, not only has actor training undergone great change but also the role of voice in actor training has been reimagined (Boston 2018). Cicely Berry, former Voice Director for the Royal Shakespeare Company for over 30 years, noted 'a changing theatre culture' (Berry 2001: 29) during her career, which shifted voice pedagogy away from the values of the 'voice beautiful' approach to the establishment of a 'natural/free' voice approach in the 60s and 70s (McAllister-Viel 2019: 43-46; Kimbrough 2011; Martin 1991).

Voice pedagogy is posed at another seismic shift in training towards more explicit anti-racist, and culturally competent curriculum. For example, Ann Cahill and Christine Hamel's recently published *Sounding Bodies: Identity, Injustice and the Voice*, 'call for voice pedagogues to question every aspect of teaching and coaching practices' (2022: 1). Their work offers 'a set of theoretical principles and frameworks out of which new practices may be born' allowing trainings to 'increase attunement to various forms of vocal injustice' (ibid). Amy Mihyang Ginther's edited collection *Stages of Reckoning: Antiracist and Decolonial Actor Training* aims to 'provide readers with theoretical contexts of how actors' bodies and voices intersect with existing acting methodologies and texts so they can adapt Eurocentric material in ways that are less harmful' (2023: 2). Cynthia Santos DeCure and Micha Espinosa's recently published *Latinx Actor Training* offers a text that was 'born out of the urgent need to address the inequities of training that we experienced and witnessed in academia and the industry. . . we saw our students perpetually measured by Eurocentric values' (2023: 1). The text aims to 'reimagine and restructure the practice of actor training by inviting culturally inclusive forms and deep investigation into heritage and identity practices' specifically addressing explorations of linguistic identity among its offerings (Santos DeCure & Espinosa 2023:1).

One of the most notable shifts in conversations around contemporary voice training is the foregrounding of the lived experience of race, gender, dis/ability, accent/dialect and language preference as well as other complex identity markers as fundamental to the ways voice trainers think and talk about voice practice. Acknowledging the positionality of the teacher and the

student in the make-up of the teaching/learning model moves away from assumptions that teacher and student share a 'universal' experience of living and interacting in the world.

Voice trainers Espinosa and Antonio Ocampo-Guzman offer their embodied experiences of race and language preference as Latinos in critiquing the ways 'very few actor-training programs are able or willing to understand the complex navigation of identity—an integral part of the Latino experience' (2010: 150). Nina Sun Eidsheim's methodological approach to her research interweaves 'insights offered by scholarship on race and gender' with her own voice training and teaching and lived experiences of race and gender (2015: 11;15). She wrote, 'My thinking has also been informed by the contradictory ways my voice has been read, depending on whether the listener has access to visual (Korean) or sonic (Scandinavian accent) cues' (Eidsheim 2015: 14).

Previously, the application of 'universalism' through a biomedical model was how exercises could transfer from teacher to student. Former Head of Voice at the National Theatre (England, UK), Patsy Rodenburg, wrote, '[o]ne of the delights of being a voice teacher is that I can teach in any language... anywhere in the world. The anatomical principles of the voice are the same in each place, the main body of sound the same' (Rodenburg 1992: 268). Her specific application of universalism suggested an inclusive pedagogy, but it did so through an over-reliance on body as a stable site for learning in which anatomy was the 'essential' category effacing cultural relativism (McAllister-Viel 2007: 99). This did not invite students to engage with difference, differently-abled bodies, and different cultural influences on bodies/voices.

A (re)consideration of voice practice challenges the impeachability of the techniques themselves, particularly the value of a 'universal' voice training approach which underpins practice as a key principle. Berry wrote in her first training manual (1973) that the exercises 'appearing in this book are foolproof' (17). Three years later, voice trainer Kristin Linklater wrote in her first training manual that '[t]he framework of the exercises is impeccably designed and has an enduring potency' (1976: 2) Rodenburg wrote in 2000, 'I and others work this way because we intend to keep a tradition alive, and we know it is the best experience for an actor' (373).

When UK actor training came under critical examination during #BlackLivesMatter protests, a 2021 Guardian article asked 'are centuries of stagecraft about to be sacrificed?' (Thorpe 2021). The concern about *sacrificing* stagecraft points to anxiety surrounding curriculum change and joins previous conversations about training that assume this 'tradition' is sound. Conversations that frame voice practices as part of 'the centuries of stagecraft' representing a 'tradition' that is 'the best experience for an actor' comprised of exercises that are 'foolproof' create, over decades, a discourse that seems to suggest this way of working propels itself forward through the strength of the exercises. Voice trainer Ginther's 2015 article 'Disconscious Racism in Mainstream British Voice Pedagogy and its Potential Effects on Students from Pluralistic Backgrounds in UK Drama Conservatoires' was a landmark article calling for 'a more engaged

and critical consciousness surrounding mainstream British voice pedagogy and its assumptions given the increasingly diverse populations within the conservatoire classrooms' (41).

Conversations critiquing dominant voice training culture have been building for decades, including critiques from co-authors Brown and McAllister-Viel (Brown 2000; 2001; McAllister-Viel 2007; 2009; 2016; 2019). What, then, is the beginning point for current 'decolonizing curriculum' efforts? What reasons exist now for decolonizing curricula that haven't always existed?

Co-author Stan Brown notes that he attended more diversity and inclusion workshops at his current training institution within the six months following George Floyd's murder than in his entire 27-year career. More specifically, if BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Color] allies want change now, why didn't they want it before George Floyd's murder? What was it about that one wrongful death among so many others that made it necessary to suddenly act? Along with the global surge in diversity and inclusion workshops, there has been a global surge in the curiosity among BIPOC about the motivations of BIPOC allies who are suddenly seeking change.

One premise of this essay is that significant change begins with the individuals that make up and run training institutions and contribute to the structural racism that exists on an institutional level. Here, co-author Stan Brown (henceforth SB) offers a series of provocations as part of a reflective exercise. The aim is for the individual trainer to explore one's motivation as the foundation for grass-roots change, placing this as the starting point for curriculum change and development. In this way, the 'changing theatre culture' that Berry noted during her time as a voice trainer moves away from mapping historical landmarks of key training developments towards more interpersonal, individual agency.

SB: One provocation I offer for a deeper understanding of why transparency of motivations is desired is this: if you are in an abusive relationship and are fortunate enough to escape, what would you do if the abuser returned and wanted to be in your life again? If your response isn't an unequivocal NO, you would likely be curious about your abuser's motivations. Why now? What has changed? It is important to note that this provocation is not about assigning all white people the role of abuser. Rather, it is about recognizing that those who have been abused are likely to have conditions or boundaries in place to protect themselves from the possibility of further abuse.

I believe that in order to inspire and inform external action, we must prioritize a conscious cultivation of internal awareness. This is not only about undoing centuries of colonial programming and structure, but also about validating the experiences of BIPOC students. Before suggesting curriculum decolonization strategies, I suggest that all educators take a moment to

reflect on their own complicity in colonization — not as an exercise in assigning blame, but as an opportunity to increase personal awareness and, where applicable, meditate on the notion of taking responsibility. I envision this meditation inspiring creative focus and direction for Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, official corporate statements on race, DEI goal accountability checklists, policy templates, and YouTube videos on decolonizing your syllabus.

A second provocation: if I come across someone starving, beaten, wounded and lying in the streets, how might it be perceived if my first instinct was to take a poll or organize a brainstorming session about how to help instead of taking immediate action to provide aid and support? Unfortunately, many diversity and inclusion events can feel performative, as if we are merely being asked to witness a performance of people talking about doing positive things. This can leave BIPOC feeling mocked or lied to by their colleagues especially when there is little or no tangible progress in the workplace environment after the DEI events end. When I detect this perceived lack of authenticity at DEI events, I instinctively distance myself from the seemingly well-intentioned people around me.

A final provocation: What does it mean if I react negatively when a repeatedly mistreated dog, whom I am trying to help, does not trust me? Despite my pure and positive motivations and intentions, could it be that I am more concerned with reinforcing something positive I believe about myself than I am with providing the dog with nourishment? What does this say about my motivations for offering the dog food?

Before embarking on the process of decolonizing the curriculum, I believe it is essential to prioritize the conscious cultivation of internal awareness as a means of inspiring and informing external action. It is important to ask ourselves: is change truly desired? What is the motivation behind this desire? How can we ask ourselves the right questions without passing judgment? How can we differentiate between what we truly want and what we think others want us to want? How can we ensure that our response is not influenced by what others want for us? While compassion for another's emotional state and well-being can be catalysts for positive change and action, I believe one's primary focus should remain on their own internal awareness and experience of - how do I feel? What do I think? What do I believe?

I understand that these provocations require an unprecedented level of self-reflection and transparency from many. That is, in the intimate space of my own awareness, where I don't have to share information with anyone else, what do I truly desire? I believe many would be disconcerted to discover that they don't actually want change. (White) privilege would not be an issue if many were not thriving within what has always been the norm.

My use of 'privilege' extends beyond 'White' privilege. That one word ‘White’ coming from me instead of (co-author) Tara makes a HUGE difference. Coming from me, it’s an indictment and an accusation that (angry or not) puts me in a position to be labeled as angry (upset, unhappy, frustrated, etc). While White people may use privilege in ways that are unique to their identity, I prefer to leave 'privilege' open here. This is because I have strong convictions about not writing from a place of anger and outrage. I strive to avoid it. I believe that it can obscure clarity and compromise the kind of language and perspective I want to access when I'm trying to communicate, collaborate, and learn along with others.

If the norm rewards and reinforces behaviors that perpetuate sameness or impede progress towards change, why would I openly admit a preference for sameness? These provocations are intended to enable individuals to explore their personal truth (even if it is a preference for sameness) without judgement, before taking any external action. I believe that the lack of progress in many diversity and inclusion initiatives is due to people taking action before understanding, aligning with, and being guided by their core motivations. In addition, evaluation mechanisms must return to these issues to check if change has actually taken place.

When I started writing this portion of our essay, my plan of contemplative action was to engage an Affinity Group of Black colleagues in a dialogue about our motivations for change — interrogating each other to gain clarity and developing a template and process along the way. The hope was that by sharing our outcomes with the full faculty and inviting them to join us, we might create a shared focus and direction for curriculum reform that was truly authentic. While some faculty have eagerly embraced the inherent challenges of evolving beyond outdated paradigms, others view and openly characterize the work of positive change as inconvenient and disruptive. What has resulted is a one-step-forward-two-steps-back effect where progress is concerned. While the MFA suite of programs that I am a part of at Northwestern University has created a DEI community that is being modeled university-wide, all attempts to engage in dialogue about undergraduate admissions' long-standing disparity between white and BIPOC student population numbers have abruptly ceased without explanation. However frustrating or discouraging, it remains essential for us to continue striving for a more equitable and inclusive educational environment.[3]

There is an enormous amount of work ahead. I’m advocating for work that results from inspired rather than forced action. Action aligned with the genuine desire for positive change. Action which acknowledges that those for whom a decolonized curriculum is intended and who will be most helped by it need healing before they can join in partnership with those, however well-meaning, who seek to decolonize.

Homogeneity in popular voice training approaches.

Building on Stan's provocations, we aim in this section to expose how many popular voice training approaches, despite claims of diversity and inclusivity, actually homogenize training, creating harmful learning environments. We investigate two specific issues we feel need unfolding before 'decolonizing curriculum' efforts move forward : applications of 'universalism' in mainstream, contemporary voice pedagogy and the problematic relationship between private voice teacher certification programmes and their implementation into public sector actor training institutions.

Anglo-American voice training writes into its history a particular characterization of diversity of training approaches. This characterization suggests that there are training techniques to address difference in the classroom. One example of such popular discussions is the *American Theatre* special issue on vocal training for the actor, which writes that '[t]hanks to these voice visionaries [Cicely Berry, Catherine Fitzmaurice, Arthur Lessac, Kristin Linklater, Patsy Rodenburg], today's actors, singers and performers have a wealth of techniques to choose from' (Gener 2010: 33). The implication is that each trainer represents a different approach and so there are many different ways to train an actor's voice.

However, of the five leading trainers cited in the *American Theatre* special issue, four received their foundational training at two London-based acting conservatoires between 1946-1970: Cicely Berry, Catherine Fitzmaurice and Patsy Rodenburg graduated from Central School of Speech and Drama and Linklater graduated from London Academy of Dramatic Art. This situates contemporary voice training for actors in a particular socio-cultural and historical place.

Berry, Fitzmaurice and Linklater all returned to their alma maters to teach voice and all four cite the former Head of Voice at their institutions as having a major influence on their teaching. Later, when developing their approaches, the four pedagogues would interact, for instance, Berry and Rodenburg would work together for nine years at the Royal Shakespeare Company. They all wrote book chapters for the same seminal voice studies collections (Saklad 2011; Hampton and Acker 1997; Armstrong and Pearson 2000). They delivered workshops and lectures together at international conferences (2007 Performance Breath conference, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, London, England, UK; 2009 Voice and Speech Trainers' Association conference, NYC, USA; 2009 Theatre Noise conference Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London, England, UK).

It is not a coincidence that these master trainers share the same or similar key principles, practices, and values, particularly the idea that 'the human voice' is the 'same everywhere' (Rodenburg 1992: 107, 268); 'the voice is the voice' (Berry 2010: 122); 'I want to highlight the fact that voice is universal and speech is cultural, --all humans have lungs, diaphragm, resonators, vocal folds. . .' (Linklater, 2019). Through its emphasis on universal, "human" anatomy and physiology, "the" body becomes the common denominator for the transference of

skills between bodies/voices (Aiken 1900: 2-3; Berry 1973: 14; Martin 1991: 37). As such, they suggest that the commonality of bodily structures, muscle function and other materials of voice help their practices cross cultures and discipline-specific contexts.

Shifting from the value of 'universalism' towards valuing a 'cultural voice' and a 'cultural ear'

Liz Mills, who teaches in the commonwealth nation of South Africa, addressed the impact of Empire on voice pedagogy at University of Cape Town, where she taught. She wrote of her experiences applying Berry's approach to Shakespearian text to 'the South African English speaking student actor' (Mills 1999: 102). She wrote, 'For [Berry] all the foundational properties of voice become circumscribed predominately by Shakespeare's texts and by the ethos of the RSC [Royal Shakespeare Company]' (Mills 1999: 102). Mills noted that when Berry discussed the energy of the line, meaning Shakespearian verse (iambic pentameter), this is 'described as close to the rhythm of conversational speech,' which 'will be present as a consciously registered pulse for those [RSC] actors in a way that it would not be for the South African English speaking student actor, for example, whose tendency is towards more emphatic stress patterns' (Mills 1999: 102).[4] Instead, Mills argued the centrality of voice in relation to culture. Mill's writing aggravated the binary between 'universal' voice and cultural speech (Linklater 2019) and noted an 'ethos' or value system underpinning the training. She wrote,

> The voice as sonic image signifies meaning in performance. When the making of vocal meaning and the signifying of vocal meaning are held central to the act of theatre, then the voice can be conceived of as having multiple sonic possibilities. The term 'sonic' used here to suggest that the voice is present as a sound image as well as being present as spoken text or vocal gesture (Mills 1999: 3).

Mills' argument first de-centered Berry's use of Shakespearian text as 'universal,' in which iambic pentameter is characterized as the 'rhythm of conversational speech' by questioning who's speech pattern would this apply? Then Mills disrupted the idea of the "universal" voice by suggesting that if 'voice is present as a sound image' that carries meaning apart from the meaning language brings, then de-coding the "sonic" image" becomes another kind of language that needs a *cultural ear* to hear and understand the *cultural voice* it listens to. The listener must be able to adapt within this sonic sign-system in order to understand the nuances of sound just as a speaker is with the nuances of spoken word. Kreiman and Sidtis note,

> Because human voices transmit spoken language from the speaker to listeners, the relationship of voice to language has long been of interest to linguists. Early theorist often distinguished the linguistic from the nonlinguistic aspects of spoken message and did not consider voice quality a part of language (Kreiman and Sidtis 2013: 260).

However, recently 'substantial evidence indicates that familiarity with the talker's voice facilitates deciphering the spoken message itself' (Kreiman and Sidtis 2013: 261). The oral/aural feedback loop between speaker and listener suggests that a "cultural ear" is the counterpoint to a

"cultural voice." Because spoken language is linked to its delivery, vocal characteristics 'operate at all levels of language structure' (Kreiman and Sidtis 2013: 261). In this context, Linklater's assertion that 'voice is universal and speech is cultural' creates a false binary for our purposes here. This further evidences the need for intersectional approaches to voice training which understands the interwoven influences of multiple cultural contexts within voice and speech curriculums.

In 2015, Eidsheim took up a similar idea of listening as an experience by a listener who is enculturated in a given way, within a larger system in which sounds and their meanings are shaped by cultural, economic and political contexts (Eidsheim 2015: 5-6) . Jennifer Lynn Stoever's T*he Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening* (2016) offered further investigations into the ways in which structural injustices create relational experiences to sounding and listening. By 2021, voice trainers, like Daron Oram, reflected on the ways in which they and their students were trained in both off-stage spaces and drama school spaces towards a "sonic norm," a phrase adapted from the work of sociologist Nirmal Puwar (Oram, 2021). Cahill and Hamel have extended Eidsheim's investigation to explicitly unfold the ways voicing and listening are 'policed' and are framed through structural injustices, specifically using feminist and race theory (Cahill and Hamel 2022).

Within actor training, when/if the student actor learns to first understand their own voice in off-stage spaces then craft from this a voice for a character, one can understand voice training on multiple different levels of singular and plural experiences from off-stage, through training, and into on-stage settings. The psychophysical act of voicing/listening, e.g. aural/oral feedback loops which exists between the mouth and ear of the speaker in order to monitor and guide voicing/speech/singing (a singular model of experience), eventually extends to the aural/oral feedback loop between speaker's mouth and another listener's ear (a plural model of experience) during performance. Thus, as the actor is speaking the singular aural/oral experience occurs simultaneously with the plural aural/oral experience between actor and audience. These interwoven experiences, along with other expectations, such as aesthetic *traditions*, are set within larger performance frameworks and are judged through a set of values, or what voices "should" do under these conditions.[5] The voice(s) and ear(s) of actors and audience members carry with them particular socio-cultural and historical contexts and in this way can be understood as embodiments and reenactments of cultural values and ideas of what a voice can/should be and what a voice can/should do. Stan Brown's and Liz Mills' work helps shift the binary of universal voice and cultural speech towards an understanding of "cultural voice."

Brown coined the term 'cultural voice' to characterize his work and articulated part of his developing practice in his first Voice and Speech Review article (Brown 2000). He aimed to de-center universalism while also questioning how difference is understood in speech. He wrote, 'Casting a generalized version of reality to portray universal truth is dishonest. . . Both students

and teachers bring a unique bank of vocal experiences to voice and speech work. A simple formulaic solution cannot exist to address the witting or unwitting biases of traditional Eurocentric voice and speech training' (Brown 2000: 18). "Universality" as a generalized version of reality is 'dishonest' in part because it tends to place Euro-centric values and ways of working as an assumed assessable point of departure for all learners. A 'cultural voice', then, as a practical method to displace Eurocentrism in training, attempts to develop a more individualistic approach based on the vocal experiences of students and teachers instead of applying a formulaic solution. This means that **each voice classroom is made up of the plural and intersectional identities of each person and is a uniquely developed composite of cultural knowledge.** Designing curriculum within this context means that **the shifting cultural knowledge of the individuals that make up the learning/teaching strategies is an on-going, ever-changing, dynamic co-authorship between students and teachers.**

How do the dynamics of such a co-authorship of curriculum emerge within institutional settings that may worry 'centuries of stagecraft are about to be sacrificed' or rely on importing pre-built exercises from certification programmes?

Co-authorship in the classroom in comparison to adaptations of private pre-designed curriculum built off-site and brought into public institutions.

Kate Burke in Hampton and Acker's *Vocal Vision* (1997) wrote in her chapter 'On Training and Pluralism':

> A few years ago ARTSEARCH announced a voice and speech position at a West Coast university, an appealing post in a lush setting... Then, my heart sank as I read on to find a particular kind of training specified in the announcement. Could I apply? Should I apply? Would my application even be considered? ... I want neither myself nor my work labelled with someone else's name... Labels are seductively spare and one-dimensional. Do administrators and theatre trainers call for Berry, Lessac, or Linklater training without a working knowledge of these approaches? (1997: 57-59).

25 years after Burke published her questions, they are still relevant today. If a large part of the curriculum built for voice training happens off-site of an institution and within a private certification programme, how does the institution know what's on offer and integrate this curriculum into their present curriculum, their mission statement, and their Equality, Diversity, Inclusivity, Accessibility, Plus [EDIA+]code of practices? Within UK training conservatoires, curriculum is reviewed each year through external examination, and usually every five years through a validation requirement, such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education [QAA], an independent charity working to benefit students and higher education by working with higher education providers and regulatory bodies to maintain and enhance quality and

standards.[6] The National Student Survey, taken each year by graduating actors, can act as a monitoring system for what works and what does not work within a teaching system. Other mechanisms such as "report and support" offer anonymous reporting of abuse at the school-level. Within Student Unions, officers are elected to represent the specific concerns of black students, female students, LGBTQIA+ students, and students who are differently abled. Although these mechanisms exist in different forms at the co-authors' own institutions, we are not suggesting they represent a gold standard and we are not advocating that private certification programmes simply adopt public institutional mechanisms.

Student protests during 2020-21 demonstrated that current university and conservatoire institutional structures across the sector do not capture and address racism adequately, and similar movements have exposed persistent sexism. However, for many private certification programmes there is little or no oversight from a monitoring, external body. Historically, the internal structures of certification programmes offer access to training direct with the founding teacher. There is no student union to mediate complaints between student and teacher or an anonymous report and support service. The power relationship is heavily in favour of the founder of the programme and can become more difficult to negotiate when the training is offered at their personal estate, sometimes located in retreat-style, remote locations.[7]

In Burke's chapter she began by describing her experience answering a job advert on ARTSEARCH which asked for a specific certification to fill the role. Over the years we have seen the role of certifications within job adverts move from optional to required. There seems to be a tendency for an institution to use the qualifications of the former post-holder as a template for the job advert. For example, if the former tutor was Linklater certified (even if that tutor did not begin the role as Linklater certified but earned that certification mid-career) the job advert asks to replace the out-going post-holder with another Linklater certified tutor. This means what was once an additional qualification now becomes mandatory for that teaching post. In this way, an institution creates a "tradition" of training in a particular way which becomes a gate-keeping mechanism. Within this context, how does an institution's voice training break free from "tradition" and offer other, perhaps very different, approaches to training?

One interview participant in Wariabharaj's Practice as Research project on certification programmes commented, 'I often see this on job listings, that they want you to have a certification in one of these methods. [. . .] so I did the certification [. . .] Certified western voice practices have had a monopoly on who gets to work in actor training' (Wariabharaj 2021: 29). And from another interview participant, 'Quite frankly, you're not going to get the job in the States unless you've got either [Fitzmaurice or Linklater] certification' (Ibid). Interviewees in Wariabharaj's research expressed feelings of not having a choice but to certify in order to get a job in a tough teaching market, in which certification is explicitly or implicitly demanded. This creates a

relationship between training institutions and certification programmes in which both profit at the expense of the individual.

A certification could help a post-holder with pay and promotion. But the tendency is for the post-holder to pay out-of-pocket for rather expensive tuition and find the time to train, sometimes for years, while holding down a full-time voice teaching role, in the hope that the promotion committee will award a promotion based on this extensive professional development. Very few institutions will pay full tuition for further education or grant sabbatical leave to train full-time. On top of workshop fees, transport, per diem expenses and accommodation expenses some would also have to afford additional costs, like childcare or carers expenses. Many institutions will not accept childminding and carers fees as reimbursable receipts for professional development.[8]

Christine Hamel, a Linklater certified trainer, critiqued her experiences in this certification programme when she wrote:

> Most teachers in my own training background (Linklater voice) are white, middle-class ciswomen, that the senior teachers who mentor trainees are typically 50+ in age. That most certified teachers of this pedagogy have had the economic means to become a designated teacher, either privately or through tuition-based higher degree programs (both paths require a 20,000 USD or more investment) speaks to a general picture of values, standards, tastes, and ideals (2022: 137).[9]

Wariabharaj found in her research that 'the intersection of money and time equate to . . . white privilege' and 'the authority of white privilege is directly connected to having full access' (2021: 32). Hamel also noted that:

> [b]ecause many of the teachers in this group come from privileged demographics, their values are likely to converge as the dominant values of the pedagogical culture. These values have material implications for the ways in which their students will take up embodiment and vocal ways of being in the world (2022: 137).

Wariabharaj's research and Hamel's reflections speak directly to the measurable outcomes that value systems hold within training models and become crafted into the bodies/voices of student actors through a notion of "stagecraft." Building on their work, we argue that private certification based training integrated into well-established drama programmes become part of the "tradition" of the school. Voice teachers are recruited to teach voice in a particular way, according to their certified training. Certification becomes one of the gatekeepers of the values of dominant cultures and perpetuates dominant ideologies. Because certification programmes and training institutions are also businesses, capital is at stake: certification programmes depend on placing alum in popular,

well-recognized drama schools as evidence of the quality and efficacy of their training. Public sector actor-training institutions have come to depend on out-sourcing the development of their curriculum, moving certification from optional to required. Voice teachers, who can spend thousands of their own income on training, are not guaranteed a teaching post or promotion but are recruited to uphold a training culture. Co-authors call for a serious (re)examination of these relationships.

Conclusion

This essay calls for a (re)valuation, an epistemological shift, in current mainstream popular voice training approaches and asks trainers and the institutions they work for to (re)consider the dynamic relationship of creating decolonized curriculum together. This article challenges voice trainers to critically reflect on their motivation for a decolonized curriculum as the starting point for effective change. It also interrogates the myth of diversity of techniques, specifically the application of 'universalism' as a problematic pedagogical model. Finally, this essay critiques relationships between public institutions and private certification programmes. In order to address the urgent call to decolonize curriculum in UK actor training programmes, this essay contributes to ongoing conversations that centre lived experiences of intersectional identities in advocating for ways trainers should think about, talk about and practice voice training.

If cultivating a 'cultural voice' is reliant on the unique cultural knowledge of the student(s) and teacher(s) in a given classroom, then culture becomes one of the materials of training, a core consideration that needs time and space and funding to develop. Voice training exercises have the potential to open up important means of cultural inclusion and ground anti-oppressive curriculum. Centuries of stagecraft are not about to be sacrificed, but they are changing as part of ongoing, necessary and perpetual change in a changing actor training culture.

This essay has argued that this changing actor-training culture can/should begin on an interpersonal level, as individual trainers, who people institutions and implement the training, forge change on a grass-roots level. Moving from individual responsibility, we then call on institutions to (re)consider their relationships with certification programmes as fundamental to decolonizing curriculum efforts.

SB: In my 1997 opening address to the International Symposium on Voice and Speech (Miami University), I delivered the following:

> I stand before you today a textbook case study in what can result from an unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy. However unconscious, through a combination of formal training and a lot of passive, mass media programming, I learned to expect my students to adapt to white cultural standards. More specifically, I was making my students conform

> in their sounds of speech to what I'd been programmed to unquestioningly embrace as "correct" or "standard."
>
> Then, at some point during my time with Richard Armstrong[10], I began to question my reasons for not listening deeper than a student's dialect and accent. I began to question my thoughts and habits of using speech sounds from white culture as the standard against which speech sounds of all other cultures were judged. Ultimately my questioning blossomed into rebellion. I had to change. Although it was considered unorthodox in my field, I decided to decentralize standard English in my voice and speech work. What if I no longer led with a fixed template and expectations of what speech should be prior to the utterance of sound? What if "the standard" and point of departure I employed in my work was a consciously cultivated, fully alive, and in-the-moment presence with the range, volume, depth, energy, and power of the human voice? How might that shift my perspective and my concept of "improvement" and "growth"?

My decision to reform my teaching approach was met with harsh criticism from many colleagues and students. I was considered something of a heretic and charlatan in my professional organization and yet, where doing my work was concerned, I'd never been happier.

I don't believe I will ever be considered or will consider myself "mainstream" in my field. I also don't believe there's one best or right way for actors to train. I do believe that disagreement should always exist. Having a different opinion from others doesn't mean that others shouldn't have their opinions. Case in point, when I was a graduate acting student a voice and speech teacher told me that I could never speak Shakespeare because the English language didn't belong to Black people. I assume my teacher knew enough history to know that she'd descended from a culture and ethnicity of people who'd kidnapped and sold another culture and ethnicity of people into slavery. Yet she chose to tell me that the language my ancestors were forced by her ancestors to speak would never be spoken at an acceptable standard by anyone with my skin color. Many will disagree, but my teacher's opinion wasn't the problem. The real problem, as I saw it, was my teacher suggesting that her opinion become my reality.

I sometimes wish that teachers had an equivalent to the principal precepts of bioethics, which states, "first, do no harm." Unfortunately, no such precept exists. Unfortunately, inherent racism still exists in voice and speech training. Unconscious bias pervades the academy, reflected in toxic beliefs and practices that equate competence with ethnicity and culture. Fortunately, students are recognizing and calling out racism in their training more frequently than when I was a student. This gives me deep hope and I encourage students to continue paying attention to and questioning the origins of any training which appears to have a goal of achieving homogeneity.

[1] Co-authors are sensitive to the concerns that by critiquing this one premise it may appear they are critiquing the book as a whole, or critiquing KTS Speech training as a system. Instead, the aim here is to pinpoint this specific premise as a departure point for discussing what they argue is part of an value system that can be linked to other mainstream, popular approaches to training actors' voices which adapt, in their own ways, 'universalism'.
[2] Authors will return to evidence this later in the chapter.
[3] Dermot Daly takes up a similar question within a UK context with his article 'Actions speak louder than words. An investigation around the promises and the reality of representation in actor training,' in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training,* 2002, 13:4 (pp. 554-572). In his article he asks if the statements of support for #BlackLivesMatter that UK drama schools released in 2020-21 were followed through with measurable change.
[4] This also raises additional questions for international students training in English as a Second or Other Language [ESOL], students who train with differently abled speech, and students who are neurodiverse. We invite the reader to reflect on Berry's use of 'every day speech' as a characterization that frames one particular speech pattern as an accessible, common experience but which many students may have difficulty accessing.
[5] Also see Evi Stamatiou (2023) 'A Screen Actor Prepares: Self-Taping by Reversing Stanislavsky's Method of Physical Actions,' in *Stanislavski Studies: Practice, Legacy, and Contemporary Theatre*, vol 11, issue 1. She argues that self-taping offers the actor the opportunity to listen back to one's voice and evaluate it as an audience member might, asking what their voice "should" do, or what would be expected by their voice within a given context.
[6] https://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us#:~:text=The%20Quality%20Assurance%20Agency%20for,and%20enhance%20quality%20and%20standards.
[7] The Patsy Rodenburg Associate Programme (PRA) training takes place 'on Patsy's farm in Portugal' https://patsyrodenburg.co.uk/teachers/ accessed 22 June 2022. Training in Linklater Voice takes place at the Linklater Voice Centre built adjacent to Kristin's house in Orkney, Scotland https://www.linklatervoice.com/kristin-linklater-voice-centre/about-the-centre accessed 22 June 2022.
[8] Fitzmaurice Voice Institute, Inc., a US registered non-profit organization, addresses financial accessibility to train as a Fitzmaurice Voicework® certified trainer by offering student scholarships. Program fee for the intensive two year training is $11,800.00 (including $800.00 deposit). This fee is in addition to the cost of 30 hours of prerequisite training, a 'base requirement for consideration for acceptance into certification training' with a 'highly recommended 5-day in-person workshop' (https://www.fitzmauriceinstitute.org/about-the-certification-program) accessed 29 November, 2023. The Lessac Institute, also a US registered non-profit organization, has 'distributed financial assistance to nearly all Intensive workshop participants' through the Sue Ann Park Endowment Fund Campaign (https://www.lessacinstitute.org/take-action) . Tuition Assistance is available to a limited number of students and only for the Lessac Intensives and Facilitator Training workshops. (https://www.lessacinstitute.org/tuition-assistance) For an example of costings: upcoming intensive workshops are located on Hendrix College campus (Arkansas, USA) and workshop fees include housing: 1 week intensive $1,250.00, 4 week intensive $3,750-$4,500 depending an 'early bird' special rate or LTRI membership discount. LTRI membership is required for all levels of certification ($35-$65 range of annual membership fees). Suggested timeline for achieving certification is 1-5 years, average Candidate completion is 3 years. Lessac Training and Research Institute has a Harassment Prevention Policy (https://www.lessacinstitute.org/shp) and Code of Conduct (https://www.lessacinstitute.org/code-of-conduct) and Diversity and Inclusion policy statement (https://www.lessacinstitute.org/new-page-1) . Accessed 29 November 2023.
[9] 2022: 137. Patsy Rodenburg's certification progamme, 'The Patsy Rodenbur Associate Programme (PRA),' is a two year program priced at 17,000 Euros and takes place at her farm in Portugal: https://patsyrodenburg.co.uk/teachers/ accessed 22 June 2022. The Kristin Linklater Voice Centre is a retreat-style, residential centre in the Orkney Islands built adjacent to Kristin's house in which a residential workshop, taught by certified Linklater teachers, is upwards of £1,175.00 per workshop: https://shop.linklatervoice.com/shop/ accessed 22 June 2022. Knight-Thompson Speechwork offers the Teacher Certification Program each June, July or August in residence at University of California-Irvine (USA) and on special occasions, abroad. Entrance into the program requires three prerequisite courses costing upwards of $2,150.00: Experiencing Speech ($850-$950), Experiencing Accents ($850-$950) and Phonetics Intensive ($450). The enrolment fee for the Certification is $4,000.00 USD. Participation in the Certification program does not guarantee

certification; in some cases additional work is required. https://ktspeechwork.org/event/teacher-certification-10/ accessed 29 November 2023.

[10] https://www.richardarmstrong.info/about

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