Voice Praxis: Social Positionality in UK Spoken Word Practice

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The work of the practitioner voice educator has changed dramatically over the past decade. Inclusive and accessible education and training requirements have made new paradigms essential. It is no longer assumed in UK higher education and conservatory actor training contexts that the student experience will be subordinated to the pedagogical leadership of the tutor. To the contrary. Pedagogical design has increasingly engaged with the idea of re-situating the student/tutor learning dynamic to give value to multiple positions of knowledge in the training studio and to reflect diverse student experiences around race, class, gender, sexuality, and neurodiversity.

The work to expose and reflect upon the impact of the re-positioned personal and professional knowledge of both trainer and student in the voice studio, is the focus of this article. The author argues that student interests are best served by practices informed by transparent and intersectional principles of engagement. The author discusses several ways in which to regard the social construction of vocal materiality as a baseline for work in the experiential studio. The account offers a critique of existing voice pedagogy and practice and suggests a theoretical framework by which to develop innovative and socially responsive voice praxis.

Keywords: voice, speech, prosody, pitch, pedagogy, intersectionality, gender, race, praxis

**Introduction**

This article articulates a de-colonized, sociologically informed approach to voice practice. It is undertaken in acknowledgment of a perceived gap between the academic articulation of critical race and gender theory in a UK higher education training context and the studio practice itself.

I bring a cis gendered, white, middle-class, lesbian practitioner educator lens to the process that renders the account, in part, inclusive of auto ethnographic elements that are particular to my own history. It builds on my publications over the past decade, including *Voice: Readings in Theatre* *Practice* (Boston 2018)*,* in which the lineage of voice in UK voice training for theatre is outlined and interrogated, and a short essay in which specific attention is paid to gendered features and bias in the sonics of the voice studio, “Pitch and Gender in Voice Training: New Methodological Directions” (Boston2019)*.* It considers recent scholarship in the field of voice studies, sociology, and ethnomusicology, particularly in US scholarship of the past decade and draws on my studio-based action research in the UK over the period 2018-2022. In combination, all the elements have been instrumental toward the formation of a socially informed studio praxis. While critics have long called for alternative multicultural approaches to the training of actors’ voices within American university drama departments (McAllister-Viel 2009, 426), there has been less systematic focus about this in the UK voice training sector. My aim is to redress the imbalance.

Notable UK exceptions to the rule include Oram’s (2021) scholar/practitioner work on an anti-discriminatory approach to accent and dialect training for the actor, Amy Mihyang-Ginther’s (2015) work on racism in UK voice training, and Tara McAllister-Viel’s (2019) work on intercultural performance and voice in her book, *Training Actors’ Voices: Toward an Intercultural/Interdisciplinary Approach.* Relevant, too, is the work of UK academic, Lisa Peck (2021), who outlines in her book *Act as a Feminist,* the problematics present in the hitherto “hidden curriculum” in actor training where “sharpening our understanding of how power is produced and passed between, who is included and excluded and what are the stakes, becomes vital” (48).

The work of theorist practitioners Oram, McAllister-Viel, Mihyang-Ginther, Peck and others, represents an important shift in practical voice and actor training in the UK conservatories over the past decade in which critical race theory, sociological theory, feminism, and ethno-musicology, among a range of other theories, have begun to be referenced in the context of the *doing* of voice; in the voice practice itself. Important to the shift has been a thorough reappraisal of the widely assumed premise that all students enter voice training, “with negative vocal habits learned through environmental and sociocultural influence,” and that all students need “adjustment” according to the same value system (McAllister-Viel 2009, 430). The key problem noted by McAllister-Viel is the assumption that the voice functions in ways that are universal to all cultures. By these means voice training has succeeded in the eradication of difference for students with backgrounds not congruent with the dominant culture in the UK drama training (e.g., white and Anglo-American). As McAllister-Viel says, it has not allowed for a more complex discussion about the ways in which “cultural assumptions inform the most basic voice exercises and affect the resulting sound” (427).

McAllister’s Viel’s critique of the universalist assumptions embedded in Anglo-American based voice practice, with its exclusion of perceptions and practices of voice beyond its borders, is shared by Daron Oram (2021). He offers a timely critique of the prevalence of sonic whiteness in the voice training studio and gives reference to the work of US scholar, Jennifer Lynn Stoeve. He situates Stoeve (2016) as a key theorist in the project to de-colonize the voice studio. In *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Stoeve theorizes that one of the ways in which racism functions in the studio is by shaping listening habits that are informed by dominant ideologies of correctness and, in themselves, reinforce the experience of being raced subjects. In tandem, McAllister-Viel, Oram, and Stoeve, provide a clear theoretical template for the renewal of voice practice in the UK experiential voice studio based upon a new sociologically and culturally informed anti-racist, anti-sexist awareness where the very sounds expressed can be regarded as being shaped by social context.

This article organizes an approach toward a critically informed voice practice in two main sections. *Part One* examines a range of theoretical underpinnings with a role in the support of greater equity and inclusion in the voice studio. *Part Two* reflects upon some of the historical speech and voice norm precedents set in the UK drama schools. It follows with reference, in brief, to two projects in which elements of critical race and feminist theory have been imbricated in the practice with impact on vocal ownership of the outcomes.

The first project was comprised of studio-based action research over the period 2018-22, in which the social theories of inclusion and equity were surfaced in ways that had not been as transparent in previous studio iterations. The second project was a de-colonizing voice podcast workshop, created with the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama (Central) master’s student, Sitandile Dube, designed to address the bias of whiteness and unconscious racism in UK voice practice. It was underpinned by several critical ideas, some of which are discussed in the article, with particular reference to those of Jennifer Lynn Stoeve. Her work, as mentioned earlier, emphasizes the importance of a challenge to the idea that listening habits need “correction.” She advocates that unless challenged, the status quo of the racialized subject gets reinforced. The podcast aimed to incorporate this perspective through the cultivation of a dialogue with a range of sonic influences that would better reflect the heritage and identity of the individual participant.

Emergent in both projects was the idea that exposure to dialogical listening and reflection, in which an individual’s unique sonic environment is in the foreground, has the potential to impact positively on self-defined vocal identity. The de-colonizing podcast was identified as one of the ways to vivify the de-centering of whiteness in public discourse through a process of accessing a set of personalized responses to vocal sound. It also became a vehicle to expose some of the ways in which “whiteness conveys internal meanings for white people’s sense of self, at the same time that it fulfils anti-black functions” (Dabiri 2021, 24).

The studio protocols evidenced in McAllister-Viel’s re-framed Western voice work in a Korean training context, created to challenge the corrective models of Western voice practices, also support the premise that vocal “sound helps define identity and is deeply connected to one’s world-view” (McAllister-Viel 2009, 437). Consequently, McAllister -Viel’s studio precedents have become instrumental in the de-colonizing voice ethos, both in the studio and the podcast. Of note are the ways in which her students were able to distinguish between the communication of words and the sounds of their language, so they could use “a diverse collection of sounds to discuss the cultural meaning of sound within their society.” It led to the ability to recognize and agree on wider social meaning and also “meaning specific to the student, depending on gender, age, life experience, or geographical origin” (438). By so doing, the work exposed how their own cultural sound had a rich connection to meaning and identity:

Even when speaking a series of words as a sentence, the students could always return to pure sound…to remind themselves of the vibrations in the sound and refocus on timbre – sound itself- as having meaning. (McAllister-Viel 2009, 438)

Drawing on the evidence that vocal sound can be as significant as speech formation itself in the matter of vocal identity, the colonizing podcast project began to look at issues of cultural perception to voiced sound. It began to focus on an individual’s sonic landscape where bias could be surfaced, perception shifted beyond “universalized” unconscious UK southern white middle class norms, and a range of sonics and identities acknowledged more in keeping with the positionality of the listener. Based on a theoretical template that set out an integration of the social positionality of both student and teacher/participant and trainer, the process of the de-colonizing podcast workshop, reflected upon in brief in Part Two, provides part of the research documentation upon which it is suggested a “new” studio voice praxis can develop (Boston and Dube 2022).

I suggest that a “new” studio praxis can benefit from the utilization of memory, imagination, experience, and positional association of the participant. The development of active listening, embodiment, and reflection, allied to the particularities of the lived experience of the individual, as in the podcast, are a means for the generation of new sonic reference points for the expressive voice. It is suggested that as white middle-class privilege and heritage gets challenged in the work of a recalibration of the dominant sonic context, voices not previously heard or recognized get resituated at the center of the training. It is not enough to assume that embodied experience or theory in isolation will provide the relevant points of resistance and illumination. I agree with McAllister-Viel about the importance of the imbrication of theory within practice. Not only does praxis provide a means to fully investigate the meanings in the transmission of voice work, it also provides a means to further understand the ideological work it effects in the world:

It is in praxis that we can better understand the ways that voice exercises, shaped as they are by anatomical expertise and by suppositions about sociocultural influence, affect how the body/voice essentializes experience. (McAllister-Viel 2009, 429)

**Part One**

***Theoretical Influence***

The urgent need to make change within UK voice studio practice is framed against the social backdrop of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement on both sides of the Atlantic, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The social, health, and economic inequities that surfaced consequently had a direct impact on the studio training experience. I focus, here, on the ways in which these global matters impacted on both tutor pedagogy and on student engagement with respect to perceptions of race and gender.

Any vestiges of the traditional notion of the tutor as holder of the knowledge and student as recipient was soon made redundant in the fast-moving social events of the COVID-19 pandemic and George Floyd’s death in the USA in early 2020. The seismic rupture of these events gave rise to the need for new pedagogical responses to meet the changing social landscape. It became clear that the complex task of de-centering whiteness in the voice studio, for example (central to the de-colonizing podcast project), would benefit from a “scaffolded” critical and sociological theoretical approach to better address and process some of the social issues arising and the shift in the power dynamic in education more widely.

The principles of Hawaiian legal rights specialist and scholar, Poka Laenui, offered a first step key for de-colonizing the voice studio. Laenui suggests that the dismantlement of the colonized position is more problematic than the model of diversity and inclusion would suggest, associated as it is with a “corrective” model (as quoted by Oram 2021). He suggests the status quo will persist if the performative gesture remains superficial. To counter this, he posits ways for individual experience to sit at the heart of change and suggests that fluid and non-dogmatic approaches are required to fully engage with the intractability of the problem. He argues that it is only through the systematic cultivation of deeper and longer-term term processes that change can be put into effect. It became vital, therefore, that the de-colonizing project in the voice studio engage similar values; they would need to be deep, and they would need to embed over a period of time in order to endure.

intercultural/interdisciplinary approach, by Tara McAllister-Viel Routledge Voice Studies,

Routledge, 2019, 218 pages, Theatre, Dance and Performance Training, 10:3, 466-468, DOI:

10.1080/19443927.2019.16407**Precedents**:

Licensed as an attorney in Hawaii since 1976, Laenui is recognized by the United Nations as one of five pioneers responsible for a radical articulation of indigenous rights. His model for a five-step process toward change, includes re-discovery and recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action (Laenui 2000). For Laenui, it is crucial to activate the “dreaming” phase in order to avoid the possibility of not being corrected or constrained.I began to see that a re-framed voice pedagogy in the acting studio would benefit from a synthesis informed by elements that are like Laenui’s “dreaming” principles. Necessary, too, would be the implementation of several other structural changes. These include anti-racist and inclusive protocols, pedagogical theories of the mythopoetic, elements drawn from the “natural” voice curriculum and non-judgmental teaching in the spirit of “radical kindness,” as articulated by Angela C. Santomero in her work, *Radical Kindness: The Life-changing Power of Giving and Receiving*:

Radical kindness means rooting all you say and do in kindness, being unconditionally kind all the time, to everyone. It means going beyond situational niceness or merely “doing the right thing” and, instead, living from a place of compassion. (Santomero 2019, 10)

It became important to form a pedagogical ethos that would help shape equivalent experiential processes to generate a shift of consciousness for the enactment of lasting change within a social justice framed practice. The key elements of the theoretical framework are identified below and act as an introduction to the wider themes of the de-colonizing pedagogy to follow.

*Inclusive and Anti-Racist*

Anti-racist protocols are an essential part of the social and political initiative to ensure the inclusivity of training in which individual needs of neurodiversity, race, class, disability, and gender are addressed. All voice training needs to be re-examined to properly challenge existing systemic structures of thought and practice that underpin racism of all kinds; studio training protocols are part of the creation and perpetuation of cultural meanings and do not exist outside the systems of social construction, so there needs to be a wholesale re-think about their design.

*Mythopoetic*

Mythopoetic approaches in the studio are important because, in the mythopoetic curriculum, are found, “the sensations, feelings, and impulses to act” (Holland and Garman 2010, 26). The mythopoetic lends itself to an experiential approach that is designed to evoke individual feeling states as part of the teaching and learning process. The authors Leonard and Willis (2010) suggest that there is a problem posed by purely fact-based education. “Nothing is wrong with getting the facts, of course, but the problem is that all facts are mediated by history, memory, imagination, and cultural construction” (Leonard and Willis 2010, 1). To work with an individual’s imagination in which “imaginal” knowing is a feature, and has parallel in Laenui’s dreaming phase, is, therefore, important to the re-configuration of a curriculum designed to go beyond the superficial or performative in which the reparative work of inclusion can begin:

Imaginal knowing is not fantasy but is linked to the way humans imagine the real world. Imaginal knowing moves the heart, holds the imagination, finds the fit between self-stories, public myths, and the content of cultural knowledge. It is deeply personal, yet open to the universe. (Leonard and Willis 2010, 3)

*Natural Voice*

“Natural voice” is a contested term in the context of social voice praxis, but it is an approach that is still useful in that it indicates a potential “liberatory” approach beyond the purely “technical” in which images and archetypes can be used to evoke expression outside the inherent biases and social norms of voice and speech training and the “voice, the body, and the imagination” can be used “to travel the landscape of the myriad possibilities of the self” (Rodgers and Armstrong 2009, i). It is an approach, however, that demands clarification and refinement. Unless its historical connotation with essentialism and universalism is challenged, it has the potential, as I have shown, to further embed biased structures.

I suggest that an engagement with sonic experiment and self-determined sonic “authorship” has the potential to invoke “new” gender-aware, anti-racist studio practice. Frankie Armstrong’s voice work in the UK, for example, expands the conditions for the experience of voice and challenges white-centered Western thought, through a community based “natural” voice approach. Armstrong weaves an influence of archetypes into her practice and calls on the figures of myths and legends from many diverse cultures (Armstrong and Rodgers 2009). Although the use of myth and legend from across the globe can lead to inappropriate universalism, unless the provenances are checked and acknowledged, they, nevertheless, provide a unique opportunity for work that is located in a range of community rituals and practices in both conscious and unconscious ways:

They are not fully developed characters but are essences: images, forms, voices, bodies, and ancient psychological projections into the imaginative world […] providing a useful tool for actors and singers to embody something larger than themselves. (Armstrong and Rodgers2009*,* 1-2)

*Radical Kindness*

A non-judgmental approach, represented within an ethos of radical kindness, is important because it provides a stylistic mode of pedagogical delivery suited to the non-hierarchical structures in which student-centered change can be most effectively evoked. Radical kindness is suggestive of a tone that is appropriate to counter some of the deeply held assumptions about race and gender that supersede reception to the voice. Where assumptions are imbricated in the relationship to dominant authority and become prohibitive to the full ownership of individual exploration and reflection, it is important to create conditions for individuals to value their own capacities. I suggest this is made more likely under the conditions of radical kindness.

In twenty- first century voice practice, at a significant remove from the didactic instructional models of the twentieth century, it is clear that no one expressive vocal practice model will suffice. The unitary, universal voice is gone and in its place is a concept of voice that benefits from a conscious de-centered approach to Western training as part of an active exposure of systemic racism. The perspective invites trust around the felt sensation, ownership of the sense communicated, incorporation of sonic influences drawn from both the West and beyond and articulation about and recognition given to a distinctiveness that is born out of the lived experience of everyone.

*Perceptual Awareness*

Faulty perceptions– linked to systemic gender, race, and class structures—get associated with the material prosody of the voice—its pitch, its rhythms, its stresses, and melodies and influence the way in which it is heard. Evolutionary biologists have discovered, for example, that faulty perception leads to generalized assumptions about the vocal features and identity of a speaker based upon biological attributes associated with systemic social values and privileges (Armstrong, Lee, and Feinberg 2019). People assume that low pitched male adults are tall – when it is often not the case. It also leads many to assume that young women are indecisive- flaky even – in their vocal disposition. A different way to perceive the young female voice on the cusp of puberty, instead, would be to take a view that it inclines them to a state where breath management and vocal “projection” places them at odds with other social factors about their identity and their place in the world. The resulting voice “wobble,” in the marginalized space of pre-pubescence, reads as a symptom of systemic sexism, not of any inherent vocal “problem” (personal communication, Jenevora Williams, from lecture notes The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama 2016).

I suggest it is important to resist systemic “faulty perception” of the voice and to foster, instead, the self-determination of vocal “authorship,” comprised of a new voice “text.” What might this look and sound like? The emergent new “text” is the voice that is born out of the dialogue between embodied vocal processes and sonic references and gets re-situated as part of a set of processes in a “culturally influenced sound sign-system” (McAllister-Viel 2009, 444), in which an individual’s capacity is based on their experience and not dominated by pre-given perception.

***Pedagogical Influence***

Action-based reflection as Course Leader for the MA/MFA voice studies: teaching and coaching at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London over a period of more than four years, forms part of the article data to support a new approach to a socially informed voice studio practice. What follows are some of the key observations drawn from studio teaching and the accelerated adaptations necessitated in the response to the urgent social movements of 2020.

Voice, indisputably, is both a phenomenon of culture and biology. There is little argument here. Voice in the studio, however, has been slow to embrace the sociological inter-relationship between perceptions of race, gender, and class and vocal expression. It is important, therefore, that studio practice gives recognition to positional background, heritage, gender, sexuality, experience of education, learning preferences and more, in the developing vocality of the individual student.

I suggest that the awareness of positionality in “live” in-studio work in which voice, for example, is not yet wholly a subsection of digitized screen-life, can be a contributory factor in the development of vocal self-determination. What do I mean by this? I suggest that the acknowledgment of *material,* present tense, embodied vocal sensation has the potential to foster responsibility for communicative veracity in ways that are distinct from the expression on mediatized platforms. The vibratory sensations of communication in action in the studio retain the potential for a close and accountable relationship to utterance. When an individual gives voice to a thought, those who bear witness share in the experience of its liveness and understand, thereby, more about the originating impulse of the thought. As part of the experience, not only is there is an evidential trace of the vibratory track from source to reception, but also accountability for the sound *as* thought is made available.

In the rupture between individual and listener, in circumstances where the sound source is separated from the receiver, such as in online delivery through the pandemic, I suggest opportunities for miscommunication and misconception can flourish. The de-colonizing pedagogy project aims to respond to this by fostering resistance to misperception through an invitation to *feel* a range of sonic vibrations in action in both “live” and mediatized contexts. It is important, therefore, that a range of vocal sounds expressed and received get incorporated into the wider student experience beyond the merely conversational.

Why is vocal sound beyond conversational speech important to this project? I suggest it is because voice exists in a shifting space between the personal, the political, and the social, and it is important to experience a multiplicity of activations. Mladen Dolar and Stephen Connor, suggest that voice is everywhere and nowhere at once (as quoted in Kim 2018, 6). Suk-Jun Kim uses Dolar to explain the phenomenon: “What language and the body have in common is the voice, but the voice is part neither of language nor of the body” (Kim 2018, 6). They observe how voice occupies a space between meaning making and non-meaning in which the acoustics of the body are always present but semantic meaning is not necessarily present. A key example of this is the *hum* which Kim argues is detached from semantic meaning making yet, nevertheless, is a consequence of actions taken in the vocal body of the individual who hums. Part of studio practice, therefore, needs to raise awareness about where voice sits in relation to the social and where it can also be taken beyond the bounds of social conversational voice to lead the individual to new areas of vibrational discovery.

In a space of limbo then, between meaning making and non-meaning, three main elements of voice vie for attention: the perception of the listener, the vibrating body of the speaker and the subsequent vocal expression. The three elements are comprised of a combination of meanings intended and those in which the material elements arrive pre-judged and pre-socialized: pre-imposed by assumption. Consequently, it is important that studio practice vivifies a range of opportunities to identify and experience the multiple components of voice in its sensations of pitch, its timbre, its rhythms, its pace, its tunes, and in its reception. Once the elements are made apparent, it is important that a process of triangulation is undertaken to verify the experience. It involves an awareness of (a) vocal materiality, (b) language, and (c) social reception. On one side, is the speaker experience of the material voice with its pitch, timbre, rhythms, pace, and tunes. On another, are the multiple elements in linguistic and phonemic presence in which the non-voice topology of the cry and the sob, the hum and so on (Kim 2018, 6) also feature. Finally, on the third side, sit the social systems of reception.

I examine the triangulated elements one by one.

First, is vocal materiality which offers the felt experience to the embodied body and provides a key reference point in the triangulation evidence. This is found in the felt vibration of conducted sound in the body, the tangible resonance of sound frequencies above the larynx and the movement of the breath throughout the body. Second, is language with its combination of non-voice and linguistic elements. The non-voice description, as already suggested, sits in a wider philosophical conversation in which some of the constituent elements of the non-voice, such as the cough, the hiccup, the babble, the laugh, and the hum (Kim 2018, 6), are so called because, like the hum, they are “non-phoneme(s)… devoid of articulation” (Kim 2018, 7). The linguistic aspect of words as they are voiced in relation to semantic meaning sit along with the non-voice, represented by the waiter with his throat -clearing “ahem” (Kim 2018, 6) and referenced by Kim as drawn from Connor’s book *Beyond Words*. The non-voiced “ahem” is a bodily laryngeal practice which expresses an intention to interrupt and is an alert to the individual who would-be interrupted. It is not, however, voice because the way in which it functions, falling outside conventions of speech, is based on an interpretation of countless other social and cultural factors in the proxemics, and optics of the context. Third, is the social reception given to a range of sonic elements that rest on pre-existing terms and conditions as well as specific contextual information. Vocal materiality, the linguistic and the non-voice, and the systems of reception, comprise the shifting space occupied by voice. Agreed they bring a complex set of intersecting coordinates to the studio. However, the rewards gained by locating and creatively exposing them have the potential to offer specific vocal enhancement to all participants.

How then, do the coordinates combine? Broadly speaking, I suggest that the expression of sound waves as they originate in the speaker’s body, along with the linguistic constructions of speech and other utterances, are subject to reception based on the social positionality of race, gender, and class of both the speaker and the listener. The experience of the embodied sensation of sound wave vibrations, however, varies between the one who expresses and the one who receives. I suggest the originating sound vibrations remain the exclusive property of the speaker and can return individual meaning. Reception, however, remains in part, dependent on the perceived congruency of the intended linguistic (or other) meaning of the phonemic world conveyed, the sonic score and the visual optics of the speaker.

Why is it important to distinguish the output from reception? I suggest it is important to make the distinction because, although both are suggestible to bias, elements that constitute perception can be resisted and are not inevitable. A case in point is in the work of the voice studio, where awareness of sound is cultivated and a means to re-frame some of the effects of the perceptual bias is offered. US scholar and practitioner, Nina Eidsheim, rightly highlights the ways in which reception creates its own assumptions about the racialized nature of the voice and her work seeks to create awareness of “timbral discrimination” (Eidsheim 2019, 4). Her approach, importantly, “foregrounds the ways in which vocal timbral character is mistakenly attributed to race… (and) the sound of a singer’s voice is in fact a co-creation to which listeners significantly contribute” (Eidsheim 2012, 9). It is suggested that the experiential studio-based voice processes outlined in this discussion have the capacity to begin to remediate some of the negative effects generated by the perceptual bias outlined by Eidsheim.

The waiter’s “ahem,” in which the so- called “non-voice” functions to communicate meaning outside language, and where its reception is based on views formed about the context of the interruption, provides a useful parallel to the reception given to the elements of the material voice. As discussed, the pitch, timbre, rhythm, stresses, and melody comprise the material voice. As such, they function within and without linguistic frameworks and, like the “ahem,” are subject to reception based on a view formed about the context of the speaker that falls outside existing linguistic frameworks but within pre-existing social systemic values. Context is important to both Kim’s “non-voice” and Eidsheim’s “timbral discrimination” (Eidsheim 2019, 4) because an intersection of positions is available to influence interpretation that can pre-determine the utterances themselves, principle amongst them being the raced position of the perceiver. Again, the experiential voice studio can help set the terms by which interpretative bias can begin to be challenged.

***Intersectionality***

The relationship between voice and assumption driven perceptions about race and gender in the training studio, provides the focus of the article, but it is important, as well, to remember that a wider *intersection* of race, class, gender, and neurodiversity provides the overarching theoretical approach within which the discussion is situated. African American academic, Kimberle′ Williams Crenshaw, Civil Rights lawyer, academic and philosopher, coined the term intersectionality in 1989 and subsequently developed it within a wider body of critical race theory. Intersectionality underscores the fact that racialized and gendered subjectivities do not stand outside a range of other social and political constructions that shape perceptions of race and class, however “felt” and personal they might seem. Given the fact that many of the studio training processes in voice lead the individual to believe that the work is essentialist in nature—as in unsocialized—it is important to raise awareness about the ways in which studio voice, too, is part of socially constructed beliefs and attitudes. As discussed, the material element of pitch movement, for example, previously regarded as a flexible facet of an individual’s vocal expression, is now more usefully considered in addition, as a highly suggestible aspect of vocal expression based on socially generated aesthetic rules that, in turn, have purported to present as natural and eternal. Such essentialism has acted to mask the social construction of voice and points toward the importance of its exposure in the interests of fully inclusive pedagogical frameworks.

It is clear then, that as pitch and timbre are contested elements in the voice practitioner portfolio, the social intersectionality of the elements that relate to pitch get highlighted. The work done in the therapeutic clinical voice field is instructive for such purposes and is offered here as an exemplar of practice for the creative studio experience. The adoption of ethical practitioner guidelines for the voice clinic (Mills and Stoneham 2020, 21) can both ensure appropriate studio protocols are devised and perceptual assumptions challenged. Based on practice protocols that are “ethical, sensitive and person-centered,” they ensure that fresh intentions are brought to both the expression and reception of the voice that lie beyond the biases “we all hold” (Mills and Stoneham 2020, 23). The clinic, therefore, has insight to offer the creative studio in the task to situate inclusive practice at its heart.

Eidsheim’s (2012) work on the construction of the racialized voice offers further theories about how the social systems that construct individual positionality dictate the way the voice is heard. An application of her perspective usefully builds on the knowledge drawn from the clinic and helps to resist the limitations, as discussed here, that are imposed by social perception, particularly those that are defined by race:

The sum of what we process multi-sensorially is trained, by virtue of existence in social environments, to carry out the work of corroborating socially constructed racial distinctions. (Eidsheim 2012, 25)

Her work gives insight into the ways in which social construction leads us to hear what we *see* or expect to *see in terms of “the ideological values of beholders” (*Eidsheim 2012, 9), rather than on the terms determined by an individual’s expressive needs and wishes. As such, she provides a vital additional element toward the transformation of studio voice protocols based on the negotiation of terms that are most appropriate to individual development and less susceptible to the constraints of racialized optics. Eidsheim (2019) elaborates further in her chapter, “Listening, Timbre and Vocality in African American Music*,*” in *The Race of Sound*, naming the problem one of an “acousmatic nature”: “a sound that one hears without seeing the causes behind it” (Eidsheim 2019, 2). Eidsheim’s hearing—without seeing—the cause concept points out how it initially dislodges perception about voice, particularly those based on optics. She observes, however, that as soon as the voice is returned to the socialized visual mode, the usual or familiar receptive norms get reinstated. I suggest that it is only through the design of a marginal space, in which the usual optics and audio functions get “disturbed,” that there lies a real opportunity to both challenge and resist normative perceptions. In curriculum terms, I suggest that elements of a mythopoetic dream space based on an intersectional model can provide the basis for appropriate studio protocols with which to embark on the process of social deconstruction.

***Bias in Reception to the Material Voice***

In advance of reflection on studio action research, in which consideration was given to the process of deconstructing biased perception, it is important to set out in brief how exposure to bias is foundational to the development of studio praxis. Here, I make a return to both Eidsheim and Mills and Stoneham’s work and note how they highlight the materiality of pitch, its movement and qualities, as common to both their accounts.

The element of pitch is both part of the material agency of the speaker as well as the perceptual agency and/or acuity of the perceiver, but, as already mentioned, it is never simply one thing at any given moment. It is a combination of the expressed and the perceived– ­the signal out and the signal in–involving the sound waves emitted by the communicator and vibration received by the one communicated to.

Due to a range of interconnected social and physiological factors associated with race and gender norms, as I have shown, pitch and timbre are often identified as racialized and gendered attributes by the beholder, as part of a set of perceptions readily thought to be unchangeable and essential. It is the bias toward one element in the voice over another that has deep implications for the individual. This is particularly so if they identify outside the racialized and heteronormative status quo that is shored up by the social, political, legal, and cultural construct of power and hierarchy of whiteness in which all are located and by which all are affected (Eidsheim 2019, 26).

Aspects of bias, particularly in relation to gender, are examined elsewhere in my article on pitch in the *Theatre Dance and Performance* issue about new directions in theatre training (Boston 2019). For current purposes, however, I would like to set out some of the ways in which various elements of voice, including pitch, timbre, melody, intonation, stress, and volume, intersect with complex phenomena informed by social perception, socially influenced sound wave production, individual physiology, and inclination. As argued, I suggest that exposure to the theories of the social construction of voice are a key formational element for work in the voice studio and can supplement and shape the portfolio of practical experiences designed to assist the individual’s development according to their own needs.

The phenomenon of pitch movement in everyday conversational band widths is generally exercised within a narrower range than in most performance art forms, particularly theatre. It is in the contexts where certain kinds of pitch movements are normalized and others are inappropriately pathologized, however, that further questions need to be asked about how and why this occurs and who the beneficiaries are? As previously suggested, approaches drawn from the field of voice therapy are helpful toward these ends. For example, Mills and Stoneham, suggest that many trans and non-binary clients in a clinical context seek remedial voice work that is not based on a diagnosis of a vocal pathology but more in relationship to discomfort about their gendered identity:

Trans and non-binary people do not have a disordered voice because they are trans and non-binary. There is no mass or lesion on the vocal folds because of being trans. There can be, though not always, high levels of social anxiety and isolation, and degrees of conflict over speaking out, at times realized as laryngeal constriction but not often converted into psychogenic dysphonia. (Mills and Stoneham 2020, 84)

I would like, then, to consider the sonics that give rise to certain perceptions of identity to better enable the deconstruction of normative perceptions. Close consideration will be given to the ways in which pitch movement gets “normalized” in a range of conversational contexts and is built into established training norms at the expense of the inclusive identity needs of individual trainees. I argue for studio protocols to better incorporate individuated heritage and other protected characteristics, alongside existing pitch, and timbre practices.

A short background to pitch movement and timbre in the portfolio of voice training exercises in the Western academies follows. It is instructive for the ways in which it reveals a long-standing seam of normative approaches to the materiality of voice in the training studio, with a particular focus on gender.

**Part Two**

***Historical Antecedents of Contemporary Spoken Voice Norms in the UK***

Early twentieth century voice practitioner, Aiken (1951), suggests that pitch range and movement are phenomena that get “naturalized” in relation to pre-existing norms. Consequently, there are some voices that get perceived as being high or too low simply due to social taste. This, in turn, gets readily associated with gendered and racialized positionalities. When Aiken writes that “it is not advisable to direct or prompt the inflections of the voice too much for fear of introducing unnatural ones” (Aiken 1951, 109), it is possible to assume that social determinism is a dominant factor in the teaching of pitch outcomes as opposed to those that originate from the requirements of individual need.

Aiken’s advice reveals how the phenomenon of social taste plays a role in the formation of perception and how the selection of “preferred” sonic elements get interwoven with the expression and reception to the timbre and vibration of the voice. Pitch, defined as “the auditory perception of how high or low a note is in relation to other notes” (Fisher and Kayes 2016, 188), is then, more than range. It is about how a material vocal element gets intrinsically woven into social perception at a systemic level by both conscious and unconscious means.

In evolutionary linguistic terms, it is of note that a characteristic of the syllable in English speech is the way it is arranged in a particular order for the benefit of auditory perception:

The order preferred most of the time is that from left to right in the syllable, the sounds are arranged from least inherently loud to the loudest and then back to softest. This makes the sounds in each syllable easier to hear. It is another way of chunking that helps our brains to keep track of what is going on in language. This property is called sonority. In simple terms, a sound is more sonorous if it is louder. (Everett 2017, 207)

Of interest here, is in the way auditory perception gets shaped by more than auditory principles. As already discussed, the optics that are *seen* in the sound produced also make a difference to “*hearing*.” Additionally, it is possible to conjecture, for example, that an individual’s capacity for sonority within syllabic chunking – associated with the amplitude of breath—could easily get associated with specific gendered characteristics. In turn, it could also give rise to unconscious selectivity in relation to reception. Daniel Everett, in his book *How Language Began*, expounds on some of the ways in which one group has evolved speech sound preferences over other kinds of sounds:

Once introduced, syllables, segments and other units of the phonological hierarchy would have undergone culture-based elaborations. Changes, in other words, are made to satisfy local preferences, without regard for ease of pronunciation or production […] So sometimes they are motivated by ease of hearing or pronunciation or by cultural reasons, to make sounds that identified one group as the source of those sounds, because speakers of one culture would have preferred some sounds to others, some enhancements to others and so on. (Everett 20217, 210)

On Everett’s supposition, there exist multiple opportunities for those in dominant positions to mishear, deny, and suppress difference in the satisfaction of dominant “local preferences.” Only an active and consistent effort to expose them as just that– dominant preferences—can hope to be of benefit to a greater plurality of vocal expression. This is supported elsewhere in Everett’s account where he observes that *cultural pressure* plays a key role in the determination of sounds used and their perceived effectiveness (Everett 2017, 210). It is important, therefore, to review any specific pressures that inform the production and reception to pitch range and to give particular focus to racialized and gendered assumptions about the sonic outputs that have hitherto remained unarticulated and unexposed.

All Western based voice methods, to some degree, have as part of their pedagogy the fostering of new sonic behaviors, of which timbre and pitch movement are a part, in the interests of the expansion and development of the sensations of voice. Historically, as I have shown, “rules” have been formulated about the best practice for pitch norms, some of which purport to be based upon the actual size of the vocal instrument itself wherein the “natural pitch of each individual voice is to be found” (Aiken 1951, 109). It is not hard to suppose, however, that early twentieth century approaches based upon given biological realities in which physical size underpins the basis of what is deemed “natural,” remain highly susceptible to the social norms (and bias) that govern perceptions of race and gender.

Eidsheim (2019), in her research on race and the voice, suggests that while the literal *tissue* of the voice on one hand is susceptible to racial conditioning, it would be misguided to relate it to a predictable vocal outcome. What her work further highlights are the outmoded frameworks of early twentieth century practitioners, such as Aiken, with their assumptions about difference as determined by “natural” rules. She also invites deeper consideration of the ways in which a range of social and cultural factors need to be factored into the exercise of spoken pitch range and timbre production.

***Non-Binary Challenge to Biological Determinism in the Clinic***

A prevalent historical binary in the studio, identified as nature versus nurture, disguises the presence of a more subtle element of biological determinism, long manipulated by those in positions of power and influence. The challenge posed to the contemporary voice practitioner, therefore, is three-fold. First, is a need to structure resistance to the normalization bias, while also remaining mindful about the exercise of pitch range flexibility in which vocal health is a priority and where it is advisable that no single note in the range gets too fatigued. Second, is consideration given to pitch and timbre as significant components in an individual’s self-determined vocality. Third, is mindful recognition of Eidsheim’s notion that it is better to understand and examine the “response” as voice coaches and teachers to the voice heard in the light of society’s racialization of vocal sound:

In the same way that culturally derived systems of pitches organized into scales render a given vibrational field in tune or out of tune, a culturally derived system of race renders a given vibrational field attached to a person as a white voice, a [B]lack voice—that is, “in tune” with expected correlations between skin color and vocal timbre—or someone who sounds white or [B]lack, meaning that the vocalization did not correspond to (was “out of tune” with) the ways in which the person as a whole was taxonomized. (Eidsheim 2019, 4)

On the basis that it is important to pay attention to what is in tune or not with a sense of culturally dominant speech and voice qualities, Kristin Linklater’s view of nasality, in her book *Freeing the Natural Voice,* also warrants review. It is a further example of embedded bias in the aesthetics of reception to the voice that is clearly overdue for revision:

Nasality inevitably implies torpid breathing […] When a deep voice is nasal it tends to be richly adenoidal and monotonous; when a medium-pitched voice is nasal it tends to be aggressively strident and monotonous; and when a high-pitched voice is nasal it is piercingly monotonous. (Linklater 2006, 263)

Mills and Stoneham’s (2020) research evidence, drawn from voice and communication therapy with trans and non-binary people, suggests that it is possible to resist the bias created by an expected correlation of skin color and vocal timbre, described by Eidsheim (2019), as well as the aesthetics advocated in Linklater (2006). Included in their therapeutic approach, with aims to enable vocal acceptance for their clients, is an element that supports an active resistance to the expected or socialized correlations between the sound of the voice and the “look” or identity of the individual.

Mills and Stoneham (2020) suggest that voice work in a clinical setting, as well as in the voice training studio, can benefit from the cultivation of a range of options in order that the individual can make *active* contributions to their own sound/meaning making. They suggest that exploration of a sound palette, in relation to both body sounds as well as those stimulated by sensory stimulation outside the body in everyday objects, for example, with their range and variety, can form the basis of more inclusive starting points:

Playing with our own sound…is beyond any binary. We may initially judge the sounds emerging as not beautiful or tuneful. However, they are body sounds and have intrinsic value. (Mills and Stoneham 2020, 99)

Similarly, the task of de-colonizing the voice by means of an expansion of auditory social and cultural reference points, can provide ways to challenge assumed started points for the development of the spoken vocal range and its sonic qualities. In a workshop on de-colonizing voice, which was held at the Central School, November 19, 2021, and concurring with Mills and Stoneham, it was noted that sound making in reference to non-human street noise or animal sounds afforded individuals greater ease of pitch movement and range than if it had been benchmarked against relational conversational speech. In its own way, it offered a means to resist spoken pitch norms, while also exercising explorative possibilities of an individual’s own choosing.

***Importance of a Range of Voice Strategies in Studio and Clinic***

Based on the evidence from the clinic, and the insight from several theoretical sources, a wide range of practical strategies can usefully activate resistance to social bias in the studio. It is accepted that physiology and physics can set guidelines for efficient and healthy vocal use and development. But, as I have shown, important too, is close attention paid to an individual’s desire to sound in accordance with their identity needs and preferences. As such, this attention goes way and above matters of the efficiency of vocal usage and extends to the ways sensations of internal congruency with pitch movement and timbre become significant aims for many binary and non-binary trans voice clients as well as those in the training studio. The dis-congruency of pitch for an actor opens potential character choices that can be adopted and discarded. However, it is a luxury not afforded someone for whom congruency is a question of ensuring the quality (and safety) of their life choices in a trans context as well as in a racialized context in which whiteness dominates. In these instances, frameworks of empathy and trust also need to be established so that experimentation can take place in full knowledge that risk-taking on several levels is present.

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As discussed, the stakes in the gender voice clinic are clearly different to those in the training studio and need to be managed accordingly (Mills and Stoneham 2020, 111). But wherever they take place, spoken voice outcomes benefit from a range of activation strategies in which social bias and judgement get moderated by individual choice and preference. It is a pluralistic approach which links the training studio to the clinic. In this case, the cultivation of an awareness of vocal sensation serves as an important bridge between both frameworks such that time given to “regular, mindful practice of exercises” can lead to greater “awareness and freedom […] where (S)ound is the end result; sensation is the process” (Mills and Stoneham 2020, 111).

Perception about the ways in which racialized identities are constructed also need to be sensitively managed. Unless surfaced, the “silent” aesthetic in the studio that gets generated, can act as a barrier to individual growth. It is important, therefore, to give more thought to an awareness of the ways in which the racialized subject is formed by inviting the trainer to nuance their training vocabulary and to inflect it appropriately for an inclusive framework. Academic and activist Emma Dabiri points out that a constant evaluation of every kind of bias in the studio, including that of race, is ever more important:

This unconscious tendency to double down on the racial categories of “[B]lack” and “white,” making blanket statements about the behaviors, beliefs, actions and desires of diverse groups of people unified under fictive, generic “races,” highlights how many of us still apparently believe that race exists as a natural biological reality. (Dabiri 2021, 14)

***Spoken Voice as Part of Social Normalization***

In the task to de-construct the voice studio, and prize normative assumptions away from the voice practitioner’s instruction, the evidence from both the gender clinic and a critical race perspective gives value to looking more closely at a wide range of material voice outcomes. I return to evolutionary linguist, Everett, who signifies the enormity of the task and highlights the powerful cultural pressures at work:

In the history of languages, a set of cultural preferences emerges that selects among the sounds that humans can produce and perceive to choose, the sounds that a particular culture at a particular time in the development of the language chooses to use. After this selection, the preferred sounds and patters will change over time subject to new articulatory, auditory, or cultural pressures. (Everett 2017, 210)

What does this de-construction offer to the spoken voice trainer who seeks to engage with inclusive practice in their vocal pedagogy? It offers a way to move beyond existing perceptions connected to race and gender which have become entrenched or fixed in the cultural and social auditory perception. It also offers choice about work with vocal range and timbre better suited to a wide range of expressive needs in keeping with individuated social and cultural positions.

The social praxis sessions in the academic year 2021-2022, outlined next, provide an example of a project to embody change in the studio based on the theory of de-centering white sonics. They offer, by way of a practical example, the potential for change within voice practice in the training studio as well as an insight into the intricacies of the task. Above all, they provide the beginnings of a structure to expose Peck’s hidden curriculum so that the whiteness of the studio and its patriarchal underpinnings can be brought into the critical headlights, challenged, and resisted through the act of vocal embodiment itself.

***De-colonizing Voice: Studio Based Action Research***

In my capacity as a voice practitioner/educator and leader of the MA/MFA voice studies: teaching and coaching at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, I introduced a training group in the summer term of 2021 to five, two- hour weekly sessions of socially informed voice praxis set against a backdrop presented by the urgent necessity to de-colonize the curriculum across the UK training sector. The classes were designed to invite students to consider their own sense-based experiential knowledge of voice in relation to a revision of normative assumptions within a training or coaching context.

In the pedagogical design were ideas about a range of ways of sensitizing individuals to the materiality of voice. It included the creation of awareness about the social underpinnings of pitch and timbre work and the importance of a re-positioned student and tutor dynamic. It was created not only to expose the “hidden curriculum” of the UK conservatoires as defined by Peck (2021), but also to identify new teaching and learning strategies. Due to my positionality as a white, middle-class, middle-aged cis woman, and the assumptions on all sides about the pedagogical power structure of the talking head position of the tutor, I was strongly compelled to activate a change of studio dynamics. Consequently, I structured greater attention to the welcomes, individual check-ins, receptivity, and social positionality of the students with an aim to better elicit and foreground declared student experiences. The sessions were designed to engage with and attend as much as possible to the student feeling/mood as to the curriculum itself in the post COVID-19 period of 2021. I recognized the importance of placing these elements at the center of the studio landscape to help address student dissatisfaction around some of the fundamental social inequities highlighted throughout the article.

During the period of this conscious shift in voice studio praxis, I grappled with a conundrum posed by both the need to surface the theory and yet also not overload voice practice with an excess of intellectual freight. I sought to generate an exchange between facilitator and student in which the theory could act as a container for experimentation and not block it. I designed social praxis informed classes as a contoured map within which a series of optional voice pathways were waymarked for individuals to attune to and travel as they felt appropriate. In other words, I aimed to give ever more autonomy to the student while still finding better ways to effectively utilize my facilitator experience.

To be fully inclusive, I saw it would be important to make explicit my positionality as a racialized white, cis female tutor-in-charge, and to expose my values and preferences based on my positionality and acknowledge that my authority in the space was compromised of many discrete elements, not previously made overt, including my racialized privilege. I sensed it was not just the curriculum, but the manner and tone of delivery that needed to change. Important too, was an overt recognition of the absence of diverse voices in not only the UK drama training sector, but also in the wider faculty team as well as in the student cohort.

One strategy to address the lack of representation of the global voice at the micro level of the studio, was to use recorded vocal music samples. By such means it was possible to evoke cultural and sonic horizons much wider than those signaled by my own voice, and to open auditory possibilities for student response to non-Western voices not acoustically present in the space. The experience of listening to sound and music samples became a key element in subsequent discussion. One participant, upon hearing the vocal ease in one of the samples—a Buddhist chant—gained insight into the actual importance of the mobility of the larynx, with its capacity to “lift” without force or struggle. The student was able to gain insight from the experience of the sound of the chant and parallel it with the phonatory impulse from a less “pressed” place (Kayes 2000, 118), sought elsewhere in Western voice instruction. I suggest that the invocation of a different set of sonic conditions, in this case drawn from beyond the Western traditions, reveals how intersectional sonic awareness can generate individually selected vocal change.

The dialogical sensations generated by listening to the music samples appeared to remove some of the anxiety often posed by a direct focus on student vocal output and promoted instead, a greater sense of both individual and group ease. It was, surprisingly, the mix of the spoken word and the non-Western recordings that provided a way to better negotiate my own positionality in the studio and gave the group permission to explore their vocality using different kinds of prompts. It also became a means for students to better trust the value of the sensation of listening to sound and experimenting without reference to obvious external judgement.

In the work, I set out a few existing genealogies of voice work so individuals could better see how pitch and timbre has long been part of traditional voice work and how it could be changed. I adapted a few specific questions about pitch, set out by author and voice practitioner Christina Shewell, to highlight how pitch movement serves as a means for the listener to perceive the intended thought of the speaker (Shewell 2009, 184-5). I also supplemented the experience with a view that pitch movement and timbre could also be a way for the speaker to reflect more about their own unique sonic community identity.

Productive discussion was had as to whether the voice coach might unintentionally intrude on matters of identity and personal effectiveness—as a manifestation of the invisible whiteness of the curriculum—if matters about voice were enforced one way or the other. As stated by Mills and Stoneham, the cultivation of individually based sensory environments, rather than ones dictated by specific race or gendered vocal systems, can surely prove more beneficial and therefore, more transformational:

We are sentient beings in receiving as well as making sound. Everything is vibrating and we interact with the world’s sensuality and soundscape in every moment. (Mills and Stoneham 2020, 99)

The studio experience also included reflection about the place of pitch as part of a vocal strategy to awaken “interest” in the listener, in the context of the evidence that the center pitches of many women may have lowered over time (Shewell 2009, 187). It has been speculated that women, in assuming the mantle of authority in public life, most often equated with the male pitch range, have lowered their pitch range to be convincing. The recognition of this as a much-observed phenomenon, gave additional scope to thought about the importance of making space for a conscious resistance to racialized and gendered stereotypes in the studio.

The remaining sessions were given to practical work that touched on physical and embodied ways to resist all manner of stereotyping. I invited the group to explore ideas and sensations about body cavities and shapes through a mythopoetic approach in which the experience of each shape as a unique reverberating source was made available. The aim was to promote individual memory and imagination through the evocation of breath in different parts of the body and to parallel the sensory work of Mills and Stoneham beyond the given binary of gender assumed sound palettes (Mills and Stoneham 2020, 99).

The development of the podcast, *De-colonising the Voice* (Boston and Dube 2022), as it took place alongside the studio work, was underpinned by the same theoretical framework, and informed by the same contemporary urgency. In its operation at a dialogical sonic level, the podcast was designed to function outside the demands of curriculum delivery where it could occupy a space unencumbered by the need for outcomes. Attention paid to individually defined sonic identity and the de-centering of white assumptions in public vocal delivery, was intrinsic to the project. It is suggested that the podcast stands as a creative parallel offer in the intricate and often painful ongoing project toward effecting urgent social change in the training voice studio and its cultures.

**Conclusion**

There are several main conclusions about how best to design voice praxis in the studio with consideration given to the urgent need to engage with inclusive, de-colonized practices. The cultivation of non-universalized assumption about vocal outcomes has clear potential to re-shape listening and response in the studio. Important too, is recognition given to the positionality of all present—including the tutor—and the ways in which such positions are brought to bear on the experience of the sensory material voice. The overall challenge, however, is to embed the work so that intellectual processes do not overload the body- feeling state. To prevent this occurring, I suggest that the theoretical framework elucidated in the article needs to operate as a “container” for the practice. What do I mean by this? I suggest the theoretical framework needs to act in such a way that it can shift the culture of the mind in all present. It must work to reflect and “hold” important contemporary issues about equality and diversity in such a way that it also allows the conditions of studio-based work to flourish in which the embodiment of the lived experience is crucial.

It remains to be seen, though, how the theoretical container in the studio can function most effectively. In the first instance, the macro-organization, within which the studio sits, must work to hold equity and inclusion values through which wider institutional change can be managed. Closer to the topic of the article, however, is the management of micro changes in the studio at the level of the teaching. I suggest that equitable and inclusive guidance, filtered through the lens of the tutor, needs to invoke the experiential means to experience a difference. By such means, the cultivation of nuanced awareness about a range of sensory experiences can be structured in accordance with a theoretical rationale without making theory the topic of the session itself. To these ends, it is vital that the voice studio remains open, fluid, porous and responsive both in terms of who populates it and in what can be activated within it. It also needs to provide opportunities for exploration within clear boundaries as determined by participant and facilitator discussion along the lines of mythopoetic principles as stated earlier. This both makes explicit the social praxis of the work and encourages non-goal orientated voice work to emerge as expressions of emergent and re-framed vocal expression.

When I embarked on the work to thread conscious social awareness into studio voice protocols, I assumed it would involve an engaged period of thought followed by a period in which the results would simply permeate the practice and pedagogy in the studio. While to some extent this has transpired, it was soon clear that an additional shift needed to be made alongside the direct intellectual processing. It was this latter shift that appeared to make a marked difference to the de-colonizing project in the action research framework. As the perceived holder of the knowledge, as the arbiter of the experience in the space and the instigator of the values, it became clear that as the tutor in charge, I needed to undergo my own process of de-colonization to become transparent and more available to the students. In this way, my unconscious white supremacist tendency to contain, know and to deliver was unraveled in favor of refreshed and more personally reflexive teaching. The challenge remains to make the values in the work clear and coherent while also ensuring that they remain available to all kinds of learners for whom student-centered learning might not be their accustomed mode of engagement.

The work in the voice studio of the future can never correct the viewpoints of the racist, unequal systems that inform much educational practice, but it can begin to better articulate itself in ways that are transparent, generous, open, tolerant, and sensitive to the complexities of dismantling racism and sexism in the social systems of twenty-first educational contexts and beyond. As Eidsheim (2019) says, it is vitally important to ensure that the old essentialisms are not reproduced (27) and that new vocal processes get envisioned through a socially deconstructed lens.

The podcast and the action research studio praxis investigation, with their collective ambition to promote transparent and active dialogue between speaker and listener, tutor, and student, aim to foster greater awareness about the formation of social and individual sonic landscapes. Both have an intention to cultivate sensory perception and generate a new sense of a sonic place in the world based on the activation of memory, imagination, experience, and association. The process takes place on terms co-determined between the individual learner and the facilitator such that it can then be incorporated into a conscious sonic experience and translated into expression and act as a challenge and an alternative to the hitherto whiteness of the actor’s voice training curriculum in UK *conservatories.*

**Acknowledgments:**

Laenui writes from an indigenous perspective on both the colonized and the decolonized positions, and I reference this work with grateful thanks. The transposition of Laenui’s political framework to the studio practice and the sonic podcast framework described here, is done in the spirit of grateful recognition to those who have lived and continue to live under the oppression of colonization and who have had the magnitude of mind to articulate a resistance so that others, such as myself, can be beneficiaries. In his words:

This phase is the most crucial for decolonization. Here is where the full panorama of possibilities is expressed, considered through debate, consultation, and building dreams on further dreams which eventually becomes the flooring for the creation of a new social order. (Laenui 2000, 10)

The recent work on sonic frameworks, with its potential to pose resistance to dominant modes of speaking and listening has been undertaken with grateful thanks to my collaborator, Sitandile Dube, from the Global Majority, who has generously engaged in dynamic discussion, reflection and creative ideation with me, her ex-course leader and white academic.

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The “mythopoetic curriculum” forms a part of the pedagogical underpinning for the reconstruction of practical voice work as a tool to resist oppressive educational structures of knowledge. and works alongside theorists mentioned above, such as Laenui, Peck, Oram, and Eidsheim. Taken together, they provide a means to begin to unlock the hegemonic heft of the power dynamics present in existing racist and sexist hierarchies of sonic domination (Leonard and Willis 2010).

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