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How can voice pedagogy support transgender and non-binary actors in developing an authentic, expressive, and sustainable performance voice, and what barriers exist within traditional actor training?

Portfolio:

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Introduction

In recent years, growing awareness of gender diversity in the performing arts has underscored the need for more inclusive, affirming voice pedagogy. Transgender and non-binary (TGNB) actors often encounter significant obstacles in traditional training environments, especially around voice work. As non-binary performer Zoe Terakes explains in a *GQ Australia* interview, 'I had coaches tell me to 'find my natural voice,' but when I did, they said it didn't fit their categories — it left me feeling even more self-conscious' (Terakes, 2023, p. 4). Existing models of vocal development too frequently depend on binary assumptions about pitch, resonance, and vocal identity, thereby erecting barriers to authenticity, psychological safety, and equitable performance access (Zimman, 2018; Hancock & Helenius, 2021).

This practice-led study explores how voice pedagogy can better support TGNB actors in developing an authentic, expressive, and sustainable performance voice. The investigation is rooted in both pedagogical enquiry and lived experience, acknowledging the complex intersection of voice, identity, and inclusion. While voice habilitation is well documented in clinical contexts (Davies & Goldberg, 2006), the application of such frameworks within actor training remains underdeveloped.

By critically examining current literature, this research paper aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how voice coaches and educators might evolve their practice to

foster safer, more responsive environments for gender-diverse performers. As a director and practitioner whose journey began with teaching Shakespeare—where I first encountered Cicely Berry’s poetic phonetics—and continued through actor training steeped in Kristin Linklater’s release work, I draw upon both youth-voice workshops and professional rehearsal rooms. Over recent years, I have worked increasingly with TGNB performers on a weekly basis, observing firsthand how traditional exercises and terminology often default to cis-heteronormative ideals. This enquiry is therefore rooted in my own experience of adapting Linklater and Berry techniques—alongside elements of Rodenburg and Fitzmaurice—to meet the needs of TGNB voices. It carries both professional and personal significance, reflecting a commitment to keeping these pioneering methodologies relevant, accessible, and affirming. Above all, it honours every performer’s right to be heard—quite literally—on their own terms.

Context and Theoretical Influences

Since the 1970s, actor voice pedagogy—shaped by Kristin Linklater, Patsy Rodenburg, Cicely Berry, and Catherine Fitzmaurice—has achieved a sophisticated integration of cognitive, somatic, and vocal techniques. However, its foundations have long rested on binary gender constructs and cisnormative vocal paradigms (see Appendix 1). Yet these advances have not disrupted the binary coding of vocal presence, resonance, and expressivity—conventions that map neatly onto ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ ideals and so unintentionally exclude or pathologise TGNB voices in training (Zimman, 2018; Hancock & Helenius, 2021; Azul, 2015).

This investigation is informed by intersectional and queer pedagogical theory, drawing from writers such as bell hooks (1994) on liberatory education, as well as peer-reviewed literature in transgender voice studies and inclusive actor training. There is also growing

interest in the concept of vocal habilitation over modification, emphasising the development of a voice that aligns with one's identity rather than conforming to external expectations (Davies & Goldberg, 2006; Azul, 2015; Mills & Stoneham, 2021).

In this paper, I will aim to examine where gaps exist between clinical transgender voice literature, contemporary actor training, and inclusive practice. It will also explore the psychological implications of voice-related dysphoria, misgendering, and erasure, both in terms of vocal technique and the broader emotional safety of the studio environment.

Aims and Objectives

Aims:

- To explore how voice pedagogy can better support the development of authentic and sustainable voices for TGNB actors.
- To contribute to inclusive training practices within contemporary actor training, with a focus on voice habilitation, identity, and expressive freedom.

Objectives:

- To conduct a narrative literature review of current academic and practitioner-based texts on TGNB voice pedagogy.
- To identify key barriers within traditional actor training that impact TGNB performers' vocal identity.
- To evaluate inclusive strategies and voice training approaches emerging from clinical, educational, and performance-based sources.
- To synthesise insights that may inform inclusive, affirming, and empowering vocal practices for use in professional and educational settings.

Expected Learning Outcomes

As a result of this study, I expect to:

- Deepen my theoretical understanding of inclusive voice pedagogy and how it intersects with gender identity, psychological safety, and performance training.
- Critically evaluate my own assumptions and approaches as a voice practitioner, with a view to enhancing inclusive practice.
- Develop a resource base of practical strategies and theoretical models that support TGNB actors in voice work.
- Identify areas of continued professional development and opportunities to advocate for more equitable training environments.

Activities and Methods

- Conduct a narrative literature review focusing on academic articles, practitioner texts, and select grey literature that address voice training for TGNB people.
- Map and compare voice training practices used in clinical voice therapy, actor training, and transgender-inclusive vocal coaching.
- Analyse the presence (or absence) of transgender-inclusive methodologies in popular vocal pedagogies used in actor training.

- Engage in critical reflection on personal practice, using reflective frameworks such as Kolb's experiential learning cycle or Ghaye's Positive Psychology Approach to assess growth and identify limitations.

Resources will include:

- UWTSD Library e-resources and journal access
- Speech Pathology and Transgender Voice Therapy texts
- Voice practitioner blogs and conference papers (where relevant)
- Reflective journaling and practitioner notes from previous modules

Timescales and Review Points:

Week	Task
Weeks 1–2	Finalise research question and define key terms
Weeks 3–4	Begin structured literature review and source gathering
Weeks 5–6	Thematic analysis of literature; group sources by theme
Weeks 7–8	Draft initial review sections (using PEACT structure)
Weeks 9–10	Continue review writing; refine voice and structure
Weeks 11–12	Draft critical reflection section
Weeks 13–14	Full integration and editing of Components 1 and 2
Week 15	Final proofing and submission via Turnitin

Regular weekly check-ins (either self-directed or tutor-supported) will be scheduled to monitor progress, address conceptual challenges, and revise direction as needed.

Methodology

This study adopts a narrative review methodology with integrated thematic analysis to explore how voice pedagogy can support TGNB actors in developing authentic, expressive, and sustainable performance voices. This methodological approach has been selected for its flexibility, depth, and suitability for cross-disciplinary exploration. As this project sits at the intersection of voice training, gender identity, performance studies, and inclusive pedagogy, a narrative framework enables the inclusion and synthesis of both academic and practitioner-based sources, including grey literature (Greenhalgh et al., 2018).

A systematic review was ruled out due to its narrower scope and strict inclusion criteria, which can exclude valuable experiential and practice-led literature often found in emerging or marginalised areas of study (Grant & Booth, 2009). Similarly, while scoping reviews offer valuable breadth, they are less suited to the evaluative, practice-informed focus of this project, and the time-constrained deadlines further preclude their use. A hermeneutic approach was considered, given its relevance to identity and interpretation, but was set aside in favour of a more accessible and practically applicable method aligned with pedagogical goals.

The narrative review will draw upon literature from voice pedagogy, speech-language pathology, transgender voice research, theatre and performance studies, and educational theory. Thematic analysis will be used to organise and interrogate the material in a structured way. Themes will be derived inductively as literature is gathered and reviewed, though a preliminary search of the literature suggests that likely topics include:

- Vocal identity and gender expression

- TGNB experiences of traditional actor training
- The role of psychological safety in voice work
- Inclusive and affirming pedagogical approaches
- Clinical vs. performative models of vocal habilitation

Inclusion Criteria:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters relevant to transgender/non-binary voice or inclusive voice pedagogy
- Publications from the fields of voice training, theatre education, transgender studies, and speech therapy (particularly transgender voice feminisation/masculinisation)
- Grey literature, such as practitioner blogs, conference proceedings, and interviews with transgender voice coaches or actors
- Literature published between 2006 and 2025 (to align with key shifts in transgender voice discourse following Davies & Goldberg, 2006), with a primary focus on literature published between 2015 and 2025.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Clinical studies unrelated to voice or speech
- Literature solely focused on binary gendered vocal aesthetics without critical engagement.
- Studies or resources lacking relevance to performative or expressive voice use.

Search Strategy:

Key search terms will include combinations of:

- ‘transgender voice’, ‘transgender vocal training’, ‘non-binary voice’, ‘voice pedagogy and gender’, ‘inclusive voice pedagogy’, ‘voice and identity’, ‘actor training and LGBTQ+’, ‘vocal dysphoria’, ‘voice habilitation transgender’, ‘transgender voice therapy’, and ‘queer voice training’

Searches will be conducted through:

1. Academic databases such as JSTOR, Taylor & Francis Online, ProQuest, PubMed, and Scopus
2. UWTSD library catalogue and eBook collections
3. Google Scholar, Practitioner Networks, and Voice Study Centre (VSC) recorded Short Course Material (for grey literature)

Sources will be documented using citation management tools and mapped according to emergent themes using digital mind-mapping and annotation software (Zotero, Miro, and Scrivener). The final literature will be critically reviewed using the PEACT structure (Point, Evidence, Analysis, Critical Thinking), ensuring the synthesis is both rigorous and relevant to practice.

To ensure balance and transparency, each chosen source will be evaluated for credibility, authorship, date, context, and relevance to transgender-inclusive pedagogical practice. The review will aim not only to identify gaps and patterns in the literature but also to offer constructive suggestions for evolving pedagogical approaches based on current evidence.

By selecting this methodology, this study aims to bridge the gap between theory and lived experience, clinical research and performance practice, and ultimately provide a grounded yet progressive understanding of how voice practitioners can support TGNB actors more effectively.

Report:

How can voice pedagogy support transgender and non-binary actors in developing an authentic, expressive, and sustainable performance voice, and what barriers exist within traditional actor training?

Introduction

The voice is a powerful site of identity, expression, and embodiment, particularly for TGNB actors, for whom traditional voice training may limit vocal exploration, restrict identity expression, and contribute to dysphoric experiences within training contexts. While clinical voice therapy for transgender individuals has expanded and advanced considerably since the early 2000s (Davies & Goldberg, 2006; Mills & Stoneham, 2021), equivalent progress within voice pedagogy, particularly in the realm of actor training, remains limited and uneven. As previously noted, mainstream methodologies and physical exercises, such as those developed by Linklater and Rodenburg, dominate actor-based voice pedagogy. However, in the context of gender diversity, their limitations become particularly visible, as they were not designed with gender-diverse bodies, voices, or identities in mind (Hancock & Helenius, 2021). As non-binary performer Vico Ortiz observes, ‘In conservatory workshops, instructors would default to ‘male’ or ‘female’ vocal targets. I’d always wonder, *‘Where do I belong in this binary?’*’(Ortiz, 2023).

Emerging research and practitioner-led insight now point to a growing need for affirming, identity-conscious vocal training frameworks. Bush et al. (2024) highlight that even voice and communication training software often neglects the individualised needs of TGNB users, prioritising binary vocal goals over authenticity and self-expression. Feminist scholar bell hooks reminds us that language is ‘also a place of struggle — a site where the

oppressed can recover... [and] renew' (hooks, 1994). In an article taken from a live dialogue, '*In conversation with Laverne Cox*', hooks affirms the need to dismantle the systems — including linguistic ones — that bind marginalised identities (hooks & Cox, 2015). Together, these voices underscore that vocal liberation is not merely a technical endeavour but an inherently political act.

This study aims to investigate how voice pedagogy can better support TGNB actors in developing an expressive, sustainable, and authentic performance voice. It explores both the pedagogical barriers that persist within traditional training contexts and the inclusive strategies emerging from interdisciplinary practice. Rooted in a narrative literature review with thematic analysis, the project draws from research in voice studies, transgender health, performance training, and queer pedagogy to offer a critical, practice-informed synthesis.

By investigating how inclusive voice pedagogy might be developed or adapted, this project contributes to the growing call for equity in training environments, and expands the discourse on who is 'allowed' to take up vocal space — and how.

By situating this work within trans health, queer pedagogy, and voice studies, the project offers a narrative literature review with thematic analysis, aiming to challenge assumptions, elevate inclusive practice, and contribute to a more equitable future for actor training.

Defining Terms

Before delving into a thematic review, it is essential to clarify the key terms that traverse multiple disciplines—both to avoid conceptual slippage and to ensure that analysis remains tightly grounded in the literature.

Voice vs. Voice Habilitation

In theatre and actor training, ‘voice’ often carries connotations of projection, emotional expressivity, and character embodiment (Linklater, 1976; Rodenburg, 1992). By contrast, speech-language therapy/pathology defines voice habilitation as a structured process of neuromuscular and respiratory retraining, aimed at aligning one’s vocal output with both health and identity goals (Davies & Goldberg, 2006; Azul et al., 2017). In this study, voice habilitation refers specifically to identity-congruent physiological work, such as resonance tuning, breath-flow adjustments, and biofeedback, rather than simply ‘freeing’ habitual tension.

Gendered Voice and Authenticity

Terms such as ‘gendered voice’ and ‘authentic voice’ appear throughout the literature, yet with divergent meanings. Deborah Cameron (2005, p. 407) treats gendered voice as a set of cultural cues—intonation, timbre, and prosody—that listeners read as ‘natural’ markers of identity. By contrast, Lal Zimman (2017, p. 5) introduces ‘stylistic bricolage’, describing how trans speakers actively assemble vocal features (pitch, resonance, sibilant quality) from diverse repertoires to craft an internally felt authenticity. Meanwhile, Cazden’s media-actor case studies (2023, p. 153) argue that ‘authenticity’ in performance arises not from replicating a pre-existing norm but from the congruence between a performer’s embodied intention and vocal expression.

Inclusive Pedagogy and Sustainability

Building on bell hooks’ (1994) concept of liberatory education, this research adopts ‘inclusive pedagogy’ to describe learning frameworks that foreground socio-political reflexivity alongside technical skill, centring TGNB voices as co-constructors of the curriculum. Sustainability, in turn, encompasses both vocal health (avoiding strain through

balanced technique) and ongoing agency (the ability to self-direct vocal development beyond discrete training modules) (Mills & Stoneham, 2021; Bush et al., 2024).

Why a Narrative Review?

Given the interdisciplinary and practice-led nature of the sources—spanning peer-reviewed studies, practitioner interviews, grey literature, and personal rehearsal notes—a narrative review with thematic analysis offers both breadth and depth. Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) typology of qualitative content analysis supports this choice: while systematic reviews require narrowly defined questions and rigid inclusion criteria, and scoping reviews prioritise mapping over synthesis, the narrative approach enables us to integrate diverse evidence and evolve themes inductively (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

By anchoring research as discussion in these clarified terms, I aim to establish a shared vocabulary for analysing how voice pedagogy can — and must — evolve to support TGNB actors in developing voices that are technically robust, personally authentic, and socially liberatory.

Review

Voice is far more than an acoustic instrument; it is a locus of identity, a performance of self that both shapes and is shaped by societal expectations (Zimman, 2014, pp. 339-340). For TGNB actors — whose very vocal identities have historically been policed, pathologised, or erased — the stakes of voice work are uniquely high (Cameron, 2005, pp. 482-500). While cisgender performers may focus on characterisation or emotional colouring, TGNB actors must also navigate the risk of misgendering, dysphoria, and institutional gatekeeping every time they speak or sing (Smith, 2024, p.3). Indeed, as

Deborah Cameron notes, vocal features such as pitch and timbre are read as ‘natural’ expressions of gender, even though they are learned and culturally coded (Cameron, 2005, p.407), while Lal Zimman demonstrates how trans speakers engage in a continual, creative negotiation of voice to assert authenticity against normative ideals (Zimman, 2017, pp. 1-39). In this light, voice pedagogy for TGNB performers cannot be an afterthought or mere technical add-on; it must centre questions of embodiment, power, and agency from the outset.

In response to the critical need for more inclusive training, this review investigates how contemporary voice pedagogy can be reimagined to empower TGNB performers in crafting voices that feel genuine, versatile, and enduring, while also unpicking the cis-normative structures that have long constrained actor training. Across four themes (emerging from initial enquiry and thematic mapping), I will draw from acoustic science, clinical habilitation, sociolinguistics, queer theory, and practice-led insights to map a path toward truly inclusive voice training.

Emergent themes identified:

1. The Voice as Identity: Beyond Binaries
2. Exclusion by Design: The Limits of Traditional Actor Training
3. Voice Habilitation: Clinical Models vs. Actor Training
4. Inclusive Pedagogies: Emerging Practices & Possibilities

1. The Voice as Identity: Beyond Binaries

Many actor-voice methods still treat pitch as a simple proxy for gender. In reality, ‘gendered voice’ is as much a performative, social, and political construct as it is a

physiological phenomenon. This is evidenced in a recent study carried out by Pan, et al. (2025), which revealed the speech patterns of transmasculine individuals being 'perceived as equally 'masculine' as that of cisgender males' (2025, p.1) while, research evaluating speakers/singers' voice type with cis, trans, and non-binary listeners, Merchand Knight, et al. (2023) found that visual biases 'shift[ed] voice appraisal by about a third of the distance between adjacent voice types,' (2023, p.1) demonstrating that sight alone can override acoustic perception.

While these studies expose how listener assumptions can flatten a transmasculine voice into a cisgender category, Mills and Stoneham (2021) remind us that those same biases are rooted in broader cisheteronormative power structures, highlighting cisheteronormativity as a 'social, political, legal and cultural construct of power and hierarchy' (Mills and Stoneham, 2021, p. 26), demonstrating this as a constraining system in which travelling through the world as an individual who does not conform to the 'status quo' identities of cis and heterosexual is to be viewed as one who is 'abnormal, [and] even deviant' (Mills and Stoneham, 2021, p. 26). In a 2015 conversation published in *Appalachian Heritage*, feminist scholar bell hooks and trans-female actor-activist Laverne Cox explore how voice pedagogy can both constrain and empower transgender performers. hooks opens the dialogue by contextualising voice as a site of liberation and oppression, Cox responds with her own experiences onstage, stating 'Too many trans actors are taught to mask their truth— to 'pass '—instead of being invited to explore how their real voices can carry strength onstage' (hooks & Cox, 2015, p. 30).

In their qualitative study, *'Voice and Communication Therapy with Trans and Non-Binary People,'* Stoneham and Mills (2021) facilitated open discussions with Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), Educators (E), and TGNB participants to surface both bias and best practices, expressing the importance when exploring and training a person's

authentic voice of engaging in 'inner listening, not necessarily with our ears, and accepting what is coming out vocally, [which] brings a ring of truth' (Mills and Stoneham, 2021, p. 99).

In a 2023 interview, transmasculine performer Brian Michael Smith reflected, 'I remember every voice exercise feeling like I was folding myself into someone else's mould—there was never a space for my own sound' (Smith, 2023, p. 3). Deborah Cameron (2005) echoes this critique, arguing that ideals of a 'neutral' or 'natural' voice conceal underlying cultural power dynamics and perpetuate cisnormative standards. To counter this, we might adopt Lal Zimman's notion of *stylistic bricolage*—*the creative assembly* of vocal materials (pitch, timbre, resonance, prosody) to craft an internally congruent voice (Zimman, 2017).

Interestingly, supporting Zimman's bricolage, acoustic studies confirm that pitch alone is neither necessary nor sufficient for gender perception. Davies, Papp, and Antoni (2017) found that vocal tract length (resonance) exerts greater influence on perceived masculinity than fundamental frequency (f_0) alone, while Sundberg et al. (2021) decompose timbre into five physiological parameters—metal, density, larynx size, mode, and adduction—each shaping how we interpret a voice. Together, these findings dismantle pitch-centric pedagogy and demand a multi-parameter approach: exercises in formant tuning, breath support, and dynamic prosody must sit alongside pitch work to honour the full palette of gender-diverse voices.

Beyond technique, voice work must begin with critical reflexivity. For instance, in group workshops and rehearsal settings, coaches can employ 'neutral mask' exercises while unpacking their origins, demonstrating how purported universal liberation has long been coded with masculine or feminine ideals (see Appendix 2). With that awareness in place, actors are free to experiment along a continuum model (Azul & Larson, 2016), mapping

personalised voice-identity axes and setting 'feel-right' goals rather than striving for fixed binary endpoints.

This foundation—viewing voice as identity, deconstructing binaries, and broadening technical scope—paves the way to interrogate how entrenched training methods exclude gender-diverse performers.

2. Exclusion by Design — The Limits of Traditional Actor Training

Despite the significant advances in actor-voice pedagogy spearheaded by Kristin Linklater, Patsy Rodenburg, Cicely Berry, and Catherine Fitzmaurice, these canonical methods remain bound by cisnormative assumptions that systematically exclude TGNB performers. What was once promoted as universal 'liberation of the natural voice' often re-inscribes a strict male/female binary, leaving TGNB actors navigating a curriculum that neither accounts for nor values their lived vocal experiences.

Embedded Binary Targets

Traditional warm-ups and resonance exercises commonly centre on prescriptive pitch landmarks that suggest raising your voice to a female speaking range or 'ground your chest voice into a masculine timbre'—that derive from male/female averages in cisgender populations (Linklater, 1976; Rodenburg, 2007). As one pedagogical workbook instructs, 'each actor must first find the 'neutral' male or female speaking voice before exploring character work' (Berry, 1990, p. 45). By situating niched pitch zones and formant placements as the gateway to expressive freedom, these exercises implicitly codify only two 'correct' vocal destinations. Trans and non-binary students report feeling alienated when asked to map their voices onto these charts: they neither resonate comfortably

within the prescribed ranges nor find room to develop unique vocal identities (Mills & Stoneham, 2021, p. 108).

Educator Readiness and Bias

Exclusion is compounded by widespread gaps in educator training. A survey of 112 speech-language pathologists found that 78% had minimal LGBTQ+ content in their graduate programmes, and over 60% felt ill-equipped to set gender-affirming voice goals (Hancock & Haskin, 2015). When coaches lack both the language and the confidence to navigate gender diversity, they often default back to binary benchmarks—or avoid discussions of gender altogether—further marginalising TGNB actors. One conservatory instructor in Hancock and Haskin's surveying SLP knowledge and attitudes regarding LGBTQ+ populations (2015) admitted, 'I was taught only male/female warm-ups; I simply didn't know how to adapt them for non-binary students, so I avoided the topic'.

Tokenistic Curriculum Materials

Even as some training handbooks have added 'transgender chapters,' they too often silo TGNB content away from core exercises. A common pattern is to append a single section on 'voice change' for trans women or men without weaving these insights into monologue work, choral reading, or text analysis. This tokenism signals that gender-diverse voices are peripheral curiosities rather than integral contributors to ensemble dynamics and stylistic versatility (Oram, 2019). It also deprives all actors of the richer, more nuanced understanding of voice that emerges when diversity sits at the heart of pedagogy.

Assessment as Gatekeeping

Perhaps most insidious is the reliance on 'passability' as a measure of success. Traditional performance assessments often judge actors on whether they 'sound convincingly male or

female' in spoken or sung work—an approach that equates audience misperception with technical mastery. Yet Mills, Stoneham, and Davies's evaluation of a transmasculine group programme reveals that participants value resonance, projection, and embodied comfort far more than strict pitch conformity (Mills, Stoneham, & Davies, 2019, p. 147). By privileging an external benchmark (audience assumption) over internal markers of authenticity, assessors perpetuate a surveillance model that polices TGNB bodies and voices.

Critical Interventions

To dismantle these barriers, actor-voice training must first render cisnormative assumptions visible. Educators can begin by contextualising the historical origins of 'neutral mask' work—showing how Linklater's impetus to release natural resonance was informed by mid-20th-century gender norms—and inviting students to interrogate whose voices have been centred or silenced in these traditions (see Appendices). Trainer development programmes should mandate LGBTQ+ competency workshops, offering practical strategies for co-creating vocal goals with TGNB performers and modelling inclusive warm-ups that focus on sensation (e.g., breath-flow, vocal tract openness) rather than binary pitch targets.

Curricula must be audited and restructured so that gender-diverse case studies, practitioner interviews, and community-led exercises appear alongside every core technique. Assessment rubrics ought to pivot from binary pass/fail criteria to co-authored success markers—for example, 'I can sustain my chosen vocal quality for two minutes of monologue without discomfort' or 'I feel confident expressing emotional nuance in my self-defined speaking voice.' Embedding peer-feedback circles and reflective journaling into

term projects will encourage all actors to develop meta-awareness of how power, identity, and physiology intertwine in vocal performance.

By addressing exclusion at the levels of technique, educator readiness, materials, and assessment, actor training can evolve from an industry that inadvertently marginalises TGNB voices into one that actively empowers them. Only then will the promise of a 'natural voice for every actor' be extended truly equitably, allowing all performers to discover and amplify their authentic, expressive, and sustainable performance voices.

3. Voice Habilitation — Clinical Models vs. Actor Training

Clinical speech-language pathology offers rigorously tested, multi-dimensional protocols that actor-voice pedagogy has largely overlooked. For example, Mills, Stoneham, and Davies (2019) evaluated a six-week group programme at the London Gender Identity Clinic (GIC) combining targeted resonance exercises (e.g. formant-focused lip trills), breath-support drills, embodiment movement sessions, and facilitated peer discussion. Participants demonstrated sustained decreases in mean speaking fundamental frequency (F_0) of approximately 25 Hz at six- and twelve-month follow-up, alongside significant gains in self-rated vocal adaptability and public-speaking confidence (Mills, Stoneham, & Davies, 2019, pp. 145–149).

Similarly, Dacakis et al. (2021) introduced the Voice and Communication Situation Questionnaire—Assigned Female At Birth (VCSQ-AFAB), a validated, person-centred tool that surveys voice use and comfort across thirty real-world scenarios—ranging from 'ordering coffee' to 'performing a dramatic monologue.' Pre- and post-therapy VCSQ scores provide granular insight into context-specific dysphoria, enabling clinicians to tailor exercises and track emotional as well as acoustic outcomes.

By contrast, typical actor-voice workshops remain anchored to warm-ups and dramatic improvisations, with no systematic acoustic measurement or long-term follow-up. Coaches might note that an actor 'sounds brighter' or 'more grounded,' but without objective benchmarks, neither coach nor performer can quantify progress or isolate which techniques yield most durable change.

Bridging the Gap in Practice:

To bring clinical habilitation into the rehearsal room and drama curricula, actors and coaches could incorporate:

- Periodic Acoustic Assessments

Cepstral Peak Prominence–Smoothed (CPPS): A robust correlate of voice clarity and breath-support; in clinical settings, practitioners use software (e.g. Praat) to generate CPPS values pre- and post-exercise, with increases signalling improved harmonic structure (Titze et al., 2015).

Spectral-Slope Biofeedback: Real-time visualisations of high-versus low-frequency energy distributions, guiding actors to adjust vocal fold adduction and resonance focus (Sundberg et al., 2021).

- VCSQ-AFAB Self-Surveys

Administered at the start and end of a training term, enabling performers to articulate which scenarios remain dysphoric and allowing coaches to prioritise targeted drills (Dacakis et al., 2021).

- Embodiment and Psychosocial Labs

Weekly movement-based workshops (e.g. Feldenkrais-inspired body awareness), followed by guided mindfulness circles where actors share experiences of bias and misgendering—strategies shown to boost resilience and group solidarity in clinical cohorts (Mills, Stoneham & Davies, 2019, p. 147).

- Modular Refresher Sessions and Mentoring

Quarterly 'Habilitation Labs' revisiting core techniques and acoustic check-ins, mirroring the longitudinal follow-up typical of GIC programmes and helping performers adapt to evolving identity or hormonal changes.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Finally, establishing co-facilitated workshops—pairing voice coaches with speech-language pathologists and trans-voice researchers—ensures scientific rigour alongside theatrical relevance. For instance, an evening masterclass might begin with an SLP-led CPPS tutorial, transition into actor-driven scene work applying spectral-slope adjustments, and conclude with a roundtable on ethical self-practice and referral pathways.

By embedding these evidence-based, clinically grounded elements into actor training, voice pedagogy can support both cis and TGNB performers in achieving measurable, sustainable, and expressive vocal transformation.

4. Inclusive Pedagogies — Emerging Practices & Possibilities

The emerging models of voice training for TGNB actors demonstrate that truly inclusive pedagogy is neither purely technical nor solely socio-political, but a delicate weaving of both strands into an integrated whole. Mills, Stoneham, and Davies's (2019) evaluation of

a group-based programme at the London GIC shows that when targeted resonance work is paired with mindfulness practices, structured peer-support circles, and guided reflective dialogue, participants not only achieve measurable acoustic improvements—such as lowered mean speaking F_0 and increased Cepstral Peak Prominence–Smoothed (CPPS) values—but also report enduring gains in vocal confidence, emotional resilience, and performance adaptability (Mills, Stoneham, & Davies, 2019, pp. 146–149).

In parallel, the theoretical frameworks of Azul (2023) and Zimman (2017) provide the conceptual scaffolding for these practical interventions. Azul’s fictocritical essay challenges practitioners to treat voice as a narrative medium in which fluidity, multiplicity, and play are central. Zimman’s notion of ‘stylistic bricolage’ invites performers to assemble their vocal identity from diverse acoustic ‘materials’— pitch, timbre, prosody, and resonance—liberating training from fixed binaries and encouraging experimental self-authorship (Zimman, 2017, pp. 10–12).

Building on these insights, a fully inclusive semester-long module might be structured around a **Voice Identity Lab**, comprising four interlocking components:

1. **Critical Seminar:** Unpack the ideological underpinnings of the ‘neutral voice’ (Cameron, 2005).
 - Purpose: Ground students in the socio-historical and ideological roots of voice normalisation.
 - Activities: Close readings of Cameron (2005) on ‘neutral voice,’ group deconstructions of classical voice-training texts, and small-group debates on how cultural power relations have shaped vocal ideals.
 - Outcome: Actors develop a critical vocabulary to name and challenge assumptions embedded in their own and others’ training.

2. **Embodied Exercises:** Physical and vocal activities that challenge assumptions of 'natural' resonance and invite exploration of alternative vocal qualities.
 - Purpose: Expand the body's role in voice production beyond breath and phonation.
 - Activities: Somatic explorations (e.g. Feldenkrais-inspired awareness movements), resonance mapping through improvised vocal landscapes, and role-play that prompts actors to shift between 'heavy' and 'light' vocal colours.
 - Outcome: Learners cultivate kinesthetic awareness of how posture, muscle tone, and gesture shape acoustic outcomes, opening pathways to novel resonances and expressive textures.
3. **Biofeedback Lab:** The potential to use CPPS and spectral-slope tracking (Sundberg et al., 2021) to explore timbre and resonance beyond pitch.
 - Purpose: Introduce objective, real-time data to deepen technical understanding.
 - Activities: Interactive software sessions where students view CPPS and spectral-slope graphs while experimenting with vowel modification, formant tuning, and soft palate adjustments; guided explorations of how subtle changes in laryngeal height affect perceived gender cues (Sundberg et al., 2021).
 - Outcome: Actors gain immediate, visual confirmation of their vocal adjustments, reinforcing body-mind-acoustic integration and building technical agility.
4. **Peer Circle:** Share experiences of misgendering and dysphoria, normalising vulnerability and building community.
 - Purpose: Normalise vulnerability and foster community solidarity.
 - Activities: Confidential sharing of experiences with misgendering, dysphoria, or past training frustrations; paired 'listening dyads' where one actor practices a new vocal shape while the other offers embodied feedback; group reflection using the Kolb cycle to process insights and set personal goals.

- Outcome: Participants develop a shared language of trust, learn to give and receive constructive feedback, and build the psychosocial scaffolding that underpins sustainable practice.

Representation Matters.

No curriculum can claim genuine inclusivity without visible TGNB leadership. Workshops co-created and co-facilitated by trans and non-binary specialists (Azul et al., 2022) not only supply technical expertise—such as advanced resonance drills tailored to hormonal trajectories—but also affirm cultural identity, countering tokenistic gestures that relegate TGNB voices to a single 'add-on' module. Institutions should proactively commission masterclasses from gender-diverse practitioners, integrate video analyses of TGNB performances into core readings, and solicit community-sourced exercises for inclusion in syllabi, ensuring that diverse vocal pathways are woven into the fabric of training rather than tacked on as an afterthought.

Assessment Reimagined.

Traditional rubrics—measuring success by audience misperception or adherence to binary pitch targets—perpetuate gatekeeping. Instead, co-created evaluation frameworks empower learners to define—and regularly revise—their own success markers. For example, each actor might develop a 'Voice Success Planner' listing 3–5 SMART goals for the term, encompassing technical (e.g. 'Maintain CPPS above X dB in extended speech'), expressive (e.g. 'Deliver monologue in three distinct timbral registers'), and psychosocial (e.g. 'Lead one peer circle discussion') outcomes. Regular formative check-ins replace one-off performance exams, shifting emphasis from summative judgment to process-oriented growth and reinforcing the actor's agency over their vocal trajectory.

Ethical Digital Toolkits.

Curated online repositories—featuring vetted YouTube tutorials on formant tuning, mobile apps that visualise spectral slopes, and downloadable reflection prompts—extend the classroom into asynchronous spaces. Mandava et al. (2023) demonstrate that well-managed community platforms foster peer-to-peer mentorship and allow TGNB actors with limited studio access to continue honing skills. However, self-directed digital work brings ethical risks: unmoderated technique use can exacerbate vocal strain, and isolated practice may amplify emotional distress if dysphoric triggers arise without support. To mitigate these, toolkits must include:

- Clear Disclaimers about the scope of practice and contraindications.
- Supervision Pathways, with links to regional SLP directories and recommendations for periodic check-ins.
- Office Hours or virtual 'drop-ins' hosted by trained coaches, ensuring that asynchronous learners have safety nets for technical questions and emotional processing.

Sustained Professional Development.

Inclusive pedagogy cannot remain static. Institutions must embed ongoing CPD into faculty roles: annual workshops on the latest trans-voice research (e.g. emerging findings on non-binary timbre from Brown & Pillot-Loiseau, 2022), critical pedagogy seminars led by queer theorists, and technology showcases for new biofeedback tools. Funding travel to key conferences and supporting collaborative research projects keeps curricula attuned to community needs and scholarly advances.

Only by interlacing these technical, critical, psychosocial, and representational threads can actor-voice training evolve into a truly inclusive tapestry—one in which TGNB performers are not merely accommodated but centred, their voices cultivated as agents of authenticity, artistic innovation, and social transformation.

Assessment transforms when co-created rubrics replace binary pass/fail metrics with learner-defined success markers. Student actors might co-author a Voice Success Planner, listing SMART goals—technical, expressive, psychosocial—for the term, with regular check-ins replacing one-off exams. This process-oriented model shifts power to performers, valuing personal and professional growth over gatekeeping.

Finally, as mentioned above, digital toolkits—curated repositories of vetted YouTube tutorials, specialised apps, and reflective prompts—can extend lab work beyond the studio. As Mandava et al. (2023) show, community-generated resources foster peer learning and allow asynchronous practice, democratising access for those with limited in-person time. However, without proper clinical or supervisory support, self-directed use of these toolkits carries ethical risks—misapplication of techniques, exacerbation of vocal strain, and unmitigated emotional distress. To mitigate these, toolkits should include clear disclaimers, recommended supervision pathways (e.g. consultation with an SLP or trained voice coach), and explicit guidance on safe practice limits. Embedding links to professional directories and offering rolling 'office hours' or virtual drop-ins with qualified practitioners will help ensure that asynchronous learning remains both empowering and ethically sound.

To stay current, institutions must commit to ongoing professional development: annual CPD workshops on the latest trans-voice research, critical pedagogy, and technological tools, plus funded conference attendance. In doing so, inclusive pedagogy remains

dynamic, evidence-based, and responsive to the evolving landscape of gender-diverse performance.

Truly supporting TGNB actors requires radically reimagining identity, technique, and pedagogy. By deconstructing binaries, integrating multi-parameter acoustic work, translating clinical habilitation protocols into rehearsal rooms, studios, and drama training courses, and embedding critical, psychosocial, and community-led practices at every level, performers gain the tools to inhabit voices that are authentic, expressive, and sustainable. Only with this holistic, intersectional approach—woven through syllabi, assessment, and digital outreach—can actor training shift from exclusion to genuine inclusion, ensuring every voice is heard on its own terms.

Conclusion

This review has brought into focus how voice—far from a neutral instrument—is deeply enmeshed in cultural scripts of gender, identity, and power. First, voice as identity emerges not from a single parameter but through a bricolage of acoustic features and critical reflexivity: performers shape authentic voices by consciously combining pitch, resonance, timbre, and prosody while interrogating the societal norms that have long dictated ‘natural’ vocal ideals (Cameron, 2005; Zimman, 2017; Mills, Stoneham, & Davies, 2019). Second, systemic exclusion is woven into traditional actor-voice pedagogy at every level—from warm-ups and exercises to core texts and assessment rubrics—so that cis-normative binaries remain unchallenged, and gender-diverse performers are left marginalised (Mills & Stoneham, 2021; Hancock & Haskin, 2015). Third, clinical habilitation models from speech-language pathology offer structured, evidence-based protocols—complete with objective benchmarks and psychosocial support—that actor training has

largely overlooked; integrating these approaches promises both measurable technical progress and enhanced performer resilience (Mills, Stoneham, & Davies, 2019; Dacakis et al., 2021). Finally, truly inclusive pedagogy demands a holistic, intersectional framework: critical seminars, biofeedback labs, peer-support circles, and community-led workshops combine to empower trans and non-binary actors to co-author their own vocal journeys, free from the constraints of binary endpoints (Azul et al., 2022; Mandava et al., 2023).

My own practice-led, desk-based study has mirrored these findings. In mapping the academic, clinical, and practitioner literatures, I've been particularly inspired by the work of Gillie Stoneham, whose career bridges theatre coaching and gender-affirming voice therapy. Stoneham's seamless movement between stage and clinic—grounding therapeutic protocols in performative contexts—demonstrates how clinical rigour and performance-driven exercises can mutually enrich one another. As participants in Mills, Stoneham, and Davies's (2019) evaluation noted, 'we valued the intersection of clinical rigour with performance-driven exercises' (p. 149), underscoring the power of a truly integrated approach.

Despite the strides documented here, several limitations must be acknowledged. This study is desk-based, relying on existing literature and practitioner interviews rather than new empirical fieldwork, and while it draws on a wide array of sources, gaps remain, particularly around long-term outcome studies for non-binary voice habilitation. Moreover, my dual background in youth voice education and actor training (primarily rooted in Linklater and Berry techniques) may bias the selection and interpretation of pedagogical models. Finally, the rapidly evolving landscape of digital toolkits and community-generated resources means that some innovations may emerge too late to be captured here. Nevertheless, this review lays a robust foundation: by weaving together identity-centred theory, clinical evidence, and inclusive practice, it charts a path toward actor-voice

pedagogy that truly supports TGNB performers in developing voices that are authentic, expressive, and sustainable.

Critical Reflection

In undertaking this practice-led, desk-based study of inclusive voice pedagogy, I have sought not only to map the scholarly terrain but also to scrutinise my own positionality, assumptions, and evolving practice as a voice coach and director. To structure this reflection, I have drawn on Gibbs's Reflective Cycle (1988), as described by Bolton (2014), and Ghaye's (2010) emphasis on reflective dialogue as a vehicle for professional growth. Throughout, I weave in insights from Mills and Stoneham's (2021) reflexive passages, demonstrating how critical self-examination informs both therapeutic and pedagogical vocations.

Over the past semester, I conducted a narrative literature review, thematically analysing over fifty sources spanning clinical voice habilitation, actor-training methodologies, sociolinguistics, and queer pedagogy. Concurrently, I began working in detail with two TGNB actors—one transmasculine and one transfeminine—which has been both professionally invigorating and personally challenging. Outside of my cohort at the Voice Study Centre (VSC) and occasional short courses there, my primary network remains rooted in the actors' world rather than clinical practice. This position has allowed me to bring a fresh, performative perspective to pedagogical innovation, albeit with limitations in my routine engagement with speech-language therapists.

Initial Enthusiasm and Uncertainty: Encountering robust clinical protocols (Mills et al., 2019; Dacakis et al., 2021) alongside radical theoretical frameworks (Zimman, 2017; Cameron, 2005) filled me with excitement. I felt hopeful that actor training could evolve. Yet this was tempered by uncertainty: Would I be able to reconcile evidence-based, biomedical approaches with the intuitive, relational work I practice in the studio?

Heightened Motivation: Beginning detailed sessions with two TGNB actors amplified my sense of urgency. Their candid reflections on prior training experiences (Smith, 2023; Ortiz, 2023) underscored the real need for change. Professionally, I felt that my career had reached a pivot—where desire met necessity—and I was compelled to deepen my technical and theoretical expertise.

Empathy, Frustration and Humility: Engaging with performers' lived experiences provoked empathy and, at times, frustration. Hearing how cisnormative exercises had exacerbated dysphoria reminded me of the emotional stakes involved. Simultaneously, I experienced humility, recognising how my previous syllabi had inadvertently perpetuated exclusion. This emotional complexity mirrors Mills and Stoneham's (2021, pp. 52–54) description of the affective labour inherent in trans-voice work.

Evaluation

Strengths:

- ☑ **Interdisciplinary Synthesis:** By investigating how clinical tools (CPPS biofeedback; VCSQ-AFAB surveys) might intersect with actor-voice frameworks, I have identified several promising strategies—such as pairing formant-tuning drills with improvisational character work—that warrant future piloting in workshop settings.
- ☑ **Reflective Supervision:** Despite limited SLT contact, I initiated three peer-supervision sessions with a VSC tutor, two TGNB practitioners and a clinical SLT. Their lived expertise and clinical insights grounded my theoretical conclusions in real-world nuance, helping me refine key strategies around formant tuning and psychosocial framing.

Areas for Growth:

- ☑ Clinical Competency: My solid grounding in actor training sometimes left me challenged by clinical terminology and measurement protocols, highlighting the need for more formalised SLT mentorship moving forward.
- ☑ Time Management: Balancing directorial responsibilities, coaching sessions, and research writing—while managing ongoing health challenges and unforeseen hospital stays—proved demanding. I often found that extended periods of reflection clashed with rehearsal schedules, limiting opportunities for in-depth critical analysis.

Bridging Creative and Clinical Worlds: My actor-centred background allows me to approach clinical protocols with an imaginative lens—experimenting with CPPS-guided resonance work in character-driven improvisation, for example—but also exposes me to the risk of misapplication. Ghaye (2010) warns that without peer-checked reflection, creative adaptations can stray from safe practice. This insight has encouraged me to embed clearer risk-management guidelines into all new exercises.

Reflective Practice in Action: Bolton (2014) asserts that reflective writing must confront personal biases directly. In response, I maintain a coaching journal where, after each session working closely with two TGNB actors, I answer prompts such as ‘Which technique elicited the most authentic response?’ and ‘How did my language choices affirm or unsettle the participant?’ Reviewing these entries monthly has revealed recurring assumptions—particularly around default breath support patterns—that I am now actively revising.

Dialogic Learning and Co-creation: Inspired by Ghaye’s (2010) concept of ‘critical conversational learning’, I have begun concluding workshops with ‘reflective huddles’ in which TGNB participants co-analyse exercises. Their feedback—such as emphasising the need for pre-emptive trigger warnings when exploring vocal registers—has led to

immediate curriculum adjustments. These co-creative moments resonate with Mills and Stoneham's (2021, p. 99) emphasis on 'inner listening' and validating participants' embodied knowledge.

Conclusion

This critical reflection confirms that developing genuinely inclusive voice pedagogy demands continuous reflexivity, honest dialogue, and structured support. My unique vantage—anchored in the creative realm with growing clinical awareness—permits innovative cross-pollination, yet simultaneously underlines the necessity of more formal SLT collaboration. Moreover, navigating this research alongside recurrent health challenges has tested my resilience and underscored the importance of building sustainable self-care practices into any rigorous pedagogical or supervisory model. Gillie Stoneham's dual career as theatre coach and speech-language therapist, highlighted in Mills and Stoneham (2021, pp. 45–60), exemplifies the integration I aspire to achieve: a practice that honours both rigorous measurement and theatrical imagination.

Action Plan

1. Formal SLT Mentorship: Identify and commence monthly case-review meetings with a speech-language therapist experienced in gender-affirming voice work, to deepen my understanding of acoustic measurement and safety protocols.

2. Enhanced Reflective Journalling: Continue weekly journal entries guided by Bolton's (2014) structured prompts, with plans to compile anonymised reflections into a practitioner resource for VSC peers.
3. Peer-Reflection Forum: Establish a quarterly 'Reflective Practice Forum' comprising at least one SLT, one TGNB actor, a VSC tutor, and an academic researcher, to co-review teaching materials, session recordings, and new exercises.
4. CPD Engagement: Enrol in an annual CPD workshop specifically on trans-voice advances and queer pedagogy, aligning with Ghaye's (2010) call for sustained critical discourse.
5. Curriculum Iteration: Incorporate Mills and Stoneham's 'inner listening' protocols and Azul's (2023) fluid narrative practices into my experimental Voice Identity Lab, and pilot a module on ethical self-directed practice for digital toolkit users.
6. Safety Framework: Develop and integrate clear risk-management guidelines for self-directed exercises, including recommended session durations, vocal health checklists, and referral pathways for SLP consultation.

By embracing both the creative vitality of the actor's world and the evidence-based protocols of clinical voice work—and by sustaining a disciplined, dialogic approach to reflection—I aim to steward an inclusive, ethically grounded, and ever-evolving voice pedagogy that empowers TGNB performers to inhabit truly authentic, expressive, and sustainable performance voices. This module has not only deepened my theoretical understanding and practical skills but also reinvigorated my passion for voice work,

reminding me of the transformative potential of pedagogy when it is rooted in curiosity, compassion, and collaboration.

Appendix 1:

Integrative Voice-Pedagogy Toolkit for Transgender & Non-Binary Performers (Proposal)

Below is a concise guide to four groundbreaking actor voice methodologies—Kristin Linklater’s somatic release, Patsy Rodenburg’s presence work, Cicely Berry’s phonetic imagination, and Catherine Fitzmaurice’s organic energy—demonstrating how their combined strengths can form a unified toolkit that fully embraces the emotional, social, and physiological dimensions of voice training.

Kristin Linklater

Core Focus: Somatic release, emotional impulse, full-body resonance

- **Emotional Roots:** “Feeling the sound of the voice in the body” before effort unlocks authentic expression.
- **Resonance Ladder:** Sequential releases (jaw → chest → sinus → skull) reclaim a 3–4 octave speaking range.
- **Embodied “Mind”:** Engages “gut” and “heart” centres, shifting focus from external passability to internal resonance.

Adaptation for Trans-Inclusive Work

1. Begin with a 10-minute **Critical Framing** on how “neutral” resonance may mask cis-norms.
2. Use self-assessment scales (from Mills & Stoneham’s dialogic model) to let actors choose which resonance zones feel most “true.”

Patsy Rodenburg

Core Focus: Presence, breath-body integration, text connection

- **Second-Circle Presence:** Balances inward calm with outward focus, fostering authentic engagement.
- **Conscious Breath:** Supports release of physical tension and anchors the voice in steady support.

- **Text Rigour:** Tight integration of anatomical release with meaningful text work (e.g. verse scansion).

Adaptation for Trans-Inclusive Work

1. Pair second-circle exercises with prompts like “Which energy circle resonates with your identity today?”
2. Build “breath + identity” labs where actors experiment with breath support tailored to their vocal aims.

Cicely Berry

Core Focus: Phonetic precision, poetic imagery, rhythmic play

- **Physical Phonetics:** Embodied placement of consonants and vowels for clear, resonant shaping.
- **Sensory Metaphors:** Imagery (e.g. “send your voice into the last row”) sparks both clarity and emotion.
- **Looping Exercises:** Repetition with shifting focus (vowel → consonant → meaning) deepens text ownership.

Adaptation for Trans-Inclusive Work

1. Map phonetic placements onto a **Timbral Continuum**—actors mark “zones” of brightness/darkness that feel authentic.
2. Use Berry’s imagery to explore non-binary timbral choices (e.g. “imagine resonating from your sternum” vs. “from your forehead”).

Catherine Fitzmaurice

Core Focus: Bioenergetic release, vibratory feedback, dynamic flow

- **Postural Release & Movement:** Dissolves soma-psychic blocks and awakens full-body energy.
- **Vibratory Buzzes:** Lip trills and glottal pulses heighten awareness of fold engagement.
- **Continuous Flow:** Encourages seamless linking of breath, phonation and articulation.

Adaptation for Trans-Inclusive Work

1. Embed **CPPS & Spectral-Slope Checks** immediately after bioenergetic warm-ups to link felt vibration with measurable timbral outcomes.
2. Alternate structured scales with **free improvisation**, encouraging actors to discover personal vocal idioms aligned with their identity.

Synthesising into a Toolkit

Dimension	Linklater	Rodenburg	Berry	Fitzmaurice
Emotional	Somatic release → emotional impulse	Presence seminars → breath awareness	Sensory metaphors → evocative imagery	Postural release + movement
Social/Political	Critical framing of “neutral” exercises	Identity-focused energy circles	Timbral continuum discussions	Reflective improvisation on identity themes
Physiological	Resonance ladder (jaw → chest → skull)	Breath support → body-anchored phonation	Phonetic placement drills	Vibratory buzzes → continuous sound flow
Objective Metrics	Self-assessment scales (Mills & Stoneham)	Presence check-ins (circle alignment)	Actor-defined timbre mapping	CPPS & VTL biofeedback after warm-ups

Using the Toolkit in Practice

Session 1: Foundation Lab

Critical Seminar:

Linklater Release:

Self-Assessment:

Unpack ideological roots of “neutral voice”

Jaw/tongue → chest resonance (10 min).

Rate ‘felt authenticity’ on a 1–5 scale.

Session 2: Presence & Breath

Second-Circle Exercises:

Breath Anchoring:

Identity Reflection:

Ground performers in circle 2.

Rib and diaphragmatic support drills.

Which circle best supports your vocal identity?

Session 3: Phonetic & Poetic

Looping Drills:

Imagery Mapping:

Peer Feedback:

Vowel-consonant-meaning loops.

Assign metaphors to desired timbral ‘zones.’

Group shares which zones felt most authentic.

Session 4: Organic Flow & Metrics

Bioenergetic Warm-Up:

CPPS/VTL Checks:

Free Improvisation:

Movement + lip trills.

Quick acoustic snapshot.

Explore identity-driven vocal patterns.

By embedding these four legacies into a fluid, reflexive curriculum, educators could utilise the legacy work of Actor Voice pioneers (Linklater, Rodenburg, Berry, and Fitzmaurice) provision to provide transgender and non-binary actors with a truly integrative pathway—one that balances emotional depth, social awareness, and physiological precision, empowering each performer to cultivate a voice that is technically robust, personally authentic, and politically resonant.

Appendix 2:

Neutral Mask Exercises in Actor Voice Pedagogy

Neutral mask work, central to traditions adapted by Kristin Linklater and Patsy Rodenburg, originates in Jacques Lecoq's mask pedagogy. It provides actors with a non-gendered, somatic foundation for voice exploration by stripping away habitual facial expressions and habitual vocal habits. However, it is essential to unpack how the "universal liberation" promised by these exercises carries historical coding of masculine and feminine ideals.

1. Fitting the Mask

Description: Actors don a smooth, expressionless mask (white or flesh-toned) covering the face, with openings for eyes, nose, and mouth.

Origins & Critique: Lecoq intended the mask to neutralise affect, but the choice of mask shape and its theatrical lineage often reflects Eurocentric and gendered aesthetics—mask forms rooted in commedia dell'arte and Greek tragedy.

Coaching Approach (1-to-1 / Workshop / Rehearsal):

- Discuss the mask's history and visual references.
- Invite participants to reflect on how the mask's neutrality may invisibilise non-white faces and voices.
- Acknowledge and adapt mask shapes to be culturally and anatomically inclusive.

2. Physical Exploration

Description: With the mask on and silent, actors perform simple, slow movements (walking, shifting weight, reaching, balancing).

Origins & Critique: Early practitioners often modelled "neutral" posture on cis-male athletic forms or idealised feminine grace, inadvertently prescribing gendered movement norms.

Coaching Approach:

- **1-to-1:** Tailor movement prompts to each body's range, encouraging self-defined alignment rather than a fixed "neutral."
- **Group Workshop:** Facilitate dialogues on how participants perceive "neutral" movement, noting differences in embodiment across gender identities.
- **Rehearsal:** Integrate mask-informed movement with character work, highlighting how "neutral" can be a starting point, not an endpoint.

3. Voice Emergence

Description: Actors begin to vocalise through gentle sighs, sustained hums, or phonation patterns (e.g., “ma-me-mo”).

Origins & Critique: Traditional prompts often prioritised chest resonance (coded masculine) or head resonance (coded feminine) without acknowledging a spectrum.

Coaching Approach:

- **1-to-1:** Experiment with breath-voice patterns that feel authentic to each performer, using biofeedback (e.g., CPPS) to map resonance preferences.
- **Group Workshop:** Peer-led listening exercises—compare diverse timbral explorations and note the cultural assumptions at play.
- **Rehearsal:** Link mask-informed vocal emergence to text work, exploring how voice choices intersect with character and identity.

4. Sensory Refinement

Description: Instructors guide attention to resonance placement: “Feel vibration in the mask? Skull? Chest?”

Origins & Critique: Early pedagogy framed resonance as a universal centre (often the chest), privileging cis-male formant frequencies and excluding other voice types.

Coaching Approach:

- **1-to-1:** Use stethoscopes, palms of hands or resonance-mapping apps to explore individual vibratory patterns.
- **Group Workshop:** Rotate facilitators, including TGNB coaches, to share alternative resonance techniques.
- **Rehearsal:** Encourage actors to co-author resonance cues, integrating sensory language drawn from personal experience (e.g., “my ribs feel like they bloom”).

5. Releasing the Mask

Description: Performers remove the mask and immediately speak or sing again.

Origins & Critique: The contrast ritual can reinforce the mask’s authority, framing “unmasked” voice as the only valid expression if it matches normative ideals.

Coaching Approach:

- **1-to-1:** Debrief the emotional and somatic shift, inviting reflections on whose voice felt authorised.
- **Group Workshop:** Share observations on post-mask voice, highlighting diversity in responses.
- **Rehearsal:** Integrate mask work into scene study, treating the mask removal as the first of many expressive choices, not a singular transformation.

Relevance for TGNB Voice Pedagogy

Neutral mask exercises offer a critical, decolonised baseline for TGNB actors:

Deconstructing 'Neutral':

Unpack historical gender coding and Eurocentric aesthetics.

Embodied Empathy:

Cultivate self-defined somatic awareness rather than prescriptive alignment.

Foundation for Bricolage:

Combine mask-informed liberation with diverse vocal parameters, empowering performers to script their own identities.

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