

WITH ONE VOICE

UK Voice Teaching (1905-2005)

Some Key Figures before 1950

**Elsie Fogerty
Dr W A Aikin
Gwynneth Thurburn
Clifford Turner
Iris Warren
Rose Bruford**

Some Key Figures after 1950

**Gwynneth Thurburn
Clifford Turner
Iris Warren
Rose Bruford
Greta Colson
Cicely Berry
Michael McCallion
Kristin Linklater
Patsy Rodenburg
Barbara Houseman**

Some Key Institutions

**Central School of Speech and Drama
Rose Bruford College
New College of Speech and Drama
RADA**

Some Key Terms

**Physiological function
Breath. Note. Tone. Word.
Central Breathing
Centre
Centre Note
Release/Free. Block/Tension.
Resonator Scale
Rib Reserve
Compass/Range**

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Some Suggested Reading

Dr W A Aikin	The Voice (1910)
Elsie Fogerty	The Speaking of English Verse (1923)
	Speech Craft (1930)
Gwynneth Thurburn	Voice and Speech (1939)
Clifford Turner	Voice and Speech in the Theatre (1950)
Greta Colson	Voice Production and Speech (1963)
Cicely Berry	Voice and the Actor (1973)
Kristin Linklater	Freeing the Natural Voice (1976, revised 2006)
Cicely Berry	The Actor and the Text (1987)
Michael McCallion	The Voice Book (1988)
Kristin Linklater	Freeing Shakespeare's Voice (1992)
Patsy Rodenburg	The Right to Speak (1992)
	The Need for Words (1993)
	The Actor Speaks (1997)
Barbara Houseman	Finding Your Voice (2002)
David and Rebecca Carey	The Vocal Arts Workbook (2008)

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While the training of the speaking voice is at least as old as the experiments Demosthenes conducted with pebbles in his mouth, I am going to pick up the story at the beginning of the last century. In the process I shall identify some key figures in C20th voice teaching, and trace the development of the key pedagogical components of their work.

The story of modern voice teaching is focused on a number of influential institutions, including RADA, which was founded in 1904 by Beerbohm Tree and provided the first formal conservatoire for actor training in this country. But it is RADA's great rival, Central, founded two years later, which has been the principal alma mater of voice teaching in the UK. Either directly or indirectly, the vast majority of voice teachers working in this country are products of the Central School and its pedagogical ethos.

But why should this be so? Essentially, it was the pioneering work of Central's first principal, Elsie Fogerty, that established the school as a training ground for voice, speech and drama teachers and speech therapists as well as actors. Where Tree was an actor-manager concerned with improving the level of acting skill, Fogerty was a teacher-performer who recognised the value of verse-speaking, mime and movement in the developing of both a theatre culture and an educational culture in general. So shortly after she and Sir Frank Benson, another actor-manager, had established the School, Fogerty created a teacher-training course to produce Central apostles who would go on to influence generations of children and actors.

Fogerty recognised the essentially physiological basis of the voice, and was therefore keen to root her training in healthy, anatomically correct practice. In 1912 she was introduced to Dr W Aikin, who had recently published a practical book on the voice, which set out the anatomical and phonetic principles of voice and speech production and provided a thorough approach to developing speaking and singing. She quickly recruited Aikin to her staff, where he remained for over 20 years, contributing immensely to the formation of the Central ethos that was to be passed on to such acolytes as Clifford Turner and Gwynneth Thurburn, who both trained at Central shortly after the First World War. Thurburn was to go on to become Principal of Central in the post-WW2 period, while Turner taught at both Central and RADA. Two other important Central graduates who would have been taught directly by Fogerty and Aikin were Rose Bruford and Greta Colson, both of whom went on to be principals of drama schools with a strong focus on voice and speech teaching. My own voice teachers were both products of Colson's school, the New College of Speech and Drama, which was eventually swallowed up by Middlesex Polytechnic (now university).

Iris Warren, Kristin Linklater's mentor, may also have been a Central graduate – Linklater certainly pays full acknowledgement to Fogerty's pioneering work in her

introduction to *Freeing the Natural Voice*. Warren taught at RADA during the '40s before joining LAMDA in 1951, by which time a young Cicely Berry was teaching at Central. Linklater trained at LAMDA in the '50s. At about the same time Michael McCallion was training at Rose Bruford College, where he was taught by graduates of the Central School. More recently, of course, Patsy Rodenburg and Barbara Houseman trained at Central, in the '70s and '80s respectively. Each in their own way was influenced by the same ethos.

How to characterise this ethos? I think of it as the marriage of physiological function with imaginative intention. I suspect that Aikin provided the physiological focus and Fogerty the imaginative. Fogerty was deeply concerned with developing the standards and practice of verse speaking in the theatre and in society as a whole. Her mentor, Russell Wakefield, taught her to value the power of speech and the indivisibility of form and meaning in poetry, and to condemn any false notions of recitation which placed personal self-assertion before 'all true faculty of poetic interpretation' (1923:x). Thus Fogerty was establishing a fundamental principle of voice teaching, that we are developing expressive skill in order to serve the writer's intentions not the speaker's ego. This requires an imagination that is able to expand to enter the world of the poet and dramatist, not a personality which seeks to reduce the writer's world to one's own boundaries.

Aikin's work also established some fundamental principles which were to become the foundation of a systematic training of the voice that can be summed up in four words: Breath. Note. Tone. Word. He wrote:

'The cultivation of the voice thus resolves itself into a threefold process, to be undertaken in the following order:-

- (1) The development of the capacity and conscious control of the breath.
- (2) The conscious establishment of well-arranged positions and movements of the resonator which are to become half-conscious habits of speech.
- (3) The free and unhampered use of the vocal vibrator in its natural relation to mental sound-perception and under the dominion of the breath.' (1910:15-16)

It is interesting to compare Aikin's threefold process with the writings of Fogerty, Thurburn and Turner. In *Speech Craft*, Fogerty follows the anatomical order of breath, note, tone and word. In *Voice and Speech*, Thurburn identifies the same sequence, but goes on to assert that this isn't 'the best educational order' (1939:25). Instead, she states: 'The aim in training is to work upon the directly-controlled organs until their action becomes automatic, dealing only in an indirect manner with unconscious movements' (1939:25). And she presents a pedagogical order of breath, muscularity, tone and pitch. Turner, who seems to be Aikin's closest disciple, prefers in *Voice and Speech in the Theatre* the breath, tone, note, word order implied by Aikin. All the authors also make a distinction between voice and speech, which Turner summarises by saying, 'Voice is instinctive and speech is an acquired habit' (1950:1) and elsewhere states that the actor's instrument 'is at one and the same time a tone-producing instrument [voice] and a word-producing instrument [speech]' (1950:6).

But let's return to Aikin and the work on breath, note, tone and word. It is to Aikin that we can trace such concepts as central and rib reserve breathing, the centre note, the open throat and resonator scale, and muscular work on the organs of articulation, all of which were to form central planks of most voice teachers' work up until the 1970s.

Aikin promoted central or intercostal-diaphragmatic breathing which focused on expansion of the ribs surrounding the solar plexus and contraction of the diaphragm as far as it affected the upper abdominal wall. This was in contrast to other forms of breathing – costal and abdominal – which were seen as unhealthy at the time. He also advocated what came to be known as rib reserve breathing – that is, the maintenance of an expanded chest through out a speech (specifically at the level of the sixth and seventh ribs) while breathing diaphragmatically. Fogerty, Thurburn and Turner all advise central breathing, but interestingly it only seems to be Turner who follows the full rib reserve approach. Both Fogerty and Thurburn prefer to relax the ribs at the end of each breath. Whether this indicates a male/female distinction is not clear. However, it is only with the work of Berry and Linklater in the 1970s that we find these techniques changing to any great extent. Both teachers were concerned with finding 'the essential truth of the voice', as Berry puts it (1973:15), and felt that rib reserve produced an unreal voice. While both of them encouraged strength and muscularity in the intercostal muscles, it was the focus on the diaphragm and the abdominal muscles which became more important, and Berry in *The Actor and the Text* (1987) even notes a development in her own thinking from an upper abdominal focus to a deeper, lower abdominal one that is more in touch with one's feelings.

The centre note, a note towards the middle of one's singing pitch range or compass, was advocated by Aikin and Turner as the best pitch to use for practice. Subsequently, this has sometimes been modified to refer to the use of a note towards the middle of the speaking range (which is usually lower than the singing range). But in either case, the aim is to develop a speaker's use of a flexible pitch range and not one that is stuck with either too high or too low a centre.

An open throat – one which is free from habitual constriction in either a vertical or horizontal dimension – is advocated by all voice practitioners. Aikin builds on this state of the resonator to develop his concept of the resonator scale, which is founded in the phenomenon produced by whispering through the shapes of the principal pure vowel sounds (monophthongs). Interestingly, Aikin complained that the FACE and GOAT vowels were losing their purity in his day – that is, for him, they were monophthongs, whereas today for most speakers they are diphthongs. I wonder if Aikin had any Scots ancestry, as both these sounds are monophthongal in most Scots accents. Turner, again following Aikin very closely, presents the resonator scale as 'the means by which tone is developed through the natural working of the resonator' (1950:39). Cultivation of the natural working of the resonator involved expansion of the oral and pharyngeal cavities and the acquisition of the ability to pass from one vowel shape to another without affecting the size of the resonator. This often required the use of a bone-prop – referred to by Thurburn as 'Aikin's Bone Prop for Vowel Position' available from Bell and Croyden for sixpence in 1948. Berry, in *Voice and the Actor*, still refers to the bone prop, while

Linklater, in *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*, has an exercise (ZooWoeShaw) which is clearly a development of the resonator sequence of vowels. Modern authors tend to refer more to the need to 'free' the voice than to expand the cavities, but in both modern and traditional cases they are all referring to the need to release the voice from habitual tensions, particularly in the jaw, lips, tongue and soft palate.

Once freed from habitual tension, the muscles of these speech organs need to develop precision and flexibility of movement. This is what is either referred to as articulation or muscularity in voice teaching, and all authors provide specific exercises for the different articulators in conjunction with tongue twisters or appropriate passages of text.

While the Central ethos represents the main British tradition, it is worth comparing it to the Warren/Linklater approach. As I've tried to show, the same essential framework links, for example, Berry and Linklater. But where the Central method was principally physiological, Linklater credits Iris Warren with introducing 'a psychological understanding to physiological knowledge' (1976:2) and so begetting a psycho-physical approach which combines imagery and imagination with physical exercises in order to achieve 'a balanced quartet of intellect and emotion, body and voice' (1976:4). Is this very different from Berry, when she writes in *Voice and the Actor*: 'Your voice must be accurate to yourself, so it needs to reflect not only what you think and feel but also your physical presence' (1973:16)? It is likely that both Berry and Linklater absorbed or inherited a Stanislavskian concern for the psychological aspects of an actor's process, and applied this with slightly different emphasis to voice, speech and text. Ultimately, both approaches are concerned with the same goal: achieving a truthful and natural communication of language. However, what constitutes 'truth' and 'natural' may obviously change over time and between cultures.

Although I have been focusing on the sequence of breath, note, tone, word as the major underpinning of voice teaching, I also want to emphasise that there has always been a strong emphasis on bodywork in voice teaching, specifically with respect to appropriate relaxation of tension and alignment of posture. Linklater describes in *Freeing the Natural Voice* how she was introduced to Alexander Technique after her move to America in 1963, but Alexander Technique came to Britain 100 years ago. Beerbohm Tree was a pupil, as were many other theatre practitioners, and Central and RADA have both had a very long if inconsistent association with the technique. Michael McCallion is perhaps the teacher who has most integrated the technique with voice teaching. Other bodywork practices – such as yoga, t'ai chi, and Laban movement – have also influenced voice teaching, and will continue to do so.

In conclusion, therefore, I would like to propose a revised form of the old sequence to reflect contemporary practice more fully: Body. Breath. Voice. Resonance. Speech.