



NATURAL VOICE NETWORK

CODE OF PRACTICE

The NVN strives to be active in fostering the highest standards of Natural Voice and inclusive practice amongst its members.

As a member of the Natural Voice Network, I am committed to bringing a Natural Voice approach to my practice, as expressed in the NVN's *Philosophy and Working Principles* document (see Appendix 1).

In addition, I am committed to acquiring and upholding the following essentials of best practice in my work.

I undertake to:

- Be well prepared and organised
- Be safe and responsible
- Have appropriate musical skills
- Be inclusive and work well with people
- Evaluate and reflect on my work
- Commit to professional development

These six points conform to the Music Education Code of Practice developed by MusicLeader and Sound Sense. For a fuller discussion see Appendix 2.

APPENDIX 1: PHILOSOPHY AND WORKING PRINCIPLES

Our philosophy

As Natural Voice practitioners we believe that singing is our birthright. For thousands of years, all over the world people have sung – to express joy, celebration and grief, to accompany work and devotion, to aid healing – without worrying about having a “good” voice or “getting it right”. Song has been a part of life, a way of binding the community together. We aim to recreate the sense that vocalising, singing and singing together are natural and open to all.

Each person’s voice is as unique as their fingerprint and, respecting that individuality, we aim to provide people with opportunities to express themselves vocally and to develop their full vocal potential. The voice we are born with is capable of freely expressing a full range of emotions, thoughts and experience – this is what we mean by the Natural Voice. However, the tensions and stresses of daily life can create physical and emotional blocks

to the Natural Voice. We therefore focus on breath and bodywork as the foundations of healthy voice use.

We are principally concerned with the melodic voice – the voice as it moves from speech to melody – the voice that is instinctively used in folk traditions around the world. In this culture many people see themselves as non-singers because of previous experiences of criticism and judgement. Many are excluded from singing groups if they do not have music reading skills. Therefore we aim in our work to counteract these experiences and to give people confidence in their melodic voice by providing a supportive learning environment.

We believe that vocalising, creativity and song should be accessible to all, regardless of previous musical ability or experience. Therefore, creating a sense of an accepting community is an essential element of our approach in working with groups.

This means not only tolerating difference but welcoming it, by positively including people who have many different needs or face particular social barriers.

Our approach to teaching by ear is a fundamental means of ensuring access. But we recognise that social factors (such as income, class, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, health, sexuality) can also create barriers to accessing singing opportunities. We are therefore committed to an ongoing process of learning about the barriers to participation some people will experience, and ways we can counter these.

Our working principles

- a) We provide a range of opportunities for people to explore their voices and enjoy song. Typically, we run voice and song workshops; offer training, short courses and creative projects; and run community choirs. These opportunities are open and accessible to everyone, regardless of musical knowledge or experience.
- b) We work in ways that enable everybody to participate as actively as possible. This includes working at a pace which recognises the needs of the less experienced and slower learners; using a variety of language, teaching styles and material; taking account of the diversity of individual needs (additional guidance to follow); using demystifying and accessible language and avoiding technical language and jargon; fostering a non-judgmental and supportive learning environment; talking in terms of unlocking, freeing, allowing, releasing and discovering the authentic voice.
- c) We aim to teach songs by ear, recognising that the majority of the music in the world comes from the oral tradition and that this is the most accessible and effective way for the majority of people to learn and retain songs.
- d) We regard vocal and physical warm-ups as an essential element of our work. They ensure healthy vocal use by anchoring the voice in the body and breath and generally prepare the voice for action. They also allow opportunities for increasing creativity, practising listening to others and creating a sense of community.

e) We are concerned with the enjoyment of singing and making it accessible, so the main focus in our work is on the process of coming together to sing, whilst at the same time developing people's vocal skills and, within the context of performance, aiming for the highest standards.

f) Respect for individuals, traditions and creativity is essential to our work. We acknowledge and accept that each voice is unique to the individual; we credit the origin of each song and vocal/physical exercise, where possible, and avoid the use of inappropriate or exploitative material; we use relevant singing styles appropriate to the culture that a song comes from; and we present the historical and cultural contexts of songs, where known.

g) We are committed to the principles of sustainability in our voice work, promoting practices which minimise environment impact, supporting equality and social justice, and advocating fair remuneration for work undertaken.

APPENDIX 2: CODE OF PRACTICE

These prompts and suggestions develop the six key points of the Music Education Code of Practice as related to the work of NVN members.

1. Be well prepared and organised

Plan your session:

- Know your material and teach songs that are appropriate for the group and the occasion.
- Think about how you structure the session (e.g. how to relax and engage people, how to move into singing, how to manage variety and pace, how to maximise involvement, how to achieve a sense of completion at the end).
- Identify what you want to achieve in the session.
- Plan to meet the specific requirements of participants.
- Plan and prepare any materials/equipment you need.
- Endeavour to honour the origins, meanings and cultural and historical contexts of songs.
- Warm up your voice before the start of the session.

Know your venue:

- Obtain clear directions and details of a contact person.
- Check disabled access.
- Check what facilities and equipment are available.
- Check health and safety and security procedures.
- Check housekeeping details (location of toilets etc.).

Work effectively with others:

- Liaise fully with partners (e.g. employers, co-tutors) to ensure that all of the above points are covered.

2. Be safe and responsible

- Make sure you have adequate public liability insurance cover (available through the NVN for UK members).
- Be clear and specific about what you are, and are not, qualified to do. (Do not give anatomical vocal advice unless you are appropriately qualified – as a speech therapist, for instance). *N.B. Membership of the NVN does not confer or imply a qualification of any kind to carry out voice work.*
- Be aware of circumstances in which you will require professional indemnity insurance.
- Carry out appropriate risk assessments for the spaces, activities and individuals you are responsible for.
- Demonstrate a professional and respectful attitude to working with people from all backgrounds and ages, including appropriate DBS certification before working with unaccompanied children or vulnerable adults.
- Check where emergency equipment is located and familiarise yourself with specific emergency procedures.
- Obtain the contact details of a person you can call on, should there be an emergency relating to the venue, or to particular at-risk individuals.
- Give appropriate health and safety warnings (e.g. prior to warm-up exercises).
- Plan for dealing with participants who become distressed (acknowledging the essential connection between body, breath, sound and emotion).
- Do not engage in activities or behaviour which bring the ethical and principled reputation of the Natural Voice Network into disrepute.

NB. The trustees of the Network reserve the right to suspend the membership of any member deemed to be in serious breach of these expectations of conduct.

3. Have appropriate vocal and musical skills

- Only accept work which is appropriate to your level of skill.
- Strive to improve your level of skill.
- Be able to pitch notes, establish rhythms and teach songs in several parts, accurately.
- Be able to bring songs to life and communicate this to others, through the use of words and gesture.
- Develop awareness and understanding of different musical genres, different singing styles and different cultural influences and traditions.
- Have the confidence to get people playing with their voices and improvising.
- Teaching skills
- Organisational skills
- Leadership skills.

4. Work well with groups and individuals

Strive to develop your:

- Teaching skills
- Organisational skills
- Leadership skills.

Bring an approach to your work that is:

- Respectful
- Inclusive of everyone
- Freeing, allowing, releasing
- Non-judgmental
- Encouraging
- Patient.

Have an awareness and understanding of:

- How to look after your own emotional well-being.
- How to handle your own and other people's expectations.
- How to deal with challenging behaviours.
- Social barriers to inclusion and how to counter them.
- The impact that releasing the voice can have on individuals.
- The potentially damaging consequences of making or allowing negative comments about people's voices.
- The boundaries of your job role.

Be considerate of other NVN practitioners in your locality and aim to work cooperatively with them (e.g. with regard to the location and timing of events).

5. Evaluate and reflect on your work

Reflective practice is a means to achieving continuing improvement in your work. The key elements are:

- Monitor what you do.
- Evaluate your practice.
- Identify things you can do to improve (e.g. change the way you do something, read a book, attend a training event).
- Put your plan into action.
- Continue to monitor and evaluate your progress.

6. Commit to professional development

To keep abreast of developments in the Natural Voice field, you can:

- Find out what other practitioners are doing.
- Find out about training courses, conferences and workshops.
- Build a library of books, CDs, websites, etc.
- Join networks and discussion groups, on- and off-line.
- Join a professional body (e.g. Sound Sense).
- Attend regional NVN meetings.
- Find a buddy for peer-to-peer support.

It is a good idea to keep a record of your professional development activities, reflect on what you have learnt from them and plan what you need to focus on next.

You will find a wealth of professional development opportunities within the NVN:

- The website lists events, training opportunities, useful resources, and links to other sites.
- The weekly bulletin includes news of opportunities and developments, as well as highlighting training and networking events when they occur.
- The Annual Gathering and other Community of Practice events provide a great opportunity to meet fellow practitioners, share skills, knowledge and experiences and discuss issues.

In addition, the forums in the members' area of the website and the closed Facebook group provide places for discussion amongst Natural Voice practitioners.

Undertaking professional development often costs money. It is a good idea to think of it as an investment in yourself and your business. Budget for it in your financial planning, so that it doesn't become an optional extra.

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