

## Skills developed through Speech NZ being put to good use.

Naomi Barton describes how her career working with the voice has progressed from key Speech NZ skills.

*Naomi Barton is a graduate of the ASB Diploma. She is now an audiobook narrator and voice coach. With a background in teaching drama and philosophy at international schools, she brings a rich range of experience to all her creative projects. Emma Carpenter reached out to her to ask her about her experience with Speech NZ, how she came to get started, how she ended up teaching overseas, and what impact Speech NZ has had on her life.*

### What was your overall experience of the programme?

"I must have started when I was about 10 years old. I completed my ASB when I was in my early 20's and last year I did a couple of theory papers towards my LSB. The Speech NZ curriculum taught me how to understand my voice and how to teach others about theirs. Interpretation, play, analysis, spontaneity have all been skills that I developed in my learning through Speech NZ."

### What are some of the ways the programme has benefited you? What doors has it opened/what confidence has it given you?

"When I was at high school, Drama wasn't even in the curriculum as a subject! My students are always shocked to hear that. So Speech allowed me to develop the skills which have always been my passion. I think understanding how to ground your voice, breathe for confidence and speak with purpose are skills that have been useful in every area of my life. I certainly feel that the ability to incorporate specific vocal awareness work into my mainstream Drama teaching in schools enriched the experience for my students."

### When did you realise that you wanted to have a career in working with the voice?

"When I decided to train as a secondary school teacher in my early 20's I really wanted to teach Drama and English, so I that was when, without realising it, I was making a commitment to incorporating my love of voice work into my career. Once I was fully established as a Drama teacher overseas and I was directing plays and musicals, the voice work was a big part of what I offered to my students."

### Tell me a bit more about your time teaching drama and philosophy overseas? That sounds so interesting!

"The challenges of different cultural contexts encouraged me to be really creative. For instance, I had a very talented student in Qatar whose parents weren't happy for her to be on stage. She had written wonderful poems, so we incorporated her into the devised production we were doing by having her speak her poems as a narrative backdrop to some scenes. I never found the 'limitations' of culture stopped us from involving anyone, or not saying what we wanted to say, we simply found more nuanced ways of doing it. I loved the challenge and the dedication of the students to do what they loved and speak their truth even when it was considered to be pushing boundaries. I think teaching in non-Western contexts is an amazing opportunity for teachers who have only been exposed to Western models of learning and performance. I loved the opportunity to have visiting artists come and work with my students as well. Classical Indian dancers, Broadway singers, Emerati playwrights, professional burlesque dancers. It gave me such an amazing opportunity to have artists around and their energy is very inspiring. As for philosophy, I always felt in some respects I did a better job of teaching that in my drama class than in my philosophy class, because we were always exploring what it is to 'be', our identity and the way we relate to the world. I would often quote Boal, "Theatre is the art of looking at ourselves." These subjects gave me a much deeper appreciation for theoretical approaches to theatre and language."

### How do you think Speech NZ programmes and other "extra-curricular" activities fit in with education today?

"I think there is always a need for specialists, and the time, space and sensitivity that a Speech NZ programme can offer students is sometimes the missing aspect of a broader brush Drama or English programme. I think working with poems for speaking, rather than just reading, analysing and writing about them is such a lost opportunity for most students in school. Reading poetry aloud is an absolute gift for Speech NZ students and it enables you to excel in the analysis required for senior English."



Naomi Barton

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### What are the most important aspects of the programme, in your opinion?

"The fact that teachers can respond to the individual learner and their specific needs. A small group setting or working one on one is perfect for that. Our voice is our unique audible signature. I believe knowing and appreciating your voice is a wonderful discovery and act of self love! Being involved in that with students is a privilege and working with my own voice to share stories gives me great joy."

*We could not be more thrilled with this success story – thank you Naomi for sharing this with us!*

*If you have a success story you would like to share with us, or know of someone who does, please get in touch with the National office at 04 498 9660 or [info@speechnz.co.nz](mailto:info@speechnz.co.nz)*