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Vocal Empowerment Curriculum for young Maya Guatemalan women

Beth Osnes, Chelsea Hackett, Jen Walentas Lewon,
Norma Baján and Christine Brennan*

This article explores the development of the SPEAK Vocal Empowerment Curriculum and provides an example of how voice training and theatrical approaches may be contextualised and hybridised to support young women's self and civic advocacy. It presents and analyses data collected from January to July of 2017 on the curriculum's impact for 48 seventh-grade students in the MAIA Impact School, a Guatemalan all-girls school serving Indigenous youth. It measures impact from several angles including self-assessment, mentor assessment, and analysis of content of recorded participant speech. Results from the research suggest that participation in this curriculum positively impacts on girls' vocal empowerment. This evidence-based practice for supporting young women's voices provides a way for voice and performance trainers to help young women unleash all that they are ready to contribute. Through vocal empowerment, the world can more fully benefit from young women's authorship of a more just and equitable future.

Keywords: empowerment, young women, girls, voice, performance

Introduction to young women's vocal empowerment

On a quiet cobble-stoned street in Panajachel, Guatemala, a long line of giggling seventh-grade Maya girls emerge from the MAIA Impact School. They are led by an energetic teacher who walks along the line offering call-and-response chants that the students nervously repeat. There is an air of anticipation as they ready themselves to publicly present what they have previously only practised in a private sphere. After a few blocks, they arrive in front of the supermarket and form a large circle. The onlookers observe with interest as their teacher begins to lead the students in what appear to be a rehearsed series of games and activities.

They sing several songs with coordinated gestures. They create a human wave by moving their arms from the floor to the ceiling and trilling their voices from low to high. With each new action, the tension lifts and the girls begin to smile. The former anxiety has become focused energy. A small crowd gathers to watch. On the heels of this activity, the students turn again back in the direction of the quiet street. Their march back is gleeful and somehow lighter. When they return to their classroom to celebrate, they reflect together on the impact of taking their empowered voice out into the world.

This outing was an activity drawn from the SPEAK 12-session performance-based Vocal Empowerment Curriculum led with students in the all-girls MAIA Impact School in Guatemala in 2017. The curriculum was developed in partnership with the MAIA school by Beth Osnes and Chelsea Hackett, both artists/scholars of performance. Its primary purpose is to support young women in empowering their voices for self-advocacy and civic engagement. Hackett and Osnes define vocal empowerment as reaching a state of comfort and ability with vocal expression that allows a person's intended content to be expressed. The curriculum is designed to invite young women to acquaint themselves with their own voices – not the voices that have spoken for and about them. The Vocal Empowerment Curriculum draws from vocal training approaches utilised by theatre makers, voice professionals, and speech pathologists to support young women's voices in being heard, healthy, and expressive. While other related programmes, such as Oracy Cambridge (2019), focus on eloquence in effective spoken communication, this programme guides young women in rehearsing the use of their voices in various contexts to gain confidence, identify likely obstacles, and act out solutions to group-identified concerns for an audience of their broader community. Peer feedback, critical reflection, and joyful self-authorship are key to this process.

The purpose of this case study is to illuminate the development of the Vocal Empowerment Curriculum and provide an example of how voice training and theatrical approaches may be contextualised and hybridised to support young women's self and civic advocacy. It presents and analyses data collected from January to July of 2017 on the curriculum's impact for 48 seventh-grade students in the MAIA Impact School. This article seeks to answer the question: how does participation in a 12-session performance-based curriculum impact girls' vocal empowerment? Secondary questions include: how did participation in this curriculum impact on students' perceptions of their own vocal empowerment, and what changes, if any, did mentors observe in the students' external characteristics of vocal empowerment (examples: use of body for self-expression and audibility of voice) after the completion of this curriculum?

Site description

Since 2008 MAIA Impact (known as Starfish One by One from 2008 to 2018) has worked in several communities surrounding Lake Atitlán,

Figure 1 A MAIA Impact student sharing her personal declaration at the public sharing for the culmination of the 12-session Vocal Empowerment Curriculum. Photo by Chelsea Hackett.

Guatemala, to provide educational opportunities for young Maya women from low-income, traditionally marginalised communities. MAIA transitioned from primarily an educational mentorship programme from 2008 to 2017 to an organisation that created its own MAIA Impact School, which represents Guatemala's first academically rigorous twenty-first-century secondary school designed, led, and run by Indigenous women for Indigenous women. In the Guatemalan National Maternal and Child Health Poll (2017), of the women aged 15–49 surveyed in Sololá (where the school is located) only 6.5% had completed secondary school, demonstrating the urgency of MAIA's efforts (Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social *et al.* 2017, p. 33). The creation of the MAIA Impact school sought to close this educational gap. A representative MAIA student is exceptional both in academic achievement and in her ability to convey her drive, commitment, resilience, and fortitude. These girls are described by MAIA as 'pioneers' as they are charting a new path for Indigenous females in Guatemala.

Osnes and Hackett have been working with MAIA intermittently since 2009, and more formally from 2013 to the present, to develop an approach for vocal empowerment for young women. They were among other outside partners consulted in the rigorous development and articulation of the six competencies MAIA Impact aims to have each student master by graduation: academic excellence, critical thinking, growth mindset, intercultural network, resilience, and vocal empowerment. By embracing it as a core competency, the school has ensured that aspects of vocal empowerment are integrated into the teaching of every subject and the larger school culture. However, the need for sustained study in this direction remains.

Norma Baján (2018), the Executive Director of MAIA Impact, shared:

> In Guatemala, women represent more than 50% of the population, yet many still lack educational opportunities and gender equality. Above all, they lack a voice of their own; a voice that reflects their desires, their dreams, their decisions, the manifestation, a voice that fights, that thinks, that transforms … Too many are condemned to live in silence by the simple fact of being born a woman.

Theoretical background

Voice

The voice is both a physical production of sound and a sense of the self that is expressed audibly. It is highly nuanced, containing subtle differences and distinctions and eliciting multiple interpretations and responses. Through voice, a person claims authorship and expresses ideas, perspectives and beliefs, and is known by others. Like a signature, the voice is unique to each person and serves as an individual identifier. According to the Center for Community Health and Development, '[w]hen people are targeted, discriminated against, or oppressed over a period of time, they often internalize (believe and make part of their self-image – their internal view of themselves) the myths and misinformation that society communicates to them about their group' (Axner 2013). The use of voice can be one string that young women can pull on to begin unravelling internalised oppression accumulated not only from their own lifetime, but also from millennia of culturally compromising views of women's humanity, worth, intelligence, and potential. When young women are led through vocal and physical exercises as a result of which they experience their voices as strong and expressive, they can be prompted to reconsider their internal views of not only their voices, but themselves, their value, and their expressive capacity.

In the book *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (1997), Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones articulate the challenge for scholars interested in the sonic/acoustic dimensions of women's voices:

> Feminists have used the word 'voice' to refer to a wide range of aspirations: cultural agency, political enfranchisement, sexual autonomy, and expressive freedom, all of which have been historically denied to women. In this context, 'voice' has become a metaphor for textual authority … This metaphor has become so pervasive, so intrinsic to feminist discourse that it makes us too easily forget (or repress) the concrete physical dimensions of the female voice upon which this metaphor was based. (Dunn and Jones 1997, p. 1)

Although vocal empowerment *is situated within* an expansive definition of voice, the physical voice is the primary actionable outcome of increased empowerment and agency.

In the book *Foundations of Voice Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Voice Production and Perception,* Jody Kreiman and Diana Sidtis (2013, pp. 1–2) note a wide range of judgements that listeners make when listening to voices. Alterations in voice quality relative to the speaker's normal vocal delivery may signal differences in the speaker's psychological characteristics, such as competence or intelligence, or in the social characteristics of the speaker, such as social status or the speaker's role in a given conversational setting. The gender of participants in this Vocal Empowerment Curriculum factors heavily into this consideration of how young women's voices are heard. Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) offered the idea that there were two types of moral voices: the masculine, which focuses more on the self, and feminine, which focuses more on caring for others. Further, in their book *Gender, Power and Political Speech: Women and Language in the 2015 UK General Election* (2016), Deborah Cameron and Sylvia Shaw further acknowledge the notion of women's 'different voice' as both a linguistic and a sociopolitical construct, noting that gender can be an influence on verbal behaviour in political and other public or institutional settings. Gender can influence how voices are heard in political and public settings. One of the reasons for the public sharing at the completion of the curriculum is to acclimatise the young women's community to hearing and receiving their voices and contributions.

Centuries of oppression have left it difficult for many women to claim their voice and to express themselves effectively. SPEAK contributes to bridging the current gap between the history of women's silenced voices with this relatively recent invitation to speak out and contribute what they have to say. Explicit attention on the development of voice (vocal awareness, confidence, range, knowledge, and skills necessary for self-advocacy and civic participation) is essential for many women – especially those who have suffered oppression and discrimination. As one girl in the programme said, 'we women have been silenced for so long; it can take us a while to find our voice'. This vocal empowerment programme allows for a dedicated time and safe space for young women to expand their expression within a supportive community of their peers. *Theatre for Women's Participation in Sustainable Development* by Osnes (2014) provides evidence that theatre is an effective and appropriate tool for women's participation in their own sustainable development, especially for women from under-resourced communities. This line of research is continued by joining forces with speech-language pathology to explore new and creative directions that combine both the science and the art of the voice to unleash the contributions of women.

Jen Lewon, Clinical Assistant Professor of Speech, Language, Hearing Sciences at University of Colorado (CU), has advised this approach to vocal empowerment since its inception and has travelled to Guatemala to assist in the design and implementation of this research on the curriculum. This approach to vocal empowerment has benefited from Lewon's guidance as a speech-language pathologist in adapting many exercises and approaches used in speech therapy to support the empowerment of young women's voices. For example, the use of singing for vocal

empowerment is supported by studies that show that singing can increase voice intensity and range (Siupsinskiene and Lycke 2011). As part of the sessions, participants sing an affirmational song and create their own accompanying movements. Lewon suggested the use of an accessible pedestrian action such as a yawn, also used by voice trainers, to support their laryngeal function. One of the daily exercises includes stretching the arms outward while yawning and voicing an open 'ahh' sound. The use of the yawn in the daily exercises is shown to expand the pharynx and to stretch and then relax the extrinsic laryngeal muscles, thus lowering the larynx in the neck to a more neutral position and permitting a more forward placement of the tongue in the oral cavity (Boone and McFarlane 1993). Additionally, Christine Brennan, CU Assistant Professor of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences, guided the quantitative presentation and analysis of the data.

Indigenous feminism guides this enquiry in Guatemala with young Maya women's voices in searching for the assets of Indigenous cultures and women's voices, examining the ways in which they have persisted and spoken out in spite of and outside of oppression (Pu 2007, Jiménez 2012). This approach is in alignment with Kristin Linklater's seminal work in voice training that focuses on liberating the natural voice; it acknowledges each person as already possessing a voice capable of effective communication, and works to remove obstacles to that authentic expression. Voice Studies is an interdisciplinary approach to studying voice that brings into question some of the underlying cultural assumptions present in twentieth- and twenty-first-century voice training and voice science when approached as an intercultural exchange (see Thomaidis and Macpherson 2015). Of particular interest is that 'anatomic principles of the voice are not understood universally, but are acquired and heavily influenced by socio-cultural and environmental factors and discipline-specific training objectives' (McAllister-Viel 2015, p. 56). This becomes of particular concern when sharing this methodology towards vocal empowerment with non-governmental organization (NGOs) or schools internationally.

Women's empowerment

SPEAK seeks to include anyone who self-identifies as a young woman, identifies their gender as female (regardless of their gender assignment at birth), was socialised as female, and/or feels they would benefit from this work. Major players in the fields of gender and development have acknowledged the importance of women's voice, agency, and empowerment. The publication *Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity* states that 'amplifying the voices of women and increasing their agency can yield broad development dividends for them and for their families, communities and societies' (Klugman 2014, p. 2). Assigning and cultivating agency is equated with empowerment, and is defined as 'the capacity to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution, or fear' (Klugman 2014, p. 1). In this context, voice is defined as the capacity to 'speak up and be heard, from homes to houses of parliament, and to

shape and share in discussions, discourse, and decisions that affect them' (Klugman 2014, p. 2). Indian Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen equates the term 'voice' with the notion of agency in terms of women's development. He introduces the notion of critical agency or critical voice, describing this as 'not merely freedom and power to act, but also freedom and power to question and reassess the prevailing norms and values' (in Sen and Drèze 2002, p. 258). Feminist scholar Jo Rowlands (1997, p. 15) defines empowerment as 'developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalised oppression' and the 'processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions' (Rowlands 1997, p. 14). Educational scholar Nelly Stromquist (2015, p. 308) defines empowerment as 'a set of knowledge, skills, and conditions that women must possess in order to understand their world and act upon it. Empowerment is thus *inseparable from subsequent action* – at both the individual and collective levels' (original emphasis).

In this light, speaking is an action that can benefit from increased vocal awareness, knowledge, and skill, as well as intentionally creating conditions in which young women feel empowered to speak for the positive social change they envision for their communities and the world. In *Human Rights and Foreign Aid*, Bethany Barratt (2008, p. 2) writes that 'by positive change I mean making the poorest people less poor and more empowered, making people who cannot express themselves free to do so, and making governments that would abuse the people to whom they are responsible unable to do so'. Young women's ability to communicate effectively can be understood as a positive force for change since having a voice can increase empowerment, contribute towards women's ability to express themselves, and be an instrument through which women speak out against governmental abuse.

Phycologist Marie-Cécile Bertau (2008, pp. 101–102) writes that voice 'is a vocal-auditory event, and it is a concept belonging to a certain socio-culturally constructed way of expression. The uttered voice is absolutely individual, coming from a unique body, but this body is located in specific sociocultural contexts and has a history of action, movements, labels'. In our programme, participating girls in Guatemala are supported in how they choose to use their public voices within their sociocultural contexts. The design of the curriculum takes into account not only their individual physical voice production but also the reception or listening to that voice by their supporting community. It is this combination of both speaking and being heard – production and perception – that makes up Bertau's definition of voice. She writes that voice is 'inextricable from a communicative context, so that production and perception are inseparably linked. The voice represents the entire person and plays a part in "underscoring the physicality of psychological self"' (Bertau 2008, p. 97). By attending to both production and perception, young women can increase vocal empowerment while maintaining a connection and continuity to their identity within their community. With increased vocal awareness and skill, young women can make intentional choices on how they wish to voice their participation in the public realm.

Lyn Mikel Brown (2016, p. 3), in her book *Powered by Girl: A Field Guide for Supporting Youth Activists*, notes: 'Girl activism as a commodity, as the domain of the individual special girl, channels attention away from social and structural inequalities and towards self-improvement and self-promotion'. The reason vocal empowerment is done collectively and is facilitated by someone from within the community is because

> [c]ontemporary girls are invited into an individualistic discourse of freedom and empowerment that ultimately undermines community and solidarity, both with other girls and with adults, creates barriers to girls' activism, and encourages girls to embrace and perpetuate the very conditions that serve to constrain, restrict, and subordinate them. (Brown 2016, p. 4)

Instead, young women can be invited and supported in challenging unjust systems and in working together to imagine and create a better future for themselves and their community. Adults within a community can work with young women to 'understand and invest in the conditions that support and enable them to connect with one another, voice strong feelings and opinions, think critically, oppose injustice, and grapple with the culture of power' (Brown 2016, p. 10). 'Encouraging girls' strong feelings and taking seriously their social critique invite them to participate in the social and political world around them, a radical act with potentially transformative consequences' (Brown 1999, p. xii).

The focus on young women is part of an international social movement often referred to as the Girl Effect that identifies young women as one of the most powerful and untapped forces on the planet, and works systemically to invest in their futures (NoVo 2013). Feminist scholar Kathryn Moeller is among one of the voices questioning the corporate ties this movement has to women's development in her book *The Gender Effect: Capitalism, Feminism, and the Corporate Politics of Development* (2018). In response to this, our curriculum continually employs critical reflection as a tool for young women's authorship of a future that corresponds to their needs, aspirations, and values. Gender scholar Shenila Khoja-Moolji speaks to the hegemonic nature of international campaigns for girls' education that imagine a singular image of an everygirl. She argues that: [s]uch notions minimise the ways in which race, religion, sexualities, abilities, and nationalities of girls position them differently and require different kinds of interventions', and goes on to say that the campaigns 'elide these differences by homogenising the figure of the girl, producing it as a stable, fixed, knowable category' (Khoja-Moolji 2015, p. 103). In an attempt to acknowledge and recognise the needs of girls in various contexts, the intersectional identities of girls were taken into consideration in developing both the curriculum and monitoring and evaluation approaches. These theoretical considerations were most directly addressed by maximising the opportunities for choice within the curriculum and by filtering this lesson through local community leaders,

making necessary adjustments and changes to the curriculum in response to their cultural and societal values, beliefs, customs, and practices.

There is an inherent power differential in entering into this research partnership as US academics who hold privilege and are from a country whose foreign policies and actions have contributed to great hardship (nearing levels of genocide) for the Indigenous people of Guatemala (Wilkinson 2004). Continual site and home visits between Hackett, Osnes, and MAIA staff (in which all involved have come to know some of each other's families), self-education, and taking years to develop trusting friendships have resulted in relationships that nurture a productive partnership. In this process, all involved have drawn upon Indigenous research methodologies, such as ethics and reciprocity, that fit within the transformative paradigm and, like feminist methodologies, are relational (Kovack 2010, p. 30).

Vocal empowerment

In the context of SPEAK, Osnes and Hackett use the phrase *vocal empowerment* to indicate an inner belief that (1) what you say is worthwhile, (2) your voice belongs to you, and (3) you have the right to self-authorship. Embedded in this approach is a responsibility to use your voice for positive social change for your community and the world. Over the course of Hackett and Osnes' collaboration with MAIA Impact, they developed a list of 10 characteristics of an empowered voice with key staff and leaders of MAIA Impact; these include:

1. People can easily hear and understand my voice.
2. I use various parts of my body when I express myself with my voice (example: the direct gaze, posture, my body, my hands).
3. I understand the basic mechanism for how my physical voice works.
4. Shame is not an obstacle to using my voice.
5. I think my voice is mine and belongs to me.
6. I feel safe as the author of my own feelings and ideas.
7. I believe my voice is important for me and my community.
8. I believe my voice has the power to make a positive impact for my life and for others.
9. I use my voice to speak my truth.
10. I use my voice with responsibility and courage.

Believing that no one can empower another's voice – a woman can only empower her own voice – we decided that, in the process of developing and implementing our curriculum, we would position ourselves as facilitators – encouraging and supporting the participants.

Design of the Vocal Empowerment Curriculum

The Vocal Empowerment Curriculum is designed for local mentors and teachers to facilitate young women in their community, on which they are the experts. This curriculum consists of 12 sessions designed to

provide a supportive community in which to reflect and critically engage on the likely costs and benefits of self-expression through the voice in a variety of imagined circumstances and settings. It teaches about the mechanics of the voice with the aim of increasing sense of ownership, ability to make intentional adjustments, enhanced effectiveness and control of one's voice, and expansion of one's expressive range. Each hour-long session begins with a relaxation visualisation, then proceeds to vocal exercises, singing a song, an activity that embodies and activates the given lesson of the session, critical reflection, and a closing.

Some examples of vocal exercise:

Whisper 'Shhh' with arms high, middle, low

> Say 'shhh' very slowly and steadily
> As you do, make a circle with your arms:
> > Above your head in one long, sustained breath
> > In front of you in one long sustained breath
> > Down to the floor in one long sustained breath
> > Keep the 'shhh' at the same strength and intensity from the beginning to the very end, as you do each circle with your arms.

Sing 'Ahh' with arms high, middle, low

> Using a supported singing voice with an open throat, sing the sound 'Ahh'
> Again, do this very slowly and in a steady tone (again exercising control to make the 'ahh' sound the same strength and intensity, from the beginning to the very end, as you do each circle)
> As you do, make a circle with your arms:
> > Above your head in one long sustained breath
> > In front of you in one long sustained breath
> > Down to the floor in one long sustained breath

Say an everyday functional phrase with arms high, middle, low

> Using a supported speaking voice with an open throat, repeat saying something you say every day, such as 'Hi, how are you doing?'
> Again, do this very slowly and in a steady tone (again exercising control to make the phrase sound the same strength and intensity, from the beginning to the very end, as you do each circle)
> As you do, make a circle with your arms:
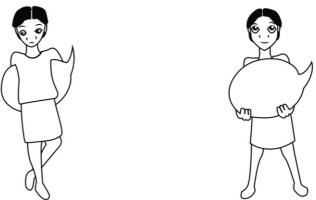> > Above your head in one long sustained breath say a phrase over and over again
> > In front of you in one long sustained breath say a phrase over and over again
> > Down to the floor in one long sustained breath say a phrase over and over again

The first six sessions of the curriculum focus on the internal experience, anatomy, and feeling of voice. In one session, participants explore how their physical voice works by watching a video of the vocal folds, making a 'ha' 'ha' 'ha' sound to notice the diaphragm muscle working to support the sound, and making various sounds such as 'la' and 'ta' alternately to notice what changes in the mouth to filter their sound. In other sessions, they explore the social and emotional voice. For example, one exercise has participants lying in a circle on the floor with their heads to the centre as each in turn answers four prompts: 'I wish I was … ', 'I'm glad I am … ', 'I wish I could … ', and 'I'm glad I can … '. The remaining six sessions focus on bringing their empowered voice out into the world in service of a social issue they identify, such as keeping Lake Atitlan free from pollution or increasing public safety for women at night. Before the conclusion of each session, each young woman writes or draws in a guided journal especially created for each session to reflect and deepen her consideration of the main concepts.

Before the final session, there is a separate public sharing event for family, friends, and key members of the community, at which each participant delivers a personal declaration of her voice stating why her voice is important to her, her greatest concern for her community, and one idea she has for acting on that concern. Also at this public sharing, participants perform skits they created in small groups to communicate their solutions to community issues they identified. To generate these skits, groups are guided in using their bodies to create a physical tableau of a problem, 'The Current Story', that they identify as it manifests within their community. These are shared and feedback is given by the others. They then identify the way they wish their community was if that problem was resolved, and create a frozen image of 'The New Story'. Again, these are shared with the entire group and feedback is given. They then collectively make several frozen tableaus of viable solutions that

6th Week: Shame is not an obstacle to using my voice.

"I feel ashamed to speak when…"   "I feel confident speaking when…"

Figure 2 A page from the SPEAK Vocal Empowerment journal, translated into English from Spanish, illustrated by Melisande Osnes.

could bring their community from 'The Current Story' to 'The New Story'. This physical exploration is used as a brainstorming exercise before the group creates a short scene that promotes one viable solution. By creating dynamic frozen images before adding voice and movement, participants are supported in expanding the outer limits of their expressive range and encouraged to use their entire bodies as their expressive instrument. In practice, this has resulted in more active skits, which in turn support overcoming a vocal tendency to be reserved and contained. This witnessing and validation – by their family, friends, and community leaders – of these various expressions in a public setting is important for many young women to feel safe, confident, and positive using their empowered voices.

Methods and results

In Guatemala, Osnes and Hackett provided training on the Vocal Empowerment Curriculum for two MAIA mentors, Irma Tzay and Nina Lopez, each of whom led a group of 24 young women. Tzay and Lopez led these 60-minute sessions in the MAIA school every other week from January to July 2017. At the time of the research, both mentors were in their early twenties and attending university courses at the weekends. Tzay and Lopez are both from the same community as their students. The impact of participation on the young women in this 12-session Vocal Empowerment Curriculum was measured from several angles including self-assessment, mentor assessment, and analysis of content of recorded participant speech.

Self and mentor assessment

Self-assessment was measured using a chart ranging from 1 to 10 – with 1 associated with feeling the most positive and 10 the least (indicated by a drawing of a smiling and a frowning face) – upon which we asked participants to write their name to indicate their self-assessment. The inverted scale was chosen to match MAIA's thermometer rating system, standardised as a tool for identifying current moods for students. Additionally, two separate charts were utilised to measure how students felt about their voice at school and in public. To collect the mentors' assessment of each participant's level of vocal empowerment, each mentor filled out a chart for each participant in their section by circling a number from 1 to 5 to rate if each girl is (a) Audible: can she be heard?, (b) Confident: can she look someone in the eye and communicate in a physical way?, and (c) Creative: can she share her thoughts and original ideas? Mentors were asked for a brief written description about each participant for the baseline assessment before facilitating the 12 sessions as well as at the completion of the 12 sessions. For the mentor assessment charts, 1 is most positive, and 5 is most negative.

Table 1. Average rating scores (and standard error) of self-ratings and teacher ratings during pre-programme and post-programme testing.

Subjective Ratings	Average Rating Pre-Program	Average Rating Post-Program	Sig.	Positive or Negative Change
Self-ratings (1-10, 1 = most positive, 10 = most negative)				
Heard/understood at school	3.52 (0.3)	2.84 (0.2)	$p = 0.012$	positive
Heard/understood in public	6.71 (0.4)	3.96 (0.3)	$p < 0.001$	positive
Teacher-ratings (1-5, 1 = most positive, 5 = most negative)				
Audibility (Can you hear her?)	3.00 (0.1)	1.77 (0.1)	$p < 0.001$	positive
Exhibits confidence in her communication	3.19 (0.1)	1.73 (0.1)	$p < 0.001$	positive
Shares her thoughts and ideas	3.06 (0.1)	1.63 (0.1)	$p < 0.001$	positive

A general linear model Repeated Measures ANOVA was used to compare pre- and post-programme measures. Measures included subjective ratings (self-ratings and teaching ratings).

For the self-ratings, there were significant positive differences between pre- and post-programme ratings for two ratings including how well the participants felt they were heard and understood at school ($F_{(1, 45)} = 6.807$, $p = 0.012$) and how well they felt they were heard and understood in public ($F_{(1, 45)} = 37.807$, $p < 0.001$). In both of these self-ratings, ratings were lower at post-programme testing (see Table 1). For the teacher ratings, there were significant positive differences between pre- and post-programme ratings for three ratings including audibility ($F_{(1, 45)} = 84.203$, $p < 0.001$), exhibiting confidence in communication ($F_{(1, 45)} = 141.462$, $p < 0.001$), and sharing thoughts and ideas ($F_{(1, 45)} = 137.872$, $p < 0.001$). In all three teacher ratings, ratings were lower (meaning more positive) at post-programme testing (see Table 1).

A mentor pre-programme written description of one participant states: 'She is shy. She doesn't like to talk'. The post-programme written description for that same student states that the girl 'participates and is more secure and confident'. Several of the post-programme descriptions specifically mention increased participation attributable to an increase in vocal empowerment. The quality of a participant feeling more secure and confident in regard to vocal expression also appeared in many of the post-programme descriptions. Another pre-programme description states: 'She has a quiet voice, but she has a lot of critical thinking', and the post-programme description for the same girl states: 'She has posture, security, confidence'. Other commonly mentioned improvements gained through participation in the programme included being able to look up when speaking, not at the floor, use of body to express oneself, and increased ease with speaking in front of a group.

Analysis of content of recorded participant speech

To measure the physical voices before and after exposure to the pro-gramme, we recorded each participant both before exposure to the

curriculum (baseline) and after complete exposure (final) using the follow-
ing prompts: 'My name is ... ', 'My voice is important to me because ... ',
'My greatest concern for my community is ... ', 'One idea I have to
improve my community is to ... '. At the completion of our 12 sessions
we added the prompt 'For me, my voice is important because ... ' in
order to provide a fresh opportunity to express an original idea. We
conducted these recordings with each girl, one at a time, in a MAIA office
just outside their usual classroom. A MAIA staff member familiar to the
girls sat across a table from each girl and explained the instructions while
holding the prompt card. Osnes sat to the side of each girl, positioned
the microphones and operated the recording machine. Hackett and
Lewon were also in the room to manage the timing, transferring, and
storing of each recording.

Analysis of pre- and post-recording of voice

After all recordings were translated and transcribed, the coding and ana-
lysis of the content of what each girl said during the baseline and the final
recordings were done by three researchers to increase inter-coder reli-
ability, Jeneé LeBlanc, a CU undergraduate student familiar with the
SPEAK curriculum from participation in the Boulder young women's vocal
empowerment group, Jashodhara Sen, a CU graduate research assistant
who travelled to Guatemala during the data collection, and Osnes.

Baseline data

First, each researcher read through the written transcription of the base-
line data and listed often repeated words and phrases, which included:
'empowered', 'raise', 'strong/strongly', 'clear', 'express/expressing',
'leader', 'participate/participating', 'feelings', 'loud', 'understand', 'value',
'hear me', and 'in public'. These words were generally used in a positive
context in speaking about their own voices and the voices of women in
their community. One statement that was representative of many of the
responses is: 'My voice is important to me because I can express myself
– and I can say what I want with my own voice'. Participants frequently
mentioned their hopes that their voices could and would be heard in
public and by their larger community. In analysing the ways in which they
spoke with their voices, there was a persistent vagueness in language
where participants mentioned 'doing projects' either with or for their
community but were not specific as to what the project would be. Also
noted were many examples of interrupted speech, stuttering, and repeat-
ing of the same words and phrases. Only once was an example provided
to help clarify a point. Only a few participants referred to gender specific-
ally, in one example mentioning the need for a strong female leader. In
general, there was little evidence of an ability to articulate a nuanced
understanding of vocal empowerment, but a strong voice was consistently
said to be a positive thing.

Final data

Next, each read through the written transcriptions of the final data and noted many of the same repeated words from the baseline data but new words too, which included: 'ideas', 'communicate', 'utilise', 'contamination', 'opinion', 'dream', and 'what I think', that seemed to indicate a slight increase in sophisticated vocabulary. There were still a few examples of stuttering, interrupted speech, and some stammering, but far less than in the baseline data. Many participants noted the importance of expressing themselves, and, indeed, seemed to do just that with better sentence construction, clearer thought processes, and by expressing their understanding of community needs. Students consistently mentioned some of the 10 characteristics of empowered voice, as identified by SPEAK, with several stating that neither shame nor embarrassment were an obstacle to them in using their voice. They expressed feeling safe as the authors of their own feelings and ideas, and they reported using their voices with courage. Some said they wanted their opinions valued, not shot down. From the baseline to the final data, there was much more specific mention of not just the empowerment of their own voices but of wanting to work towards supporting others' voices too, such as parents and other women, through gathering, training, or workshops. Some participants noticed that by using their empowered voices they were demonstrating and modelling how to have an empowered voice for others. Another participant said: 'My voice is important to me to express my feelings, also to teach my community to be a leader and teach them to not be afraid to talk like us empowered women'. We noticed the use of the phrase 'raising my voice' in a way that seemed to be in a spirit of valuing their voices more, not just to indicate an increase in volume.

Most were able to identify specific community problems they hoped to impact, such as violence against women, equity for all genders, or environmental contamination. Most had a unique take on how these issues should be handled and ideas for what they could do, such as contacting elected leaders, gathering signatures for petitions, or holding public meetings or workshops. Also noteworthy is that in the final data, references to their own thoughts and ideas were prevalent, such as: 'I can say the things I think and not deny my ideas'. All three researchers noted an increase in effusiveness and eloquence, with statements such as 'an empowered voice means speaking well and expressing what we have in our hearts and exploring it into the world', 'to me empowered voices means to lift, to lift my voice and give with all of my heart what I feel' or 'to me empowered voice means elevating our voice to the world'.

All three researchers also noted the linking of advanced concepts with local issues such as the economy as it impacts on local food security. One participant said: 'My biggest worry is they elect a leader who doesn't know how to handle the conditions in my community', which signifies an understanding of the importance of appropriate leadership within community government.

There was collective concern expressed for women's rights, one stating that '[a]ll of us women having the same rights'. One girl specifically

understood vocal empowerment as being a collective achievement, stating that '[e]mpowered voice means that we the women should express ourselves in front of people'. There were many mentions of using the voice to talk *with* people rather than *to* or *at* people, with comments such as 'To me, empowered voice means to raise my voice among people and to be able to talk with people', 'An idea I have to better my community is to talk with the parents and families', or 'An idea I have to better my community is to give a talk or chat with the leaders so that they don't litter'. Talking *with* others includes listening to them – much in line with how Bertau or Kreiman and Sidtis theorise vocal production and reception – and entering into dialogue to critically engage with issues of shared importance.

Finally, in the final recordings, there were more mentions of dreams – such as 'My biggest worry about my community is about education because not all children have education to be able to study and follow their dreams' – as well as explicit connection between these dreams and voicing: 'My voice is important to me because with my voice I can achieve my dreams'. In the several mentions of dreams, they seemed to indicate future planning and achievement of long-term goals. Related to this is the idea of the voice helping one move forward, supported by the comment 'My voice is important because it takes me many places'.

Baseline to final data matched to determine change in vocal empowerment

The three researchers read through the data again independently, this time with the baseline and final responses matched between the subjects to indicate whether there was a positive, negative, or no change in the ways in which they spoke *about* their voices and the ways in which they spoke *with* their voices. A 1–5 scale was employed in which 1 = positive change, 2 = partial positive change, 3 = no change, 4 = partial negative change, and 5 = negative change. Criteria used for measuring this possible change were derived from the following qualities associated with positive change:

- evidence of understanding of the question;
- engagement with the prompt;
- sophistication of vocabulary and sentence structure;
- eloquence in use of language;
- original thoughts and ideas;
- conviction in thought and ideas for action;
- identification of specific problems and authorship of specific solutions to those problems;
- exhibiting or referring to the 10 characteristics of an empowered voice.

The average rating for all 48 participants by LeBlanc was 1.29, by Sen 1.45, and Osnes 1.45. The overall average of the three ratings is 1.4, which indicates an average between positive change and partial positive change, with a slight lean towards positive change.

Figure 3 Family and friends participating in an activity as part of the public sharing for the culminating 12-session Vocal Empowerment Curriculum. Photo by Chelsea Hackett.

Taking their empowered voices into the world

Multiple methods of monitoring and evaluation demonstrate increases in (1) young women's positive feelings about their voices at school and in public, (2) mentors' impressions of their voices as audible, confident, and creative, and (3) the positive ways in which participants spoke with and about their voices. Given these results, the SPEAK 12-session curriculum for vocal empowerment is recommended for use with young women to support them in empowering their voices for self and civic advocacy. This study of the Vocal Empowerment Curriculum by young women at the MAIA Impact School in Guatemala provides evidence of its positive impact for increasing levels of vocal empowerment. Early results from further monitoring and evaluation of this curriculum in two locations in Egypt by CU graduate student Sarah Fahmy show evidence that it likewise produced similar positive results in a very different cultural context. She found that many of her participants associated an empowered voice – one that could make a worthwhile contribution – with a voice speaking the English language, not Arabic. By facilitating the entire curriculum in Arabic only, Fahmy was able to support the young women in claiming their Arabic voices for self and civic advocacy. Further research is recommended to continue to understand how the framework for this curriculum and this overall approach to vocal empowerment can be adjusted to support young women's voices in a wide variety of settings.

At nearly every public event that MAIA hosts, they now lead attendees in one or more vocal exercises or activities. Vocal empowerment has become MAIA's most public-facing expression of the spirit of education and social transformation that is occurring within their school. Hackett and Osnes are currently working with MAIA to create vocal

empowerment curricula for five more years beyond the introductory 12-session curriculum.

As Baján stated in her speech about the MAIA educational methodology, which includes the SPEAK approach to vocal empowerment:

> This is powerful, the girls are already models of their communities, and their voice is manifested in what they say – in their spirit, in their actions, in their look, in their self-confidence, in their perseverance, and with their examples. Believe me, the next generation is already certain of its ability to transform communities. These women can, and they will. Having a voice does not only mean saying what you think. Having a voice means deciding your life, that is, the direction of a society and the future of a country. (Baján 2018)

The Vocal Empowerment Curriculum is an evidence-based practice for young women to amplify their voices to advocate for the future they want for themselves, their communities, their nation, and the world.

As a conclusion, this article offers directly the voices of the young women from the MAIA Impact school. When asked how you will use your voice to lead and make change after you graduate from school, responses by MAIA students included the following:

> 'I will use my voice to express myself and to take away fear.'
> 'I will use my empowered voice in my community to lead, to improve our natural environment, and to defend human rights.'
> 'I will use my voice to share my opinions, my thoughts, and my ideas. I will use my voice responsibly. I will demand rights for women. I will create change in my community and help the young women who have not had the opportunity to study. I will use my voice to help them reach their goals.'
> 'I will use my empowered voice to help others and show them that people can make changes in their societies.'

Their voices released into the world will create, we hope, a tidal wave of change as they take positions of leadership within Guatemala and beyond.

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