



# POLYGLOT THEATRE'S VOICE LAB - NOW ONLINE!

Voice Lab is a unique creative installation module for collecting the thoughts and opinions of children. Voice Lab encourages reflective thought and the articulation of opinions and feelings. Voice Lab is curious and pays close attention to what children think, feel and say, enabling their ideas to be shared to make positive change.

Voice Lab operates in two modes: the original physical mode and the newly-developed online version.

In the physical mode, children are invited one at a time into a beautifully designed, serene dome – entirely alone. In this space they have a conversation with Voice Lab – a voice driven by a concealed live performer that asks questions, encourages opinion and regards the child as the expert.

In response to COVID-19, Voice Lab's online version offers children the opportunity to reflect on change and uncertainty, and to begin to process the pandemic's impact on their sense of the world and themselves. In this period of isolation and disconnection it is vital that children have their voices heard and valued. Voice Lab shows children that no matter where they are or how alone they may feel, their voices can be heard and shared to make a difference.

## How does Voice Lab work online?

Voice Lab takes place over Zoom. The participant arrives in their Voice Lab session - the Zoom meeting - and is greeted by a friendly Polyglot facilitator. The facilitator checks that the participant's technology is working correctly and encourages the use of headphones if available. They briefly talk through what is going to happen in the session and make sure the child feels comfortable and ready to proceed.

The facilitator then turns off their own audio and video and the screen fills with colour and Voice Lab welcomes the participant to the space. The digital interface is a colourful screen that slowly changes colour throughout the session. At the centre of the screen is a glowing circle that reacts to voice and gently pulses as the conversation unfolds. The Voice Lab session is controlled by a live performer, invisible to the participant who elicits detailed responses, gives time for thought and regards the child as the expert. This hidden operator triggers pre-recorded questions, feeds in sound effects and can 'go live' to speak directly to the participant if the conversation requires it.

Voice Lab has the ability to feed a soundscape directly to the participant, which means that while the child is talking Voice Lab can bring some of those elements to life sonically. For example, the child talks about going into space and they hear a rocket blasting off. They describe a train pulling up and hear the hiss of a steam-train. They describe a field, and suddenly the air is filled with wind blowing on long grass.

The questions Voice Lab asks can be designed around any theme, but Voice Lab always asks some introductory questions to make the child feel comfortable and to create a rapport with Voice Lab. These questions are: What is your name?, How old are you? and What is your favourite colour? When the child says their favourite colour, the whole screen changes to that colour. This puts the child in control and lets them know that Voice Lab is listening to them.



## **Why is Voice Lab important?**

Voice Lab travels at the speed of the participant, giving time to think and imagine, and allowing thoughts to unfold in detail. Enveloped in this introspective space, children feel confident to speak their thoughts out loud, rather than thinking in silence, allowing them time to consider their response to the questions posed to them. This enables children to form new thoughts and opinions on things they may never have been asked about.

In the digital realm, Voice Lab allows us to engage with children who are currently socially isolated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At this unprecedented time, we see an enormous need for Voice Lab to support the mental health of children by offering a safe environment for them to share their thoughts and feelings. Voice Lab also has the capacity to reach thousands of children who might previously have been unable to engage with Voice Lab due to geographical remoteness or financial hardship.

## **What equipment does the participant need to experience Voice Lab online?**

Participants need a device – a computer, tablet or smartphone – that is connected to the internet. Using headphones is optimal, and a quiet space away from other people is ideal.

## **How long is each Voice Lab online session?**

This depends on the amount of questions being asked and the way the child responds to Voice Lab, but we suggest each session runs for at least 15 minutes, which allows for 25 questions including the introduction.

## **How many children can Voice Lab speak to in one day?**

Voice Lab operates online in two-hour blocks, accommodating four 15-minute sessions per hour. The minimum number of participants Voice Lab can speak to in a day is 16, but this number varies depending on session length and whether Voice Lab is being used in a school setting or if participants are joining from home.

## **How does Polyglot seek permission for children to participate?**

Written consent is obtained from the child and their parent or guardian before participating and consent is specifically obtained for future use of the child's de-identified words. Consent is additionally sought at two stages during the Voice Lab session: once at the beginning — "Are you happy to stay to answer some questions?" and once at the end — "Are you happy for Voice Lab to use your words?" At all stages of the Voice Lab engagement participants can choose not to participate or can withdraw their consent if they no longer want to participate.

## **What is the risk management process if a child says something of concern inside Voice Lab?**

Polyglot is a Child Safe Organisation and all employees hold a current Working with Children Check and adhere to Polyglot Theatre's Code of Conduct, Child Safe Policy and Online Child Safety Guidelines. If a child says something of concern during their session, the Voice Lab team will follow up with a representative from the hosting school or organisation. Organisational protocols will then be followed. A report will also be made to Polyglot's Child Safety Officer who will ensure the report goes to the relevant body.

## **CONTACT**

Lexie Wood, Project Manager - Voice Lab  
lexie@polyglot.org.au | 0408 490 890