



Politicizing and humanizing management learning and education with Paulo Freire

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Abstract

Paulo Freire is widely acknowledged as one of the leading 20th-century philosophers of education. Freire's ideas have been leveraged by scholars across the social sciences, including in the field of organization studies where it has come to inform extant understandings of management learning and education. While such engagements with Freire have enriched many germane discourses in our field, we have yet to excavate the full potential of his writings. This special issue aims to remedy this oversight by illuminating myriad promising trajectories through which scholars in organization studies can return to Freire's ideas with the intention of enhancing the future of management learning and education.

Keywords

Critical management education, management learning, Paulo Freire, pedagogy

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Introduction

The 19th of September 2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Two years previously, the golden jubilee of his masterpiece *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1968) was commemorated in Brazil and elsewhere (e.g. Abbott and Badley, 2020; Celebi, 2018; Souza and Mendonça, 2019). These occasions presented us with the ideal opportunity to assemble a special issue that revisited Freire's legacy in the context of contemporary management learning and education.

Freire figures prominently among the most important critical thinkers for the Global South, though he is acknowledged worldwide and across disciplines—sometimes in the same breath as “John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers” (Kolb and Kolb, 2005: 194). Notwithstanding the enduring significance of his writings, Freire's radical pedagogy is yet to be explored fully in management learning and education. While Freire has been referenced in organization studies broadly, and in management education specifically, with this special issue we aim to move from cursory attributions to his writings to sustained engagements with the corpus of his work. In doing so, we unearth the substantive and multifarious opportunities that his ideas offer to pressing questions confronting management education (Dal Magro et al., 2020; Dehler, 2009; Grey and Mitev, 1995; Perriton and Reynolds, 2018; Trott, 2013). These opportunities arise not from eulogistic readings of Freire's work, but from in-depth, reflexive engagement with it, as well as from its problematization vis-à-vis the grand challenges humanity is currently facing. The articles included in this special issue cover topics as diverse as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate emergency, widening socio-economic inequalities, polarization, violence, gender inequities, colonialism, racism, erosion of democratic values and institutions, commodification, and the marketization of education and social life. These topics are investigated through Freirean concerns and the practices germane to management learning and education.

Freire's life and work were rife with political crises and social upheaval, which infused his thinking with political and ethical awareness. After he was sent into exile out of his homeland of Brazil, Freire (1973 [1967]) analyzed the ousting of the country's president Joao Goulart by a military coup. He wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (“Brazil's unintended gift to the world” (Shor, 2018)) while living in exile in Chile. Freire's development of anti-oppressive and liberating practices through education was antithetical to Brazilian dictators' technocratic view of education of the period (1964–1985). Indeed, Freire's (2017) educational method was “eminently political, ethical, humanistic and democratic” (p. 282), rooted in the “everydayness” (“*cotidianeidade*”; Freire, 2017: 285). It considered the material conditions of those who engage in the learning process as well as accounted for the historical processes that shape the present (Freire, 1973 [1967]). Freire's (2017) view of learning as a dialogical process—the inseparable binomial of teaching–learning—was based on the development of “generative themes”—a problem faced by a group that can prompt reflection and action. Freire saw education as a political act aimed at the emancipation of the individual (Shor and Freire, 1987).

Drawing on Paulo Freire, hooks (2010) claims that learning requires openness and willingness to engage with new possibilities, “so that we might discover those places of radical transparency where knowledge can empower” (p. 187). The emphasis on politics, ethics, and public responsibility of education and educators makes Freire's work particularly relevant in today's context of global crises. This is particularly pertinent given the recent Black Lives Matter movement and the (re)surfacing of hatred, violence, racism, misogyny, and xenophobia in the context of far-right populism in many parts of the world (Barros and Wanderley, 2020; Prasad, 2020; Robinson and Bristow, 2020).

In our call for papers, we invited authors to rethink management learning and education through critical pedagogic lenses by grappling with Freire's work and/or addressing its implications. We asked authors to consider, for example, how Freirean student centrality can influence postcolonial and decolonial approaches in management and organization studies and how Freire's contributions inform participatory action research, participatory communication, and decolonial pedagogy (Lomeli and Rappaport, 2018; Suzina et al., 2020). Amid calls for decolonizing management knowledge, reflexivity becomes even more important for business school academics; as such, they are invited to revisit their social purpose within the broader communities in which they operate (Zulfiqar and Prasad, 2021, 2022).

Freirean thinking can help to reimagine critical management learning and education by enriching the ideas of other critical thinkers (see, for example, hooks, 1994). Individually or collectively, the articles in this special issue expand on existing debates in the field by: exploring organizational learning and pedagogical processes at the heart of social and communal enterprises; showing how education as political engagement and emancipation serve as a basis for academic and intellectual activism (Contu, 2018, 2020); re-examining and re-imagining the public value of management learning and education in neoliberal business schools (Giroux, 2010); and continuing the discussion about the "Performative University," where universities that were once a public good are managed as if they are market-driven corporations with increasingly commercialized and commoditized higher education (Jones et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 crisis has made the crucial role of educators in society more explicit—not only in their impact on the present challenges but also in terms of their capacity to shape different futures. We believe it is now more imperative than ever to pose questions inspired by Freire "on power-benefit beyond . . . cost-benefit, of social justice beyond efficiency" (Kinsey, 1997: 470). It is equally important to interrogate Freire's legacy from various conceptual and pedagogical paradigms such as liberal feminism, black feminism, and personal praxis (hooks, 1994: 7), with the aim to enhance reflexivity and combat oppression in its intersecting discursive and material manifestations as well as to deliver justice-oriented educational practices, including in business schools (Fotaki and Prasad, 2015). Freire's work and the promise it offers may give rise to tensions, limitations, and utopias. But, it is up to every educator to ask, as Meek (1987: vi) did in her foreword to Freire and Donaldo (1987): "What are we helping students to learn?"

Rethinking management learning and education with Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire's oeuvre, as suggested earlier, is rather diverse. He developed and employed a variety of concepts in the elaboration and praxis of his critical pedagogy. Despite the richness and depth of his work, researchers citing Freire often only make cursory or passing reference to his masterpiece, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Yet, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* offers a treasure trove to critical scholars who wish to respond to calls for the study of wicked problems and deliver positive societal impact through intellectual activism, especially in their own pedagogical practices (Contu, 2009, 2020). Teaching, after all, is key to academics' identity and responsibility (Fotaki and Prasad, 2014). For most business school academics, it is central to their contractual obligation to their employer. In one way or another, what to teach and how to teach it remains to be fundamental questions for academics.

Questions associated with liberation and justice are befitting an intellectual activist like Paulo Freire. These issues go to the core of his work, not only in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* but also in *Pedagogy of Hope*. In the latter text, Freire elaborated on his notion of hope by referring to it as an ontological need that is always situated in practice, in the actual historical struggles at hand. For Freire, it is only in relation to the concreteness of these historical struggles that hope and an

education of freedom can truly be actualized. We shall return to this notion of concreteness later as it is rather central to critical pedagogy. For now, following Freire dialectics, it is worth focusing on one of the most well-known ideas found in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and rearticulated in *Pedagogy of Hope*, the “banking” model of education—an idea wholly antithetical to his critical pedagogy.

For Freire, the banking model of education is dominant and mirrors oppressive society as a whole where power asymmetries are maintained. In this model, education is not a system through which to counter de-humanizing processes or structures that undermine freedom. Instead, “banking” education reproduces the hegemonic status quo where oppression is actualized in the routine and supposedly neutral objectification of individuals and groups. Historically, the perpetuation of the oppressive status quo, varying according to specific socio-historical and economic conditions, stems from the exertion of power. As Freire (1968) wrote, “it engenders an entire way of life and behavior for those caught in it—the oppressor and the oppressed” (p. 58). This oppressive dynamic codifies ethical commitments and behaviors within the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressor’s notion of humanity is linked to their sense of possession, creating a distorted view of dignity anchored in dominance and control. This cycle of oppression and dispossession embeds itself in societal norms and behaviors, making it a challenging but crucial system to recognize and dismantle.

Paulo Freire (1968) identified Eric Fromm’s “having” consciousness as central to the reproduction of oppressive relations and the constant control needed to maintain the status quo as “the earth, property, production, the creation of people, people themselves, time—everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal” (p. 58). The oppressed consciousness, and the struggles for freedom toward a humanizing life as fully human—a “being” rather than “having” consciousness—is a subversive act against the interest of the oppressors. It is an attack on the oppressors’ way of life—their “inalienable right,” a right they acquired through their own “effort” with their “courage to take risks” while others are “envious” and “ungrateful” (Freire, 1968: 59). These words continue to speak to us as authoritarian voices are popping up all over the world. They are the response of the oppressed to every “reverse-discrimination” claim, “woke” indoctrination cry, and “all lives matter” rally.

The voices of objectification and possession are also in the individualizing, ever self-optimizing competition driving many, if not most, of our management students. Resistance to learning that departs from the traditional banking model of knowledge with its individualizing and possessive “having” mode of being is to be expected. Yet, shades of gray abound since “we,” critical management scholars, are not let off the hook so easily, as highlighted in several of the articles included in this special issue. We “play the game” (Butler and Spoelstra, 2015; Prasad, 2013) by serving an institution that sells capitalism; albeit, one that today is presented as more “humane” “sustainable,” and capable of solving all problems from poverty to the climate emergency, in an ever present “solutionism,” as Dallyn and colleagues in this special issue call it. Playing the game props our “having” mode of being while, at once, it casualizes, chains, and infects our professional existence.

Freire’s thinking helps us in addressing the contradictions at the heart of our work, especially in relation to our role as educators—exactly because he appreciated that the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy is a subjective as well as an objective position where each is implicated in and by the other. The oppressors are oppressed by the situation of oppression and the sadistic enjoyment actualized in treating humans as things that chain them to having consciousness, unable to be free, and become fully human. The oppressed introjects beliefs and ideas of the oppressors by buying into the naturalness, the ahistoricity of its own oppression (Freire, 1968: 96).

Freire elucidates the position of the progressive educator in ways that invite a specific educational praxis—a mode of teaching and critical pedagogy that addresses the contradictions in practice by, for example, by refusing the banking model of education. Instead, it advocates for engaging a dialogic process that takes fully on board the concrete socio-historical circumstances and includes all those involved in making up educational praxis, including teachers and students. As he puts it in 1974, this requires a problematization of the human being and the world where neither are understood in isolation but always in relation to one other. This features significantly in the relationship between teachers and students where *both* engage in a process of transformation (Freire, 2013 [1974]).

In the banking model of education, the student and the teacher stand opposite each other. The student knows nothing, is lacking, a mere empty vessel to be filled by the teacher's knowledge. The teacher is the only Subject of the learning process, and students are merely passive objects. The banking concept of knowledge still resonates and is evident today in management education (see Cooper and Majumdar, 2023 in this special issue). Arguably, this is an indictment to Critical Management Education (CME) as a discipline, its lack of progress in facilitating and supporting critical pedagogical practices in business education. "We," as a widespread and diverse community of critical scholars in business schools, have never truly learned the lessons of Freire's educational philosophical critical praxis. But it is not surprising since the discussions—the learning dialogue and the options for praxis—on the processes and practices of CME have been, at best, scattered.

To be fair, plenty of scholars engage in CME that takes to heart Freire's notion of education. Indeed, several examples of CME that has been informed by Freire either explicitly or tacitly have emerged in the extant literature over the last three decades. Grey et al. (1996) captured the potential of critical pedagogy by studying a management undergraduate course in the North of England. Vince proposed a modality of experiential learning informed by critical pedagogy. In doing so, he explained how "Freire's work provides an approach to understanding the nature of management education not simply in terms of the experiential reality of the individual, but in relation to the social reality in which the learning process itself is situated" (Vince, 1996: 117). More recently, Zulfiqar and Prasad (2021) returned to Freire to illuminate how CME that is intended to achieve consciousness-raising can compel socio-economically elite students to recognize, question, and undo their own class privilege.

Freire's education is an act of love and freedom based in the recognition of the student–teacher relation where both teacher and student engage in a learning process transforming each other and their world through their dialogue. Freire's emphasis on dialogical education is a counterpoint to traditional hierarchical "banking" teaching methods, advocating instead the co-creation of knowledge through open discussions and debates. This dialogic problematizing approach aligns well with contemporary needs for managers to be adaptive, reflective, and action-oriented in ways that can actively modify the very notion of management as a social practice. The shift that occurs in the meaning and embodiment of the practice of management, from technocratic, detached, and neutral, to one that fully recognizes the multiple and intersecting relations of oppression at hand and that through dialogue, reflection, problematization, and action can be reflexively reframed and re-oriented, is a powerful and pregnant realization. The affordances engendered by an engagement of Freire's dialogical critical problematization are effectively exemplified in Shoukry and Fatien (2023) reframing of coaching as a social practice in this special issue.

Freire's problematization is also especially salient given the new demands emerging from the widespread use of artificial intelligence tools in all interactions including in the organization of work, recruitment, and new jobs, together with the educational and societal changes that they are bringing forward (Barros et al., 2023). Adopting Freire's notions of problematization and generative themes, management education can focus on grand challenges such as long-term sustainability,

which would allow students to engage with ground up actionable interventions participating in actual practices and organizations as illustrated in Dallyn et al. (2023) in this special issue. Freire also invites us to question existing paradigms, engage in ethical reasoning, and consider not only the broader societal implications of business practices and the implications of their actions, but also our place in the world. Freire's idea of praxis—reflection followed by action—can be integrated through experiential learning, making management education more responsive to real-world challenges. Moreover, Freire's work invites ethical and political awareness into the curriculum, encompassing corporate social responsibility, social justice, and governance because his pedagogy is always a "situated" pedagogy. As we have indicated earlier, it deals with the concrete and the specific, complex socio-economic historical situation at hand.

Paulo Freire's situated pedagogy and critical management education

In his "Education for Critical Consciousness," Paulo Freire details his political historical analysis of Brazil. He notes the form of colonialism forwarded by early Portuguese domination of the country and the specific hierarchies and silencing it engendered. He further critiqued the 1800s re-Europeanization of the country, which reinforced and deepened the marginalization and oppression of those of African descent as well as members of Indigenous communities (Freire, 2013 [1974]: 21–25). His analysis identifies the limits and the possibilities of a radicalization of a democratic revolution. Freire engages in the same careful analysis of the experiences he had while in exile in Chile and other countries he visited. Such analyses were always focused on the contradictions at hand; addressing class, gender, and racial oppression in the United States, the apartheid system in South Africa, the freedom and anti-colonial movements in other African countries and in the Caribbean, and the plight of southern European workers in Germany in the 1970s.

Freire's work serves as a reminder that the actual socio-economic historical context is paramount for any education that aims to be a practice of freedom. Freire's anti-oppressive and decolonial arguments provide critical lenses to examine organizational hierarchy, gender, race, and other forms of inequality. These ideas can be particularly impactful in light of the increasing focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in organizations and the ever-growing demands for justice. Integrating these Freirean principles can contribute to developing management professionals who are not only technically skilled but also ethically aware and socially accountable. As Freire puts it in his dialogue with Ira Shor: "In the liberating perspective, the teacher has the right but also the duty to challenge the status quo, especially in the questions of domination by sex, race, or class" (Freire and Shor, 1987: 174).

Despite the wealth of concepts and methodological affordances found in Freire's writings, there have been few opportunities for collective learning for management educators. The agential capabilities needed for a critical pedagogy of management education are mostly left to each individual scholar, often on a long lonely journey in working out and experimenting how to engage in a teaching practice for freedom. This requires rejecting the traditional banking model that, as Jamil et al. (2023) indicate in this special issue, serves Moloch—the oppressive and exploitative, racialized, and gendered capitalism that is delivering the world to the climate tragedy together with the dissolution of the democratic dream and its prospects for drastic but necessary social change.

When it comes to research, CMS, as a broad scholarly community, has plenty of spaces for early career and other critical scholars to learn from each other and hone their own critical research skills, both theoretical and methodological. These spaces include, for example, conferences, research workshops, professional development workshops, and webinars. A similar wealth of

learning opportunities has not been available when it comes to pedagogical practices to effectively teach in business schools with the aim of instilling conscientization among students (Zulfiqar and Prasad, 2021). For all the urgent calls to CMS to make a difference in the world, it is interesting that one of the low hanging fruits, the practice of teaching and learning, has been left mostly to its own devices. Sure, plenty of articles have been written that recount examples of teaching designs and tools that go in the direction of a critical pedagogy. And there have been isolated initiatives, like the work of the Barc Collective, the series on teaching and learning in engagedscholar.org platform, the online workshop on decolonizing the business school organized by the then Cass Business School Ethos Center, a small number of CME PDWs at the Academy of Management CMS Division, and some CME-themed CMS InTouch events. These initiatives have been trying to create an archive of alternatives as well as support individuals and collective learning. Yet, an organized, sustained, and collective dialogue of what it means to articulate CME in different situations and locales remains missing in the business school.

There might be plenty of reasons for our field's relative lack of engagement with pedagogy. Our work as academics often tends to fetishize theorizing. The unsavory intermingling between the development of "management" as a scholarly discipline and marketization of higher education has created a monstrous attachment to "theory," often seen in academic journals as the injunction to provide a "theoretical" contribution (Prasad, 2023). This critique parallels Freire's (2013 [1974]: ix) observation that critical scholars unreflexively buy into critical theories in ways that become escapist, completely detached from the concrete lives and knowledge of our students and ourselves. As Freire (1994: 102–103) puts it, theories in this purview tend to acquire a magical property. We develop curricula that include wonderful critical theories. In our "supercertitudes," as "we know what our students should know" (Freire, 1994: 106), the very act of introducing these theories to our students is taken to warrant their development of a critical consciousness. This is, of course, misguided thinking, which Freire's critical pedagogy sought to subvert. Moreover, Freire is unequivocal in distancing critical progressive education from sectarianism and propaganda. Students are not supposed to regurgitate to us the refined critical theories we teach them. We cannot be upset if they reject us and our teaching, if such teaching has all to do with us and our pet critical theories, but is wholly divorced from students' situated experiences, their knowledge, their lives, and their multiple and complex realities.

Freire warns progressive educators to remember that conscientization ("conscientização") is always part of the dialectical process in the critical praxis of learning that calls and involves our own conscience as teachers/educators. The "prise de conscience" as progressive educators is not done once and for all (Freire, 2013 [1974]: 131). It is a constant process of consciousness transformation, where each of us re-enters and responds to the relations of specific socio-economic historical realities our students and ourselves as educators face. As Freire (1968) puts it, through dialogue, problematization, reflection, and action

people (NDA both teachers and students) develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality; but as a reality in process, in transformation. (p. 83)

To become progressive educators, incessantly returning to democratic dialogue in spite of the straight jacket imposed by the traditional role of the educator and the objective and subjective constraints and fantasies we deal with, invites a constant dialogue, actions and reflection, accountability with others, the students, administrators, local community and beyond, and of course a constant dialogue with our peers. It is a work always in progress.

Yet, how many courses, PDWs, and consortia for early career scholars and doctoral students address the concepts, praxis, or dilemmas of critical pedagogy? How many collaborative spaces have been built to archive CME knowledge on critical pedagogy? Hardly any, as mentioned earlier. As Freire (1994) warns, “we have never needed more radical positions in the sense of the radicalness I advocate in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as we need today” (p. 41). This was in 1994, yet the world in which we live in relation to what and how we teach management has only become more wickedly problematic. Radicality in management education, we suggest, is needed more than ever.

Perriton and Reynolds (2018) argue that it might be time to resurrect the “Connecting Learning and Critique” Conference, a conference that ran from 1999 to 2004 and was the source of debate and fruitful dialogue on many experimentations and critical interventions in management education. We would echo this argument by noting that we need to re-invent a connecting learning and critique space for our times. We need a space with multiple modalities, timings, and languages; a space and an organization that is de-centralized, hybrid, and plural, and which mobilizes critically oriented journals, conferences, workshops, and webinars in different countries but that insists on the necessity to study, socialize, share, dialogue, reflect, and enact a management education for freedom.

The contributions to this special issue

To be clear, we do not hold some sort of naive optimism in thinking that enacting CME will bring “the great social transformation” (Freire and Shor, 1987: 130). Being aware of the current social, political, and economic circumstances, we recognize how society is organized around the oppression of the majority. Notwithstanding this recognition, we do not allow ourselves to succumb to hopelessness or nihilism. Each of us can share plenty of experiences as educators that stand witness to the fact that “it is possible to accomplish something important in the institutional spaces of a college in order to help the transformation of society” (Freire and Shor, 1987: 130). The seven papers included in this special issue elucidate how this is actualized by mobilizing some of Freire’s concepts and practices of critical pedagogy in different countries and contexts. These range from conceptual to empirical, Global South and North, and include coaching in Egypt, UK management students learning sustainability in the face of climate emergency and bio-natural depletion, the dilemmas of being a PhD student in the United Kingdom, engaging with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, advancing decolonial methodology, combating the climate change, and rediscovering revolutionary action. In the remainder of this section, we briefly overview each of these papers to give readers a sense of their range and contributions.

In “That is political! A Freirean perspective towards coaching as a social practice,” Shoukry and Fatien (2023) provide a nuanced examination of coaching through Paulo Freire’s theories on oppression and emancipation. Challenging the predominantly functionalist and performance-oriented discourse in coaching, the authors present an empirical study conducted over 9 months with Egyptian coaching practitioners. Their study, rooted in cooperative inquiry, entailed initial training followed by iterative cycles of action and reflexive workshops. The Egyptian context serves as a backdrop, as coaching practices became inevitably influenced by the nation’s unique socio-political challenges. Engaging with Freirean-inspired praxis prompted practitioners to reframe their understanding of coaching from a power dynamics perspective. Such a reframing led to a dialectical comprehension of oppression, enabling the practitioners to move beyond binary oppositions to a more nuanced, dynamic view. This altered understanding consequently influenced their coaching methods, encouraging them to see both the coach and coachee as joint agents in the broader social and political emancipation process. This reconceptualization adds a critical layer to the discourse

on coaching, situating it as a social practice imbued with political ramifications and underscores the potential for coaching to serve as an instrument for societal change.

In “Infusing courageous love for universal dignity and environmental response-ability through management education and learning: inspired by Freire’s dream,” Jamil et al. (2023) contend that conventional frameworks of management education require fundamental reevaluation. The authors critique the mainstream narrative that overemphasizes market mechanisms and corporate interests, arguing that such a stance perpetuates societal inequities and environmental degradation. They depict the Global Market as “Moloch,” a deity demanding human sacrifice. This representation critiques liberal democracies functioning under capitalism with little scope to go beyond its logic. They imply that they often demand sacrificing humane dimensions in the name of Moloch. Positioned against this backdrop, the authors propose a paradigm shift in management education informed by Paulo Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy. Jamil, Humphries-Kil and Dey argue that Freirean principles could serve as a cornerstone for cultivating “response-ability”—a heightened sense of responsibility that is responsive to the pressing challenges of our times. This proposed transformation aligns with international agendas, notably the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. By fostering a sense of “response-ability,” the authors advocate for an educational approach that moves beyond mere functional expertise to instill an ethical commitment to social justice and environmental sustainability. This vision for management education aims not just to prepare business leaders for the corporate world but to equip them with the ethical frameworks and courage needed for universal emancipation from systemic harm, thus striving for a more just and equitable global society.

In “*Metodologica otra: Challenging modern/colonial matrix with Paulo Freire and decolonial thinking*,” Teresa Harari and Marlei Pozzebon (2023) present us with *metodologia otra* to challenge Eurocentric methodologies in critical management education. Based on a hermeneutical and abductive reading of Paulo Freire and on decolonial literature, the authors bring to the fore radical principles to challenge the colonial matrix of power: learning to unlearn, *escrevivência*, interculturality and *corazonar/sentipensar*. These principles enact decoloniality, allowing the researcher to go beyond critical, reflexive, dialogical, and affective. They posit that Freire significantly contributed to advancing a decolonial methodology, which enables us to rethink knowledge production by giving protagonism to historically silenced voices. Harari and Pozzebon conclude that “the focus should be less on the research instruments and more on how they are used.”

In “(De)humanization in the business school: critical reflection on doctoral experiences,” Susan Cooper and Dipsikha Guha Majumdar (2023) turn Freire’s powerful lenses of banking education, (de)humanization and conscientização (conscientization) on their own experiences as PhD students in UK business schools. Arguing that business schools do and always have lacked humanity, Cooper and Majumdar convey their struggles against such dehumanization by narrating and reflecting on painfully insightful autoethnographic vignettes. These show their disappointment as PhD students in post-Brexit, pandemic Britain at a time of intensified racial tensions and the cost-of-living crisis. One vignette describes how PhD students were cast adrift during the COVID-19 lockdowns, being told to count themselves lucky to have extra time for reading, while fieldwork had to be canceled and no additional time or funding were available to complete the degrees. In the later stage of the pandemic came the push for “normality,” and PhD students “had to choose between protecting [their] health or ‘networking,’ a demand that [was] ambiguously and yet threateningly tied to [their] academic fate.” The second vignette narrates PhD students’ lack of solidarity during the historical process of changing a business school name, which was found to be associated with the slave trade. Cooper and Majumdar interpret these events through Freire’s concepts of banking education and dehumanization, arguing that neoliberal business schools entrap PhD students in a banking education system, whereby neoliberal academic career ideals turn them into

“passive, adaptive, necrophilous” persons. PhD students are both the oppressed and the “sub-oppressors,” suffering from dehumanization in the business school but also reinforcing it through social reproduction. Yet, Cooper and Majumdar leave us with hope for more humanized business schools, where through Freirean conscientization, critical reflection and “cooperation-based dialogue, we can take a pragmatic step toward revolutionary praxis . . . , inclusivity, awareness, and freedom.”

In “Conscientisation and communities of compost: Rethinking management pedagogy in an age of climate crises,” Sam Dallyn et al. (2023) invoke Freire’s concepts of political organization and action to develop a pedagogy undergirded in “collective, community orientated ecocentric approaches.” Such approaches as the authors observe, are critically needed to respond to the ever pressing challenge of climate change. They further interweave Donna Haraway’s ideas of “staying with the trouble” and “Communities of Compost” with Freire’s arguments to illuminate how local practices can potentially subvert the disconcerting progressive of climate warming.

In “Paulo Freire and the praxis of liberation: Education, organization and ethics,” Maria Ceci Misoczky (2023) offers a thought-provoking critique of how Freire’s writings have been imprudently adapted by academics based in the Global North. For Misoczky, engagement with Freire’s ideas by such academics have been limited to how they can configure a more conscientious pedagogical approach. So, while academics readily cite his critiques of the banking model of education or the pedagogical utility of conscientization, they have almost wholly failed to account for his ostensibly more radical ideas, specifically those related to revolutionary action. Whether the absence of Freire’s ideas concerning revolution is because it is perceived to be too controversial or because it is assumed as no longer germane for the political assemblages that are found decades after the original concept was coined, Misoczky contends that this is an oversight that merits remedy. Misoczky’s article is a must read for those seeking to understand how academics very selectively use (perhaps misappropriate) the ideas of Global South writers. It is apt to conclude the summary of the articles by quoting Misoczky’s final statement: “This is not a conclusive contribution; it is an invitation to future dialogues that embrace what Paulo Freire’s ideas represent in terms of theoretical proposals and political aspirations.”

Finally, in “Unveiling systemic oppression in business education: Freire’s contribution to our quest for social change,” Maria Fernanda Cavalcanti and Andre Silva (2023) explore Freire’s contribution to the quest of critical management educators for social change. Deploying a Freire-inspired thematic analysis, they highlight oppressive practices and beliefs in management education that keep management educators in a compliant and passive state, tarnishing their potential for critical resistance. The authors propose a revised critical performativity framework, informed by Freire’s conceptual and practical work (e.g. to historicize, to dialogue, etc). CME should not be understood as a set of tools to “save” students from their alienation. Rather, the framework they elaborate enables scholars, with their students, to become cognizant and reflexive on their own complex situated oppressive conditions, especially those engendering passivity, “a key element” in today’s authoritarian turn. A set of principles and guidelines for a Freire-inspired critical management education are therefore highlighted for readers to consider and mobilize wherever they are.

To summarize, the manuscripts in this special issue advance Freire’s theories as an inspiration for seeking new ways of emancipation. They highlight the importance of context and that knowledge should always consider the dimensions in which it is produced. Freire’s idea of developing critical consciousness in educational encounters manifests in the texts. In this sense, management education must be technically competent and aware of all complex dimensions of human life and the effects of organizational activity. Teaching–learning settings are responsible for enabling participants to respond meaningfully to the issues the world faces today. Freire’s non-naive utopianism that establishes new possibilities for humanity beyond current oppressive relationships also

appears in the articles presented in this special issue. They argue for change beyond management's technical and functional aspects, including critical consciousness, ethical reasoning, and meaningful action oriented toward a society that is better for most. They invite those involved in management learning to shift from a transactional view of management education to a transformational one, repositioning individuals involved and society. Through this, they honor Freire's legacy.

Concluding thoughts

We launched the call for contributions to this special issue to coincide with Paulo Freire's 100th birthday. Coincidentally, we are concluding it exactly 60 years after Freire's first experiments in the city of Angicos, in the semi-arid poor region of northeastern Brazil. In Angicos, Freire and his team taught, in just 40 hours, the first letters to 300 adults. This became the very first field test of the method he would later present in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

In August 2023, in the city of Sobral in the Brazilian state of Ceará, the local mayor inaugurated an elementary school named Paulo Freire (there are more than 300 such named schools in the country). Sobral has been recently recognized as the best model of elementary education in Brazil, which led the state of Ceará to adopt it in all schools—other Brazilian states soon followed. Sobral's model is firmly based on Freire's insights. For this achievement, Camilo Santana, ex-state governor of Ceará, has been named Minister of Education for the third term of President Lula (2023–2027). Santana brought his education team to the ministry, and his appointed deputy, Izolda Cela—a psychologist and Freirean educator born in Sobral—was responsible for the success of Sobral's pedagogical model.

This renews our hope for the future of education in Brazil as well as the relevance of Freire's legacy. Freire affirmed that his pedagogy was not a finished model; rather, it had to be practiced to come alive, always *with* those being educated in a dialogical reflexive process *with* the educator. We hope this special issue keeps us walking and questioning *with* Paulo Freire in critical management education—continuing on with Freire's unfinished pedagogical model.

It seems fitting to conclude this editorial with the quotation from Donaldo Macedo's introduction to the Bloomsbury edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

Although he did not hold our hands as we crossed the thresholds of the twenty-first century, his words of wisdom, his penetrating and insightful ideas, his courage to denounce in order to announce, his courage to love and “to speak about love without fear of being called ascientific, if not antiscientific” his humility, and his humanity make him immortal—a forever-present force that keeps alive our understanding of history as possibility.

Freire's commitment to empathetic, dialogical, participatory learning and his emphasis on mutual conscientization offer atemporal pedagogical insights. By fostering critical and authorial thinking in management students and practitioners, we can cultivate (educational) organizations aware of humanity's most pressing challenges. The accurate measure of effective education lies not just in economic success but in empowering subjects to be authors of their own lives, recognizing that being human is living in our communities as global citizens. Freire reminds us that knowledge is complex, contextualized, and co-created; and should aim not only to transmit content but also to produce meaningful understanding that can transform realities.





Freire's ontological perspective sees individuals as social beings connected through communities and ecosystems. Epistemologically, Freire understands knowledge as something embedded in everydayness, not an external object one acquires and contrasts through binary schemes of right and wrong. It is connected and shaped through our interactions and our environment. Knowledge

is not transmitted from an all-knowing instructor to passive students but is embraced only through dialogical engagement. Therefore, knowledge is not only about facts or techniques but also encompasses an ethical stance that frames attitudes.

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