Conscientisation and Communities of Compost: Rethinking management pedagogy in an age of climate crises

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Abstract
The unprecedented scale of the climate crisis has led to a questioning of conventional approaches to sustainability in management education, centred around business case for sustainability narratives. Such critique gives rise to serious questions around how we approach teaching the universality of the climate crisis, species extinction and biodiversity loss differently. Working with Freire's stress on the political role of the educator, action rooted in the concrete and the interconnections he establishes between pedagogy and political organisation, our contribution is to connect these interventions with Haraway's call to stay 'with the trouble' and generate Communities of Compost – that is, collective more than human communities of multi-species flourishing. In doing so, we propose threading together ecocentric and political economy approaches in management education, to present an alternative to corporate sustainability solutionism and to politically rethink scalar mismatches – that is when problems and proposed 'solutions' to the climate crisis apply to different sets of relations. As a way of addressing this, we develop pedagogical practices around Haraway's multi-species Communities of Compost and combine this with the political movement of La Via Campesina – focusing on its campaigns for agroecology and food sovereignty.

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Introduction

There is now a well-established consensus that climate change poses an unprecedented threat to planetary and inter-species survival (see, for example, Dawson, 2016; International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2022; Kolbert, 2015 [2014]). Following this consensus has been an increasing – albeit somewhat uneven and mixed (Burchell et al., 2015) – engagement with sustainability in business and management education in recent years (Alcaraz and Thiruvattal, 2010; Moratis and Melissen, 2022; Weybrecht, 2017), particularly with the emergence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and their widespread adoption by business schools through the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME). The PRME have now been adopted by over 850 institutional signatories across over 85 countries (United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education (UNPRME), 2022). That said, a substantial body of research has questioned approaches that are rooted in business case for sustainability narratives, which tend to dominate corporate reporting through the focus on how sustainability can best be allied to and support profitability (Landrum and Ohsowski, 2017; see also Banerjee, 2011; Kurucz et al., 2014; Wright and Nyberg, 2017). Such narratives downplay political conflict and portray sustainable initiatives as a 'win–win' scenario for businesses, consumers and the environment (Nyberg et al., 2022: 2; see also Landrum and Ohsowski, 2017).

The issue of how we approach teaching sustainability and climate change differently has received some attention (Kurucz et al., 2014; Pio and Waddock, 2021). That said, alternative pedagogical approaches to sustainability in management studies are still at a relatively early stage of development. Critical approaches to business case for sustainability narratives often drift into two camps: political economy approaches that stress the urgent need for broader structural transformation to have any hope of addressing the scale of the current crisis and which highlight the limits of 'corporate solutionism' (Banerjee, 2012; Wittneben et al., 2012; Wright and Nyberg, 2017). And ecocentric approaches that seek to foster interdependence and care with the natural world in management pedagogy (Allen et al., 2019; Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019; Shrivastava, 2010). In this article, we seek to thread these approaches together and draw on Paulo Freire's (1996) politicised pedagogy to do so, but in a manner that supplements his important pedagogical and political interventions with a radical feminist approach that in engaging with the climate crisis seeks to find ways of staying 'with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016).

The need to thread ecocentric and political economy approaches arises from a political problem of scale – or what Liboiron (2021: 101) calls 'scalar mismatch', when problems and proposed 'solutions' occur at different scales and overlook relationships that matter. We characterise this as a potential limitation of ecocentric approaches that can be too focused on transformation through personal encounters (see, for example, Shrivastava, 2010). Conversely, a theme in Freire's (1996) key, ground-breaking work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the conception of political organisation and action he develops, which we argue can be pedagogically threaded with more explicitly collective, community oriented ecocentric approaches.

We use Haraway's conception of staying with the trouble as a call to trace out an alternative management pedagogy that faces up to and addresses the 'wicked universality' (Latour, 2017) of the climate crisis. We take the term 'wicked universality' from Latour (2017) to help ground our intervention because it deepens existing conceptions of wicked, or indeed super wicked, problems (Wright and Nyberg, 2017: 1636–1637). Wicked problems refer to immense problems with innumerable causes that cannot be solved by any single actor (Camillus, 2008). The term 'wicked universality' adds to this by stressing the universality of the climate crisis, encouraging both students and us, to link this problem to our daily lives *and* to broader political, economic and global levels. The term 'wicked universality' also helps to broaden the focus by stressing the close

interconnection between climate change and other ecological crises, such as biodiversity loss and excessive nitrogen use through fertiliser in agriculture (see Beecham, 2018). Both these crises have been categorised as having already surpassed critical planetary thresholds (Rockstöm et al., 2009).

What then does the pedagogical call to *Stay with the Trouble* (Haraway, 2016) consist of when combined with Freire's political pedagogy in addressing this 'wicked universality'? Here we build upon three guiding principles of Freire's radical pedagogy: the first, is that the role of the teacher is always political and can never be neutral (see, for example, Freire, 2004: 36). Second, that we should always seek to root our pedagogy in concrete experience (Freire, 1996: 76–77) and *action* and engagement with our students lives (Freire, 1996: 73; 1985: 189). Third, we propose returning to a theme in Freire's (1996) major work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, his account of political organisation, to incorporate political demands and movements into this alternative approach, an area that has been rather neglected thus far in management pedagogy engagements with Freire's work.[1] Haraway's (2016: 31) conception of string figures becomes useful to this recasting of pedagogy. String figures are practices and processes, a 'becoming-with each other in surprising relays' (Haraway, 2016: 3), which we use to thread and interconnect different critical interventions to construct alternative pedagogies of the climate crisis in an ongoing process.[2]

Haraway (2016) generates a distinctive collectivist (more than human) ecocentric approach through 'theory in the mud' (p. 31) and what she characterises as 'Communities of Compost'. 'Communities of Compost' is a rich conceptual tool to think with in Haraway's (2016) account of 'staying with the trouble', that helps us to reconceptualise community through different forms of multi-species organisation (p. 130). On a more practical pedagogical level, composting is also part of a process of relearning 'how to conjugate worlds with partial connections' across species (Haraway, 2016: 13) – which we explore as part of an ongoing pedagogical experimentation in the 'Discussion' section. The conception of Communities of Compost offers an important resource to become *with* in management pedagogy, rooted in everyday practice, becoming *with* soil and the vast number of species of microbial and plant life that soil generates and supports (see also Lowenfels and Lewis, 2010; Puig de la Ballacasa, 2019; Shiva, 2022). One that also has strong overlaps with the political movement of agroecology and its focus on biodiversity, community and caring for soil (La Via Campesina (LVC), 2018; Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012; Shiva, 2022).

In other words, the idea is to work with the pedagogical potential of *community* composting. The rationale is that, in bringing community composting into management education, we potentially engage students in practising different conceptions of organisation (Parker, 2018) in a manner that is rooted in the concrete (Freire, 2001: 44) but which then needs to be threaded into broader political and economic questions around agriculture, land relations and food production. Here we draw on Freire's (1996) politicised pedagogy and connect this with the transnational peasant movement La Via Campesina (LVC) – whose work combines pedagogical practices that spread agroecology as a movement and set of practices (Rosset et al., 2019), with more critical political and economic calls for systemic change (LVC, 2018: 3).

The contributions of this article stem from staging this rich encounter between Freire and Haraway to generate fresh insights to address this 'wicked universality' in management pedagogy: first, we bring out the contemporary relevance of Freire's (1996) conception of conscientisation and political organisation to debates around the climate crisis, by updating it – with the aid of Haraway (2016) – so that it makes central encounters and relations across species, in politicised processes of becoming with. Second, we draw on Haraway's (2016) conception of Communities of Compost to develop a radically different approach to teaching the climate crisis in management pedagogy. Third, in doing so we present a strong case for threading together ecocentric and political economy approaches, by layering Communities of Compost with Freire's conception of political organisation and action (Freire, 1996: 76–77), and the case of LVC.

We make this call to stay with the trouble in management pedagogy in the following steps: first, we situate our intervention in relation to PRME and the SDGs – that we suggest present a partial, but insufficient, opening. We also highlight faultlines around planet and profit in the existing work on sustainability in management education, drawing on the political economy intervention (see, for example, Banerjee, 2012). In the final part of the literature review, we focus on the ecocentric approach in management pedagogy and its stress on care, interdependence and interconnection with the natural world (Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019). Political economy and ecocentric approaches offer us some important threads in management pedagogy but we argue that they work at different scales that need to be threaded together. Thus, in the following section, beginning with Freire's (1996) important conception of conscientisation, we work with Haraway's (2016) conception of Communities of Compost. Then to address potential issues of scalar mismatch, we turn to Freire's conception of political organisation to thread some interconnections between community composting and the campaigning of LVC. In the following 'Discussion' section, we outline our own ongoing efforts to incorporate community composting into core sustainability related business and management modules by working with a local community garden to install community compost bins and integrate site visits into teaching. In the second part of the Discussion, we outline how we aim to dialogically thread these concrete practices around community composting with the more politicised approach of LVC in management pedagogy.

Teaching sustainability critically

The 'sustainability paradox' frames our engagement with the existing literature on critical approaches to teaching sustainability. Outlined by Kurucz et al. (2014), it refers to how 'our dominant approaches to wealth creation degrade the ecological systems and social relationships upon which our very survival depends' (p. 438). The sustainability paradox is important because it highlights several issues that business schools typically do not engage with (Kurucz et al., 2014; Parker, 2018), such as the fact that we need to drastically reduce consumption particularly in Western economies (Shwom and Lorenzen, 2012) to seriously address the climate crisis. A reality that businesses – arguably for obvious reasons – tend not to foreground. Or the extent to which those with the largest levels of wealth and economic means across the globe have by far the most negative effects on the planet in terms of CO_2 emissions (Bruckner et al., 2022). This runs somewhat counter to the idea that the purpose of a business education, such as an MBA from a prestigious business school, is to help students achieve high paid employment and join a position among this top 1 per cent that emits by far the most carbon in their daily lives (Bruckner et al., 2022). Thus, there are a series of broader political faultlines around inequality in this wicked universality, exacerbated by the fact that those living in low-income countries are overwhelmingly least responsible for climate change and are under most immediate threat from it (Miller, 2017: 17). Given the importance of the sustainability paradox, we first explore different ways of engaging with, or sidestepping it, beginning with the influential SDGs and PRME framework, and then draw on the political economy intervention to highlight the need for a more politicised approach (Pohlmann et al., 2021). Following this, we argue that it is best to combine political economy perspectives with ecological and ecocentric approaches in management pedagogy, for which Haraway (2016) gives us some important conceptual resources to further develop.

PRME and the SDGs

The PRME originated in 2007 with the aim of bringing more positive values like sustainability into business school curricula (see Erskine and Johnson, 2012: 198), and the PRME has subsequently

become closely associated with the 17 SDGs agreed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, including measures like SDG12 Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG13 Climate Action and SDG9 Reduced Inequalities (Sachs et al., 2022). While the SDGs and PRME signal an important shift of emphasis in management education towards global grand challenges, subsequent views on the role of PRME in business education have been mixed, and at times polarised. Situated by some as heralding a shift towards a different, transformational business education (Alcaraz and Thiruvattal, 2010; Weybrecht, 2017). Conversely in the most critical portrayals, the SDGs are seen as the latest incarnation of CSR (corporate social responsibility) image washing (see, for example, Kopnina, 2020). Here, the SDGs become the latest add-on to the profit plus responsibility framework, or a further incarnation of depoliticised corporate stakeholder governance (Louw, 2014). Whatever one's perspective on the SDGs, there is also a body of empirically grounded literature that is sceptical of the extent to which, thus far, the SDGs have been substantively incorporated into business school pedagogical practice (Burchell et al., 2015; Maloni et al., 2021).

Advancing from these debates, Millar and Price (2018) question to what extent PRME invites critical reflexivity. Given that it has the potential to be adopted as a 'global mission statement' (Millar and Price, 2018: 351) within the existing pillars of management education, rather than transforming or questioning existing corporate centred pillars of business education. Critical reflexivity is undoubtedly important here, a key part of which is a critical reflection on whether key actors – including us as educators – have agency, particularly in terms of capacity to 'challenge and rethink social structures' (Millar and Price, 2018: 348). As Millar and Price (2018: 360) suggest, the PRME are best not seen as a set of self-contained objectives but rather as discussion points that can productively be brought into dialogue with other philosophies. In a more recent intervention, Moratis and Melissen (2022) call for a politicised activist engagement with the SDGs. That is, from an activist perspective we can use the SDGs to push for conceptions of sustainability that take us beyond the business case (Moratis and Melissen, 2022). This call for an activist engagement with the SDGs is one in principle we support. But it is also clear that, as Millar and Price (2018) caution, to give this activist perspective life and, ideally, combine it with consciousness raising and action (Freire, 1996; Kurucz et al., 2014), we need to draw on alternative frameworks to break from business case for sustainability narratives.

The political economy intervention

The political economy intervention emerges from a critique of corporate centred understandings of sustainability (such as Arragon-Correa et al., 2017; Stead and Stead, 2010). Essentially, the political economic argument is that such approaches neglect the broader systematic, structural inequalities and the political conflicts around climate change, species extinction and ecosystem damage (Banerjee, 2011, 2012; Boyce, 2008; Wittneben et al., 2012). As Wittneben et al. (2012) express succinctly, meeting the commitments that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change deem necessary to avert further catastrophic climate change will 'require radical and fundamental shifts in socio-political structures, technological and economic systems, organizational forms and modes of organizing' (p. 1432). This political demand for structural action to address climate change is also increasingly expressed by members of the scientific community, for example, Pohlmann et al. (2021) argue that the climate crisis is not simply one crisis among others and that it interconnects with a wide range of other political-economic challenges. Indeed, they stress that the difficulty of making the necessary social changes to address the climate crisis stems from 'the centrality of fossil fuels and the material wealth derived from them' in 'prevailing structures of domination' (Pohlmann et al., 2021: 232).

The political economy literature also underscores the need to go beyond 'sustainability', given its multiple ambiguous meanings (Gray, 2010), including those that conceal the sustainability paradox rather than confronting it. Similarly, we seek to encourage a shift in pedagogical approach to one in which we begin with the wicked universality – climate change, mass extinction and biodiversity loss – rather than the language of sustainability, which, at least implicitly, frames the pedagogical intervention as a resolution to a problem of unsustainability. The danger is that sustainability as a term with a multitude of ambiguous meanings can become a conceptual holder that limits horizons to a business centric or organisation centric problem-solution lens (Figueiró and Raufflet, 2015: 27), rather than facing up to the structural elements of the climate crisis that the political economy perspective highlights. Importantly, as Gray (2010) argues, environmental sustainability 'only begins to make any sense at the level of eco-systems and is probably difficult to conceptualize at anything below planetary and species levels' (p. 48). Furthermore, as Campbell et al. (2019: 726) note, climate change is not something an organisation can encompass or draw lines around, through recuperating it into existing frameworks, which is something that the promise of sustainability often invokes (see Landrum and Ohsowski, 2017). Thus, while sustainability is an important concept, to address climate change and biodiversity loss, we need to develop fresh conceptual tools to move us beyond the confines of corporate sustainability solutionism in management pedagogy. The climate crisis and the sixth great extinction (Kolbert, 2015 [2014]) cannot be solved through heroic organisational saviours (see Heizmann and Liu, 2018) or improved corporate sustainability strategy (Rodrigues and Franco, 2019).

The political economy approach highlights some of the crucial faultlines of climate change – global inequality, unsustainable consumption, climate change loss and damage, forced migration (Miller, 2017), and the need for further government intervention. But we argue there are at least two further aspects to build on in the political economy perspective: the first is around how we think about bringing the political economy of this wicked university into management pedagogy, and here there is much scope for further development. Given the need for structural transformation, how might we approach the politics of climate change in management pedagogy? We will go on to argue that one promising route here is the fostering of a collective, ecocentric engagement with Communities of Compost, and then threading this with transnational political organisations and movements, drawing on the case of LVC. Second, and connected with the first point, how do we bring the politics of climate change as reflected in the climate justice movement and a wave of recent protests to the level of practices in management pedagogy? The danger is that in highlighting the structurally rooted aspects of the climate crisis (see Boyce, 2008), we may simply emphasise the insufficiency of current corporate action around climate change, which by itself may – albeit inadvertently – simply generate hopelessness and defeatism (Haraway, 2016: 3) among our students as opposed to alternative forms of thinking and action. Thus, rather than limiting our focus to critiquing the latest incarnation of corporate sustainability; we must find ways to engage with climate change and species extinction in a manner that encourages us and our students to think differently and, ideally, act to generate new community and organisational forms 'at the level of action' (Freire, 1996: 77). The ecocentric approach to sustainability begins to point us in this direction.

The ecocentric approach

The 'ecocentric' approach to teaching sustainability seeks to go beyond factual and science-based data on climate change, to stress our interconnectedness with non-human species, and situates these entities as 'inherently valuable, beautiful and even sacred' (Shrivastava, 2010: 445; see also Allen et al., 2019; Borland and Lindgreen, 2013). This literature stresses our interdependencies and

embeddedness with the natural world and proposes a form of self-reflexivity in which as educators we situate ourselves, and engage our students, in thinking about our position '*in* the world as co-creators of the situation in which we find ourselves' (Allen et al., 2019: 787). We very much welcome this stress on ecological embeddedness in management pedagogy, yet there is a need to give stronger emphasis to the political and collective organisational aspects of this ecocentric approach, otherwise we face the problem of scalar mismatch by conflating relations at different levels (see Liboiron, 2021). That is, fostering an ecological sensibility is important, but by itself it does not address the 'sustainability paradox' (Kurucz et al., 2014), such as the destructive aspects of agri-business within the existing corporate food regime (McMichael, 2005) based overwhelmingly on mass producing food as cheaply as possible, through expanding crop monocultures, excessive nitrogen fertiliser use and low-cost production (LVC, 2018; McMichael, 2013: 80–81).

Importantly, the ecocentric approach has accompanied a more recent focus on Indigenous cultures and practices. Within many Indigenous communities, there is a stress on reciprocity with different species, the importance of engagement with place and natural phenomena in the world around us, and a linguistic recognition of the natural world as composed of active agents, rather than a passive and external nature (see Banerjee and Arjaliès, 2021; Pio and Waddock, 2021; Walsh, 2015). That said, here again the pathways opened by ecocentric approaches need to be accompanied by analysis of the broader political, economic and geographic faultlines around climate change, species extinction and corporate land takeovers (see LVC, 2017). This includes recognising centuries of colonial invasion and exploitation by Western economic powers that has imperilled the existence of many Indigenous communities (see Banerjee, 2022). Indeed, Banerjee's (2022) recent work here points to the need to place engagement with Indigenous communities and practices in a wider political economy frame that also foregrounds colonial violence and land-grabbing (see also Liboiron, 2021; LVC, 2017; Walsh, 2015). Furthermore, Indigenous writers and activists have highlighted a continuing 'colonial mindset' characterised by the imposition of norms of private property, natural resource extraction and exploitation, which works through technological and economic power (Alfred, 2017), and which threatens Indigenous ecocentric practices and territories (see also Liboiron, 2021). Thus, the ecocentric approach in seeking to foster ecological embeddedness must also recognise the continuing political and economic faultlines and inequalities that have shaped this wicked universality.

The ecocentric approach stresses an ethic of care with the world around us (see Kurucz et al., 2014; Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019). But this understanding of care needs to be understood politically and collectively rather than principally in terms of personal ethics (Chatzidakis and Shaw, 2018; Puig de la Ballacasa, 2017). Thus, the ecocentric approach in management education is one that must be oriented towards leaving 'a mark in a collective' (see Puig de la Ballacasa, 2019: 134), 'at the level of action' (see Freire, 1996: 77; see also Freire, 1974: 90). In the following section, we build on some of Freire's key pedagogical insights to develop a revitalised management pedagogy that is focused on the 'wicked universality' of the climate crisis – one that threads together the ecocentric emphasis on inter-species care with political economy and Freire's (1996) conception of political organisation, which we then apply to educational practice in the 'Discussion' section.

Conscientisation and staying with the trouble

Freire's notion of conscientisation refers to processes of 'raising awareness of self and context, and the relations between them, then translating that awareness to action' (Kurucz et al., 2014: 444). Conscientisation, is closely connected to two key elements that ground Freire's pedagogical theory and approach and which underpin our analysis: first, that education is always 'a political act' and one that can never be neutral; second, that conscientisation is integrally linked to action and

practices (Freire, 1985: 188–189). Rather than situating the rich philosophy of pedagogy, Freire develops as a set of methods to be applied; it is best seen as 'a series of theoretical signposts that need to be decoded and critically appropriated' within specific contexts (Giroux, 1985: vxiii–xix). Thus, in developing a pedagogical approach that aims for conscientisation around this contemporary wicked universality in business schools and their emerging pedagogical – albeit often partial – engagements with the climate crisis (Burchell et al., 2015); we need to develop concrete ways of staying with the trouble.

It should be noted that at times in Freire's work he tends to restage a dualism in which humans have the exclusive status as thinking beings with conscious awareness; unlike the external 'unthinking', passive objects of nature. For example, in his discussion of animal life in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he states that animals are ahistorical and that 'their ahistorical life does not occur in the "world" in its strict meaning', as they do not have the capacity for consciousness (see Freire, 1996: 79). This dualistic understanding stems partly from the historical period in which Freire was writing; *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was first published in 1968 (the English edition in 1970), but arguably such a binary and restrictive understanding of the non-human is a barrier to a richer engagement with the world around us in a way that addresses multi-species becoming with (Haraway, 2016). Rather than an external other, nature is better seen as a 'social partner, a social agent with a history, a conversant in a discourse' (Haraway, 2008: 173). Intriguingly in the final published letter written towards the end of his life, Freire (2004) writes movingly in a manner that points to the emergence of an ecocentric sensibility, as he critiques the 'materialistic mentality' based on monetary earnings, for its failure to embrace the other, to show 'reverence towards life – human, animal, and vegetable' or 'a caring attitude towards things, a taste for beautifulness, the valuing of feelings' (pp. 46–47). This strongly suggests that a key task for those inspired by Freire's critical pedagogy today is to re-think Freire's insights to address this contemporary wicked universality.

Part of the shift entailed by staying with trouble means avoiding solutionism (Haraway, 2016: 3) – a solutionism often invoked in the name of sustainability, techno-fixes and new business strategies. One danger of adopting technological solutionism in management education (see, for example, Arragon-Correa et al., 2017: 471) is that the climate crisis is already with us (Campbell et al., 2019: 727). This is a crisis of the present that has already uprooted and destroyed countless communities, and one that will only become more pervasive (Pohlmann et al., 2021). At the reverse end of the spectrum is a projection of hopelessness, which our students can also be inclined towards, a bitter cynicism that as Haraway (2016: 3) acknowledges is 'harder to dismiss'. Yet such a mode of reasoning invites both political passivity and organisational inertia. Instead, staying with the trouble, does not look away from the wicked universality, but calls on us and our students to engage with it, to think through how we might construct string figures of 'multispecies flourishing' (Haraway, 2016: 3) in ways that thread with conscientisation.

Communities of Compost

Communities of Compost are string figures, composting is 'practice and process: it is becoming-with each other in surprising relays; it is a figure for ongoingness' (Haraway, 2016: 3), through continually mixing, decomposing and spreading different kinds of waste and organic matter to feed soil. Within Haraway's (2016) work, Communities of Compost is principally a valuable theoretical concept to *think with*, one that she links to art and speculative fiction (see, for example, Haraway, 2016: 164–165). Our argument here however is that Communities of Compost is also an important concept to apply to concrete practices. As we will go onto explore in this section and the later Discussion, Communities of Compost has considerable import for rethinking contemporary

management pedagogy in terms of the climate crises through engaging with community composting as concrete practice.

At a theoretical level, Communities of Compost points to a distinctive conception of community, one that shares some close affinities with Dal Magro et al.'s (2020: 585) understanding of community, defined by its 'territorial and relational dimension' and 'establishing social relations over time'. But Communities of Compost also invokes a community that goes beyond humans into the multitude of non-human lifeforms, including the microbial, that give and are given life in and through composting. Indeed, as Liboiron (2021: 141) notes 'we can extend this concept of community to people who aren't human, materials, landscapes, events, obligations, and other types of relations' (see also Redecker and Herzig, 2020: 666). At a practical level, community composting constitutes a form of collective care for soil, through adding the organic matter that sustains and nurtures the extraordinarily rich ecosystem of bacterial and microbial life that soil is composed of (Beecham, 2018; Lowenfels and Lewis, 2010; Monbiot, 2022; Puig de la Ballacasa, 2019). Soil is also a great carbon sink, which has the additional beneficial feature of storing and capturing CO_2, indeed reportedly 'soils are the greatest carbon sink after the oceans' (Shiva, 2022: 47).

While soil and compost may sound unglamourous, mundane, dirty and perhaps a rather unbusiness like topic for management pedagogy, as Monbiot (2022) stresses, understanding soil is crucial to addressing some of the greatest questions of the wicked universality facing us. This includes

> how we might feed ourselves in a world whose natural and human systems are changing at astonishing speed, how we might do so without destroying the basis of our subsistence and how we might, while securing our own survival protect the rest of life on earth. (Monbiot, 2022: 26)

Thus, thinking and practically engaging with Communities of Compost in management pedagogy as a collective, multi-species endeavour – as soil is a living organism – can be a key component of a conscientisation that stays with the trouble. It is based on collective practices that thread together the ecocentric emphasis on ecological care, with alternative communities of practice (Kurucz et al., 2014) in a manner that can, and arguably should, be combined with highlighting the destructive monocultures that exist within dominant agribusiness food production processes (McMichael, 2013).

Widespread monoculture crop farming underpins agribusiness and much of the food we consume (a large part of which consists of crops for livestock feed) and is responsible for the 'overwhelming majority of habitat destruction' particularly through the production of soy and palm oil (see Shiva, 2022). In this habitat destruction, the application of nitrogen fertiliser seriously damages the rich living ecosystem that soil consists of, to the extent that the disruption of the nitrogen cycle has now surpassed a critical planetary threshold (see Beecham, 2018; Monbiot, 2022: 24; Rockstöm et al., 2009; Shiva, 2016: 109). Conversely, 'compost is the ideal way to improve soil quality, build soil organic matter levels, and correct mineral imbalances' (Shiva, 2022: 105). As a form of string figure, combining a multitude of insectoid and microbial lives and human-nonhuman social relations, Communities of Compost can also operate at the level of pedagogical practice in a manner that offers proximity to the object of analysis 'in terms of lived experience' (Freire, 2001: 44). As Puig de la Ballacasa (2019) stresses, soil care can help us to make visible – through composting and accompanying pedagogical practices – human–soil entanglements and 'common aliveness' (p. 393).

In contrast to human exceptionalism, in which businesses and individuals are positioned as the primary agents that act upon an external and subordinate natural environment, Communities of Compost are organisational embodiments of processes and *practices* in which 'human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and the abiotic powers of this earth are the main story'

(Haraway, 2016: 55). At a more theoretical level, the invocation of community here, also entails that 'we are compost' and as beings in a multi-species earth, we 'compose and decompose each other' (Haraway, 2016: 97) in processes of becoming *with* in which we are active agents within multi-species communities rather than masters.

One of the strengths of community composting as a grounded practice is that it holds the potential to engage business school students and the broader university in the local community (see Kavanagh, 2022). In addition, when threaded with political-economic critiques of dominant agricultural practices, as well as the silencing of Indigenous peoples who tend to live *with* the land in reciprocal ways (Pio and Waddock, 2021; Townsend and Townsend, 2020), Communities of Compost present an approach to staying with the trouble that generates alternative practices, which can then be threaded back into broader political, economic and planetary issues. Composting is an active process that results in rich fertile organic matter that will facilitate the emergence of plant life, which, in turn, generates further forms of life in different ecosystems (see Lowenfels and Lewis, 2010). Thus, the pedagogical practice of community composting offers a concrete instantiation of multi-species flourishing that in staying with the trouble helps to address – albeit at small scales – a social and ecological crisis in soil health. Yet to think through how we might connect community composting with broader challenges around the health of soil, species extinction and biodiversity loss, we need to move to a different set of social relations which the political economy lens highlights. It is here that Freire's (1996) conception of the importance of action and political organisation, and the case of LVC comes to the fore.

Scalar mismatch and LVC

Where then do we take this call to generate Communities of Compost in terms of the intrinsically political nature of pedagogy that Freire highlights? An important element of the final chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the transformative conception of political organisation he develops (Freire, 1996: 157). We begin this section by pointing to a need to establish interconnections between Communities of Compost and political economy approaches, through bringing in Liboiron's (2021) rich anti-colonial intervention to highlight the potential problem of scalar mismatch and composting (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022: 130). Second, turning to Freire's conception of political organisation we propose threading Communities of Compost with the political movement around LVC. In the following 'Discussion' section, we apply this string figure directly to management pedagogy, drawing on our teaching and our development of a couple of core undergraduate modules related to sustainability.

While the experiential engagement with Communities of Compost offers an 'experience within a particular socioecological context' that fosters a sense of 'being part of a system of mutual, interconnecting responsibilities' (Whyte, 2016: 183). There is the potential danger is that if this composting string figure is seen in isolation, it becomes detached from the need for broader political and economic transformations to address climate crises. This problem points to what Liboiron (2021: 85) characterises as a 'scalar mismatch', that is when problems and proposed 'solutions' address different sets of relations. In applying the analysis of relations at one level to address a quite different set of relations, we are left with a mismatch. Despite the real value of ecocentric approaches to sustainability in management pedagogy that consist of proposing a 'passion for sustainability' and ecological 'experiential embodied understanding' (Shrivastava, 2010: 445); in isolation this would be mismatched with broader structural issues of corporate land-grabbing and colonial violence (Banerjee, 2022; Liboiron, 2021; LVC, 2017). It should be stressed that Shrivastava (2010: 443) points honestly, albeit indirectly, to this tension when he notes that the more he has taught about sustainability the more his own carbon footprint has risen. Thus,

demonstrating the potential for mismatches across different sets of relations. Crucial to the wider issues of caring for land differently – of which community composting is one example – are land relations (see Shattuck et al., 2023). Indeed, for Liboiron (2021), colonialism itself is rooted in 'relationships characterized by conquest and genocide that grant colonialists and settlers ongoing state access to land and resources' (p. 9). Thus, land relations and 'the assumed entitlement to Indigenous Land' (Liboiron, 2021: 9) is a defining feature of colonialism (see also Banerjee, 2022). Communities of Compost and the political movement around agroecology – of which, as we will see, LVC has been a leading educational and campaigning voice – point to how we might foster alternative sets of relations with Land, closely allied to the broader political movement of agroecology, based on becoming with communities of the human and non-human (Haraway, 2016; LVC, 2018; Shiva, 2022).

Drawing on Styres and Zinga (2013), Liboiron distinguishes between two conceptions of land – *Land* as capitalised which, in the spirit of agroecology (Wezel et al., 2009), stresses interconnectedness, relationality and combined living with plants, air, water, humans and events; while land uncapitalised denotes land instead as a common universal (Liboiron, 2021). This latter conception of land serves to support dominant agricultural processes of expansion and extraction, which characterises large-scale monocultures that dominate contemporary corporate food production (Heron et al., 2018; McMichael, 2013; Shattuck et al., 2023). Conversely for Liboiron (2021: 45) Land is fundamentally relational. Thus, we can begin to see how such an anti-colonial perspective starts to thread the fostering of ecocentric sensibilities with political economic questions of Land relations, and the politics of the continued uprooting of Indigenous communities (Liboiron, 2021).

We have suggested that generating Communities of Compost presents a novel way of introducing a different set of relations around land as Land in management pedagogy. A sensitivity to questions of scale also becomes central here in threading ecocentric with political economy approaches. For Liboiron (2021) scale refers to different relationalities, and the relations with which we attempt to address particular problems, scale serves 'as an analytic to suss out which relationships matter in different contexts' (Liboiron, 2021: 110). Indeed, as Liboiron (2021) notes, regarding minimising plastic usage, 'if interventions into plastic pollution have no impact on extraction, financialization, or industry's access to capital, then they aren't going to be effective' (p. 92). It should be cautioned that composting, when seen as an individualised behavioural change, operates at the scale of depoliticised consumer choice (Liboiron and Lepawsky, 2022: 132); rather than addressing the broader systemic causes of soil erosion, excessive use of nitrogen fertilisers and the destructive impacts of large-scale crop monocultures.

Now *community* composting is somewhat distinct from composting as a consumer choice here, as is the stress on composting as a collective pedagogical process based around threading interconnections in and through organic matter. Yet to thread the ecocentric with political economy interventions, there is a need to link this intervention with a broader political conceptualisation and here we draw on Freire's (1996) stress on political organisation and activism. LVC and the political movement around agroecology and peasant farming that it has had a central role in, help us to thread Freire's essentially political conception of pedagogy grounded in action with Communities of Compost in practice. LVC (literally translated as the peasant way) (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010: 150) is a broad-based transnational movement of organisations, family farmers, peasants, Indigenous people, landless peasants and farm workers representing around 500 million rural peasants worldwide through its affiliated organisations (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). The LVC movement was hatched in Latin America in 1992 and became increasingly recognised on the international stage through the 1996 World Food Summit (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). For Redecker and Herzig (2020), LVC presents a commitment to an

extended form of radical democracy 'rooted in the soil' (p. 658). Two key concepts that underpin LVC's radical agenda are food sovereignty and the agroecology movement. Food sovereignty is a hugely influential unifying political call that emerged from LVC at the World Food Summit of 1996 (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). A call that foregrounds the role of communities, peasants and small-scale farmers engaged in diverse food production processes that work with existing habitats and biodiversity; in contrast to large-scale 'industrialised corporate agriculture' (Nicholson and Borras Jr, 2023: 613). Food sovereignty is explicitly about 'about systemic change', democratic control over food, and how land, water and soil are used 'for the benefit of current and future generations' (LVC, 2018: 3).

Food sovereignty is also deeply interconnected with agroecology (Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012: 7), while it is clearly beyond the scope of the present article to examine the history of agroecology in depth, it has been referred to as science, practice and movement (Wezel et al., 2009) based around supporting and protecting biodiversity, nurturing soil health – which composting is of course central to – and crucially, recognising the immense value of the particular wisdom and knowledges in peasant, community and Indigenous relations with Land (Shiva, 2022). Agroecology – particularly in Latin America – is also a political movement and 'praxis of change' (LVC, 2017: 36; Wezel et al., 2009) that calls for systemic transformation away from the use of pesticides and the industrialised monocultures of agribusiness; towards valuing local knowledges, Indigenous practices, and family and community farming (Martínez-Torres and Rosset, 2010). For LVC, this is strongly connected with sovereignty and the need for a systemic change in land relations (LVC, 2018: 3), since a break from large-scale ownership of land towards caring, nurturing and supporting biodiversity and soil health in food production will need to be facilitated by 'redistributive policies, fair and equitable access and control of natural and productive resources' (LVC, 2017: 34). In terms of the SDGs, LVC (2019) has engaged with them where they provide opportunities to address the systemic causes of climate change in agriculture and the need for major reform, but they have disengaged and been openly critical of UN decision-making processes when negotiation processes are overwhelmingly dominated by big business actors (see, for example, Canfield et al., 2021).

LVC also has some clear affinities with the conception of political organisation, Freire develops in the final chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Overlaps would perhaps not be surprising given that Freire is a key public intellectual in the history of Brazil, and Brazil has been one of the main bastions of influence in the formation of LVC before it broadened out beyond Latin America into a more transnational movement (Borras, 2008: 263). Freire's conception of political organisation has three central features that are closely coupled with LVC as a campaigning, and pedagogical, organisation: first, and perhaps most obviously, the centrality of pedagogy, consisting of dialogical education and learning with people (Freire, 1996: 161). As Freire (1996) notes powerfully, organisation is 'a highly educational process in which leaders and people together experience true authority and freedom, which they then seek to establish in society by *transforming the reality* that mediates them' (our italics) (p. 159). LVC very much sees agroecology and the sharing of diverse peasant knowledges as a key part of its politicised educational mission and purpose (Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012: 8; LVC, 2015). Indeed, this has also encompassed universities and institutions of higher education, there is even an LVC-affiliated Paolo Freire Latin American Institute of Agroecology in Barinas Venezuela (LVC, 2015: 1–2; Rosset et al., 2019).

The second key aspect of Freire's (1996: 149) conception of political organisation is the stress on the *dialogical*; rather than leaders disseminating knowledge from above. LVC's membership has always included organisations from both the north and the south in a spirit of solidarity and dialogue (McKeon, 2015). As LVC works to spread agroecology education, *campesino-o-campesino* (farmer-to-farmer) dialogue is a central feature of its organisational form (Rosset et al., 2019; Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012). For example, Indigenous people within LVC have been

central to thinking about territory and have 'been among the first to sound the alert about climate change, which is now a priority issue' (Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012). Third, the stress on 'unity in diversification . . . which channels forces in dispersion' (Freire, 1996: 123) has long been a central challenge but also a productive tension within LVC (see, for example, Borras, 2008; Desmarais, 2008). Indeed, LVC is consistently working to elaborate a unified solidarity amid diversity through naming – for Freire (1996) we '*name* the world in order to transform it' (p. 148) – in what is an unfolding, constitutive and tension ridden process. Indeed, unifying points within this dialogical approach have been developed by LVC through long processes of negotiation. Here *agroecology* and *food sovereignty* have been central to *naming* a political identity that works across local, national and international scales (Desmarais, 2008: 144; LVC, 2017: 38; see also Freire, 1996: 148).

Through practising, sharing and spreading agroecological knowledges across different contexts – including community composting practices – and combining this with working to advance political demands at different scales, including internationally through the UN, LVC presents an important instance of working *across* scale. In doing so it demonstrates a way of politically connecting across scales and thus works to address the problem of scalar mismatch identified above. In the spirit of conscientisation, it combines engagement with practices in a manner that takes us beyond personal or local consumption habits (see Carrington et al., 2016; Chatzidakis and Shaw, 2018: 310), by working to generate unification across borders through – dialogically established – political naming and transnational demands. A key part of this is spreading agroecology as a set of relations and practices, and as a political movement (Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012: 8). In the following Discussion, we outline our ongoing engagements with threading these interventions into pedagogical practice.

Discussion

In bringing together this intervention rooted in Haraway's (2016) 'Communities of Compost' and Freire's (1996) conception of 'conscientisation', the pressing question becomes how we translate this story into pedagogical practice in the contemporary business school? UK business schools are at a relatively early stage in developing modules that foreground climate breakdown as a central – or better, the most central – issue facing humanity (McGuire, 2022; see also Burchell et al., 2015; Maloni et al., 2021). While, as noted, PRME as a framework for the integration of sustainability and grand challenges into management education has certain limits (Louw, 2014; Millar and Price, 2018), PRME and the SDGs have opened certain pathways to design and deliver modules that foreground engagement with 'climate breakdown' (McGuire, 2022) and its wicked universality in Business Schools. As testament to this, in March 2023, the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) – a leading organisation in the establishment of recognised standards of quality in UK universities – in its recent benchmarking statement emphasised that our future students must be 'equipped to engage meaningfully with, and respond to, climate challenges' and that this is a condition of 'planetary survival' (QAA, 2023). Thus, the pedagogical string figure we aim to construct by connecting these pedagogical threads is still at an early stage of planning and development, as is the pedagogical foregrounding of the climate crisis for many business schools in the United Kingdom – although it is becoming something that is increasingly expected (QAA, 2023).

Retaining a clear sense of the interplay between theory and practice is a further crucial theme in Freire's work (see, for example, Freire and Macedo, 1995: 382), which we explore build on in the 'Discussion' section. In the case of the institution that we work for, sustainability and responsible business modules have become more fully integrated into a revised business and management undergraduate programme in recent years. As this process takes time, it is only now that these

modules are integrated across different levels of the degree programme, and therefore, this peda-gogical exploration is still an early-stage work in progress.

Communities of Compost and pedagogical practices

Our principal contribution to generating a pedagogical Community of Compost has been through an ongoing collaboration with an active local community garden. After securing some internal funding from our university, we have engaged with volunteers and a vibrant local community arts-based organisation to install a compost bin. Visits to the site have been integrated into the design of two core undergraduate modules related to sustainability that will take place next academic year. We have also added some composting worms to the site, which is of course another important example of fostering 'multi-species relationships' (Bertoni, 2013; Haraway, 2016: 19). In future sustainability related modules our plans are to include site visits to this unfolding multi-species community of compost, by discussing the composting process with students and inviting them to participate by adding cardboard and left over vegetable peelings.[3]

In the past we have invited guest speakers onto our sustainability modules, such as one of the founders of a locally based Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) organisation to talk about their practices. The speaker also introduced food sovereignty as a key framing concept underpin-ning their practices (thus establishing a link to the political movement that LVC reflects and has given voice to). Student responses to this visit were somewhat mixed, one student chose to inform us in subsequent feedback that the invited speaker offered nothing of relevance to their future assignment. This reflects a challenge that this pedagogical approach to climate breakdown may encounter, in terms of the receptivity of students to alternative pedagogical approaches that stay with the trouble. That said, another student was keen to get hold of the contact details of this CSA guest speaker, to do a future project on social entrepreneurship and composting. These contrasting stories which are very far from a representative sample, reflect the real diversity of student per-spectives and opinions around engaging with the climate crisis through alternative – explicitly ecological and political – perspectives. Student receptivity to these approaches then is variable, contextually specific and difficult to predict. Part of the process of constructing a pedagogical string figure that stays with the trouble then is a commitment to engaging with students in an ongo-ing experimental process. Reflected in Haraway's (2016: 3) statement that string figures are 'a figure of ongoingness' based around 'picking up threads and dropping them', and generating relays. Our main thread now will be to begin with concrete practices as Freire (1996) urges us to do, through community composting, and see how our students engage differently when we start from 'lived experience' (p. 44), through acting in a concrete community of compost and feeding the soil. An initiative that also connects with Kavanagh's (2022) vision of localising the business school, through working with existing local communities to feed soil, consisting of both the human and non-human (Haraway, 2016; Liboiron, 2021). A concrete experience that we will then thread out into a broader political and economic questioning of land relations and food production.

LVC in management education

Having outlined our own ongoing pedagogical efforts to foster concrete practices (see Freire and Macedo, 1995: 382; Haraway, 2016: 31) through community composting, as well as highlighting a central challenge around doing so – principally divergent and unpredictable student responses. The key task then becomes how we thread this with the political perspectives and actions of LVC, and work to address the problem of scalar mismatch (Liboiron, 2021). It should be noted that LVC is often self-styled as an anti-capitalist organisation and movement (see, for example, Nicholson

and Borras, 2019: 613), through its stress on political mobilisation *against* large-scale agribusiness, corporate land grabbing and the uprooting of Indigenous peoples. Agroecology and food sovereignty are held up as explicitly political alternatives to these trends (see, for example, Rosset and Martínez-Torres, 2012). Clearly our students on large business and management modules may not always be entirely comfortable with the focus on LVC and the situating of land relations and food production as essentially political matters of contestation, closely tied to colonialism (Liboiron, 2021). It is important to stress here that Freire clearly dissociates his own pedagogical approach from instilling propaganda that imparts a set of critical perspectives onto students (see Freire, 2001: 86); yet he remains committed to a pedagogy of liberation (Shor and Freire, 1987). So how can this tension be negotiated between engaging with our students in dialogue when they are likely to begin from very different starting positions in terms of political perspectives and values, while also critiquing the limits of corporate sustainability solutionism, explicitly politicising food production, and drawing on LVC to do so? Freire's commitment to the dialogical is crucial here (Freire, 1996: 82), but it is a dialogical approach in which the role of the educator in generating themes for dialogue is never neutral, it is essentially political (see, for example, Shor and Freire, 1987: 110). The political position of the educator means that we have responsibility not to impart certain perspectives onto students but simultaneously nor can we sidestep these political debates and conflicts around food production and land relations in management pedagogy. That is, if we are serious about staying with the trouble.

Here once again we begin from the concrete by introducing our students to a community of compost through site visits to the community composting bins that have been installed, which students can then actively contribute to, and care for, at the level of collective action. Following an initial visit to the community compost bins, we plan to invite students to reflect on their experiences by discussing how they feel about this practical experience of composting in subsequent seminars, then to consider if it has changed their perspectives in any way on food production processes, and their relations to, and *with*, Land. From this reflection on concrete experiences (see Freire, 2001: 44), we will then introduce LVC into these debates through the framing concepts of agroecology and food sovereignty; clearly contrasting this with existing processes of large-scale agricultural extractivism that tend to dominate supermarket food production processes (Shattuck et al., 2023), such as through mass monoculture soy production largely for animal feed (Heron et al., 2018).

Our pedagogical efforts here will be centred on dialogically threading theory with practice (Freire and Macedo, 1995), through engaging in the practical production of a community of compost and then dialogically inviting students to reflect on their experiences in subsequent seminar discussions. Here LVC and agroecology will be introduced as a political alternative to dominant narratives of corporate-led 'sustainable agriculture' (McNeill, 2019), and our students will be invited to discuss and consider the differences between them. As composting and feeding soil is an important element of agroecology as practice (Rosset et al., 2019: 908), some of our students will potentially be able to connect this with their own concrete experiences of community composting in previous weeks. Where this dialogical engagement will lead us is, by virtue of its dialogical nature, unpredictable, and it is a thread that we will continue to repattern in ongoing fashion, as we seek to develop modules about climate breakdown in management pedagogy that stay with the trouble.

Conclusion

This article has developed an alternative approach to addressing the wicked universality of the climate crisis in management pedagogy by combining Freire's (1996) pedagogical interventions

based around rootedness in the concrete and dialogical engagement, the political role of the educator, and political organisation and action; with Haraway's (2016) call to stay with the trouble and the string figure of Communities of Compost. The key contributions of this article stem from threading conscientisation (Freire, 1996) with Haraway's (2016) rich conception of Communities of Compost, to develop a distinctive approach to teaching the climate crisis. In threading Communities of Compost with the political organisation, LVC, we have presented some ongoing threads to interconnect ecocentric and political economy approaches in management pedagogy. Staying with the trouble, also entails being prepared to politicise the wicked universality of biodiversity loss, species extinction and climate change, by experimenting and threading a radically different string figure of management pedagogy in a manner that begins from concrete practices.

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Notes

1. It should be noted that in other fields in which Freire has had perhaps a more long-standing influence – such as political economic critiques of development, and social movement studies – the close interconnections between his account of pedagogy and the conception of political organisations and social movements he develops have received more attention (see, for example, O'Cadiz et al., 1998; Thomas, 2009).
2. String figures are a rich tool to think and act *with*, that denote '*thinking* as well as *making* practices', and which encompasses both 'pedagogical practices and cosmological performances' (Haraway, 2016: 14). While string figures undoubtedly have a broader theoretical and methodological significance in Haraway's (2016) work, here we focus on *pedagogical* practices as we work to thread interconnections that develop a distinctive string figure that stays with the trouble in management pedagogy.
3. There will be a practical educational component to these site visits, in terms of learning about vermicomposting, and which items of waste can and cannot be composted, including in what (rough) proportions, and how they can be mixed – in responsive fashion depending on texture, scent and insectoid life – to ensure high quality compost. All to raise awareness of the 'beautiful science' of composting as a set of collective practices (Trew, 2022).

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