



# Intellectual emancipation as minimal humanism – The relevance of Jacques Rancière in business school teaching

Management Learning  
2021, Vol. 52(2) 165–187

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DOI: 10.1177/1350507620969549

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## Abstract

How might emancipatory teaching practices look like in the context of the business school, when the meaning of the subject of emancipation, the human being, has become unsettled? Our philosophical essay addresses this question by excavating Jacques Rancière's conception of intellectual emancipation and showing its practical relevance for experiments with emancipatory teaching in a business school environment. Speaking from within a tradition where the meaning of human is irrevocably unsettled, Rancière, remarkably, still insists on an essential link between emancipation and humanism – although in a minimal version. First, we show why and how Rancière's analyses of emancipation are united by the common concern to affirm such a *minimal humanism*. Thereafter, we describe how three features sets intellectual emancipation apart from social and aesthetic emancipation and makes it pertinent to take intellectual emancipation to school: The possibility and *intention* to emancipate others, the acknowledgement of the constructive role of *reason* herein, and the significance of teacher *authority* in doing so. Lastly, we move beyond and problematize Rancière's clear conceptual account of intellectual emancipation by extracting three heuristic pedagogical devices from it and by recounting their confrontation with the messy details of our teaching practice at the business school.

## Keywords

Business school teaching, intellectual emancipation, Jacques Rancière, minimal humanism

The whole character of a species, its species-character, resides in the nature of its life activity, and free, conscious activity constitutes the species-character of man. (Marx, 1992: 328)

The listener must [. . .] verify if the speaker is within the bounds of reason, if he departs from it, if he returns to it. (Rancière, 1991: 41)

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How might emancipatory teaching practices look like in the context of the business school, when the meaning of the subject of emancipation, the human being, has become unsettled?

Our essay addresses this question by excavating a conception of intellectual emancipation from the French philosopher Jacques Rancière's work and showing its relevance for experiments with emancipatory teaching in a business school environment. Rancière is particularly relevant for addressing this question because he investigates emancipatory practices from within a tradition of thought that radically challenges the traditional status of the human being. His mentor, Louis Althusser, with whom he later broke (Rancière, 2011a), propounded a staunch anti-humanist Marxism and Michel Foucault, whom he recognized as an important source of inspiration (Rancière, 2012a: 65–76), famously wagered on the imminent effacement of man (Foucault, 2005: 373).

Our main contribution consists in showing how – in thought as well as in practice – the unsettling of the humanities does not necessarily lead beyond the human. Rather, we will show how the work of Rancière establishes a link between emancipation and what we refer to as a *minimal humanism*. Tellingly, to establish this link, Rancière does not discard the traditional humanistic preoccupation with reason and universality. He reworks them in an attempt to avoid the principal danger of an inhuman humanism grounded in a settled meaning of the human: the danger of employing universal criteria for human rationality as a ground for social differentiation. In contrast, his 'presupposition of equality' affirms that emancipation can be conceived as a common, indeed universal concern, without grounding it in a foundationalist account of the subject of emancipation. For Rancière, the emancipatory claim to equality springs from the precarious ambiguity of speech-acts that opens the possibility both for establishing contemptuous hierarchies *and* for insisting on the common equality between speaker and listener. Precisely because equality is a possibility presupposed in our speech-acts, Rancière's approach re-commits to the humanistic tradition's core conception of human beings as speaking beings – As animals with *logos*. However, he does so without settling his conception in a positive ontology of man. As it will become clear in the following, Rancière affirms the unsettling of the human being not in order to embrace post-humanism (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 1991; Serres, 1982; Wolfe, 2009) but in order to reconceive humanism in a minimalist way. His thought is therefore well-suited for developing a conception of emancipatory teaching that avoids the promotion of the 'humanities as a kind of moral super-ego' within management education (Johnsen et al., 2016, 2018). The challenge is to overcome this settled moralism while at the same time developing a pedagogical response to the contemporary reduction of the human to a form of capital that has become prevalent, not least at the business school (Becker, 1993; Brown, 2015: 175–200; Foucault, 2008: 215–237). To begin with, we would like to situate how our approach build on the contemporary research on emancipation within management and organization studies (MOS), and in particular how we relate to the discussions of emancipation that relate to management learning and education. We will enter this discussion through some brief remarks on the historical trajectory of the concept of emancipation.

## **A brief historical entry into 'Emancipation in MOS'**

In the time of the Roman Republic, emancipation referred to the juridical act through which a father set his son free, analogous to the manumission of a slave (Arena, 2018). Through his legal act, the emancipated son received the independence secured by civil law to own property. Gradually the concept travelled from the sphere of civil law into the wider field of politics and social struggles, and it came to refer not only transitively to the conferment of independence upon another but also reflexively to the process of self-empowerment. In the age of Enlightenment, the concept was infused with a profound anti-hierarchical aspect. The demand for emancipation was mobilized against the feudal forms of domination from kings and nobility, and the spiritual domination of the

Christian church and its doctrines. Inspired by philosophers of the Enlightenment, the concept was also imbued with a teleological intent that eventually meant to encompass all human subjects (Brunner et al., 2004: 161–169). Emancipation now invoked a universal and historical horizon, designating a process of liberation meant to eventually confer full-fledged independence from all domination. It is this conception of emancipation that culminated in Marx's philosophy. In his early manuscripts, Marx never tires of emphasizing how the Enlightenment emancipation from religion and feudal forms of authority is only a prelude to a more fundamental emancipation from the shackles of bourgeois society and its capitalist mode of production and division of labour. According to Marx, such a revolutionary emancipation will realize a state of absolute freedom from domination (Marx, 1992). Rather than mere *political* emancipation in terms of guaranteed rights, Marx thus aimed at *human* emancipation, the complete emancipation of our capacities for self-realization (cf. McLellan, 1995: 72–75). For the early Marx, communism is the true form of humanism. Marx's approach decisively shaped the discussion of emancipation in modern political debate as well as in the social sciences (cf. Baron, 1971; O'Mahoney et al., 2018; Ritter, 1972). Eventually, this concept of emancipation made its way into management and organization theory by way of Critical Theory (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 432, 1992b, 2003). In 'On The Idea of Emancipation in Management and Organization Studies', Alvesson and Willmott thus emphasize the Marxist heritage of the conception of emancipation propounded by Critical Theory: 'Critical theorists [. . .] reject the (bourgeois humanist) idea that the full expansion of human autonomy can be accommodated within the constraints of capitalist work organizations' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 442).

It is important to emphasize that there is something decisively 'settled' about the Marxist conception of emancipation (cf. Brewis and Wray-Bliss, 2008; Fleming and Banerjee, 2016; Johnsen et al., 2018). In the introduction to his critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right, the young Marx writes:

The criticism of religion disillusions man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses, so that he will move around himself as his own true Sun. Religion is only the illusory Sun which revolves around man as long as he does not revolve around himself. (Marx, 1992: 244).

According to Marx, the true value of Enlightenment's emancipation from religion is that it challenges the human species to acknowledge that in terms of thinking, acting, and in shaping a meaningful world, it is not a secondary, dependent being, analogous to a secondary planet revolving around the primary sun. Taking the imagery further, the human species should not restrict its self-image to being the mere centre planet of a multi-planet solar system – a centre that would have to acknowledge limits to its supreme status, metaphorically represented in planets revolving independently around it. Rather, humanity must be conceived of as revolving around itself in its own system, alone in a splendid, sovereign self-relation. In renouncing its illusory god and grasping the true nature of its status, the question of humanity's self-conception is metaphysically settled. The consequence of such a settled self-conception is not least a certainty about the meaning of history where the human species is meant to emancipate its essence. Marx is thus conspicuously confident of his capacity to theoretically determine and prophesize on the grandest of scale what counts as a step of progress towards full emancipation and how this process will unfold.

The diagnoses of the 'post-structuralists' (e.g. Foucault, 2005: 373) aimed to unsettle this conception of the emancipation of the human species. We can regard Alvesson and Willmott as drawing the consequences of these critical diagnoses MOS. While acknowledging 'the panoramic, utopian vision' of the Marxist tradition as a contribution to the project of emancipation, they move

the focus from such macro-emancipatory concerns to processes of so-called micro-emancipation in order to make emancipation 'more relevant and accessible to the mundane world of management and organization' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 434). They contend that the concept of micro-emancipation implies 'an emphasis on partial, temporary movements that break away from diverse forms of oppression, rather than successive moves towards a predetermined state of liberation' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 447). As such, micro-emancipatory practices are conceived as 'uncertain, contradictory, ambiguous and precarious' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 447). This conception of emancipation in terms of concrete, precarious practices is broad enough to capture a broad variety of approaches within MOS developed in the past decades, including a number of Alvesson and Willmott's own contributions (1992b, 2003, 2012).

Recently, however, this distinction between macro- and micro-emancipation in MOS has been explicitly challenged on the basis of Jacques Rancière's philosophy. Rancière's concept of emancipation, with its starting point in the assertion that equality is a founding premise for analysis rather than a programmatic goal that needs to be achieved, allows Huault, Perret and Spicer to move beyond the distinction between macro- and micro-emancipation in several ways (Huault et al., 2014: 36). They can avoid the settled essentialism that haunts the Marxist tradition of macro-emancipation, in which human nature hides beneath the alienated surface, striving to come out once and for all at the end of the process of emancipation (cf. Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 440). At the same time, Rancière's axiom, presupposing equality in analyses of human beings retains a minimal trace of the Marxist idea that emancipation is inadequate if not conceived universally as human emancipation. Precisely because the presupposition of equality expresses a *minimal humanism*, it also avoids a fragmented conception of emancipatory struggles which Huault, Perret and Spicer point to as a danger intrinsic to the notion of micro-emancipation: 'Rancière's approach allows us to move beyond the fragmented understanding of emancipation. Instead of only examining fragmented struggles, we are directed to the common demand for equality at the centre of these struggles' (Huault et al., 2014: 42). Likewise, because Rancière's analysis focuses on the common demand for equality actualized in struggles, which challenge social and political hierarchies that seem perfectly sensible, this approach can also avoid the tendency to banality and insignificance that Huault et al. rightly identify as a danger in MOS' turn towards micro-emancipation (2014: 28).

The following interpretation of Rancière's concept of intellectual emancipation and our reflections on our experiments with this concept as teachers at a business school contributes critically to the trajectory we have sketched. As a part of this interpretation, we will distinguish intellectual emancipation from political and aesthetic emancipation in Rancière's philosophy. This conceptual clarification allows us to use his thought to improve our understanding of the emancipatory practices that may take place in education at the business school. The existing research on emancipation at the business school that applies Rancièrean thought does not distinguish intellectual emancipation as a separate form of emancipation (Beyes, 2017; Carroll and Smolovic Jones, 2018; Garrett, 2018; Huault and Perret, 2016; Huault et al., 2014; Kalonaityte, 2018; Mack, 2015; Rhodes, 2019; Wright et al., 2013). By drawing primarily on *The Ignorant Schoolmaster – Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Rancière, 1991) we present a Rancière that is compatible with the pedagogic context of business educators.

## The essay in outline

The first part of our essay reconstructs Rancière's conception of emancipation. Building on recent interpretations of Rancière's work (Birnbaum, 2018; Fjeld, 2018), we distinguish between his analyses of emancipation within pedagogic, political and aesthetic practices. Based on his methodological assumption of equality Rancière's common concern in relation to these three forms of

practices is to affirm what we have termed *minimal humanism* but so far only tentatively articulated.

In the second part, we turn our attention to three important features of intellectual emancipation that distinguishes it from political and aesthetic emancipation, none of which have received attention in MOS, including management learning. Our attention to the specific features of intellectual emancipation opens new possibilities for thinking and practicing emancipation in business school education. First, our reconstruction enables a more positive view on the role of authority within emancipatory learning than what can be found in the current applications of Rancière (e.g. Huault and Perret, 2011, 2016). Secondly, our interpretation allows us to acknowledge the constructive role of reason in emancipatory learning. Our emphasis on the constructive process of intellectual emancipation as a commitment to ‘reason between equals’ (Rancière, 1991) goes against the grain of current ‘deconstructive’ uses of Rancière within management learning which focus on the disruptive potential of his thought (Huault and Perret, 2011, 2016; Lambert, 2012; Mack, 2015; Passila et al., 2016) or its potential for resistance (Debendetti et al., 2017). Our emphasis on emancipation rather than learning outcomes also contrasts with more constructive attempts to mobilize Rancière to create better learning at the business school (Martineau and Calcei, 2019) in management practice (Scott, 2017) and elsewhere (Otoide, 2015). The acknowledgement of the role of reason revisits and reinterprets the backbone in the traditional concept of emancipation as found in critical theory (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a). Third, also in contrast to previous contributions within MOS, we focus on the specific intentionality at stake in intellectual emancipation when the aim is to emancipate *others*. Our analysis of the importance of the question of intentionality also permits us to distinguish intellectual emancipation from various forms of contemporary progressive pedagogies, present at the business school today (Kirschner et al., 2006: 82).

In the third part of our essay, we move beyond Rancière’s solely conceptual and therefore somewhat stylized account of intellectual emancipation (cf. Cavazzini, 2013; Pelletier, 2012). In a reflective account of practice, we discuss our experiments with intellectual emancipation at the business school. Our emphasis on the distinct nature of intellectual emancipation and in particular our focus on its constructive rather than purely disruptive potential has made us question and teach in discordance with the common idea that ‘Rancière does not want to go to school’ (Huault and Perret, 2016: 161). Our narrative brings out how the shift from conceptual clarity to the messy details of practice inevitably problematizes the project of intellectual emancipation, and we point out how dealing with the obstacles of practice has spurred us to further engage with the pedagogical insights in Rancière’s rich but condensed book on intellectual emancipation. To highlight this dialectic between concept-work and pedagogic practice, and as a way to make our narrative relevant to possible future work with intellectual emancipation in business education, we have structured this part according to three heuristic pedagogical devices: committing students to a *thing in common*, the role of the teacher as *standing in the door*, and the attempt to navigate and dispense with *contempt* in the classroom. By putting these devices on display, we hope to provide practical access points for business educators interested in the question of emancipation.

In the concluding discussion, we reflect more generally upon the prospects of ‘intellectual emancipation as minimal humanism’ in the context of the business school.

## **Part I: Rancière’s conception of emancipation and its affirmation of minimal humanism**

According to Huault et al. (2014), which currently constitutes the most developed attempt to engage with Rancière’s conception of emancipation in MOS, a broad concept of emancipation can be generalized from the three different contexts wherein Rancière employs the concept: education,

politics and aesthetics. We follow this interpretation to the extent that we also acknowledge a substantial commonality in Rancière's approach to emancipation throughout his work. Based on Birnbaum's (2018) and Fjeld's (2018) recent efforts to separate the pedagogic, the political and the aesthetic Rancière, this part articulates what we take to be the consistent commonality of emancipation throughout his work. There are, however, also significant differences between our overall approach to Rancière developed in this part and the approach of Huault et al. (2014).

What, in our view, characterizes Rancière's general *method of equality* (Rancière, 2005, 2012a, 2016) can best be understood by bringing to the fore his particular idea and use of the concept of universality, the so-called *singularization of the universal*. In contrast to Huault et al., we do not regard the singularization of the universal as one aspect among others of his conception of emancipation (Huault et al., 2014: 36). Rather, as we will show, the singularization of the universal characterizes *every* event of emancipation and takes place when speaking beings insist on affirming their relations as *situations of address*.

Furthermore, and more importantly in the context of this special issue, Huault, Perret and Spicer evade the implicit commitment to minimal humanism in Rancière's theory. The evasion is apparent when they speak of Rancière's 'radical premise of equality between beings' (Huault et al., 2014: 29). Rancière, however, speaks of equality between '*speaking beings*' (Rancière, 1991: 45–73, 1995: 71–91, 2011b), beings who can take part in a situation of address and react and communicate within this situation according to their capacity to think and articulate themselves. In other words, Rancière, like the young Marx, stands in an Aristotelian humanist tradition that speak of an equality between animals who possesses a capacity for *logos*, discursive reason (cf. Aristotle, 1998: 1253a, 7–18). The premise of the method of equality is an equality between all human beings in this sense. In consequence our essay does not interpret the unsettling of the humanities as leading beyond the human, but rather towards a different meaning of the human.

## Rancière's method of equality and his conception of universality

At the core of Rancière's project, whether in the educational, political, or aesthetic context lies a specific, ambiguous conception of universality. In this conception, universality is the medium that effectively makes classifications and comparisons of human beings possible *and* holds the potential to overcome the hierarchies based on such classifications and comparisons. In Rancière's view, universality is in other words essentially double-sided (Rancière, 2006: 518). On the one side, universality, in the sense of a common measure, is a condition for differentiation between beings with the capacity for discourse. *Logos*, defined as the universal nature of the human being is what allows us to classify human beings as a function of how well they measure up to their definition. As such, it is the basis of comparison and hierarchy. On the other side, the universality of *logos* always entails the possibility of being understood differently, through affirmation of what is common to all without endorsing the intention of differentiation.

In our view, the egalitarian side of universality only has reality when the language of hierarchy and differentiation is understood as more than a truth claim, i.e. in terms of an *address* between speakers in a specific situation (Rancière, 1995: 71–91). Speaking beings can always decide to understand the truth told about why they, based on their measure of *logos*, are assigned a certain place in the social order as more than an assignation. They can decide to hear this truth as a justification, and once this shift is effectuated, we have entered the domain of address. This is so because justification is not an act of assignation, but an act of giving reasons for this assignation – and the act of giving reasons do not make sense unless it is addressed to someone capable of understanding reasons. The egalitarian side of universality always has this form of a presupposition of a basic equal capacity *in actu* without which the act of address would hardly make sense. Yet, when the

social order is read as a matter of justification, presupposing addressees who are equal in the above sense, the place assigning aim of such justifications (and other place assigning speech acts) can become a matter of contention: 'Any interlocutory situation is split at the outset by the contentious issue [ . . . ] of knowing what can be deduced from the understanding of a language' (Rancière, 1995: 78). An order, a piece of propaganda, or a justification of the teacher's superior position might work as intended and we can deduce that language serves its purpose – the addressee acts according to his assigned place in the social order. He understands his place. However, we can also infer that the inferior person has understood the superior's address because the inferior takes part in the same community of speaking beings and is therefore in this sense equal to his superior. In short, we can deduce that the inequality of social ranks works only because of the universal equality of speaking beings. Rancière's method of equality consists in bringing to light the different circumstances in which this deduction has been made and how, once grasped, its affirmation *hic et nunc*, singularized into an event. This singularization is what it means to affirm the egalitarian side of universality against its inegalitarian side where speaking beings are asymmetrically related. The method of equality seeks to narrate these singularizations where the universality of human beings in their bare shared minimal condition as speaking beings somehow materialized into an event. In this sense, the method of equality is an affirmation of a minimal humanism.

We will now briefly sketch how Rancière methodologically pursues the affirmation of minimal humanism in concrete practices within the realms of education, politics, and art.

## Pedagogy and intellectual emancipation

Joseph Jacotot, referent of the title and protagonist of the narrative in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, discovered the egalitarian side of universality by coincidence. Political turmoil in early 19th century France forced the highly regarded professor in French literature into exile in the Flemish speaking part of the Netherlands. Here, the king of the Netherlands had offered him a position as a professor at half pay. The truly exceptional circumstances, however, were the following: a considerable number of students wanted to learn about French literature but knew no French. Jacotot, on the other hand, knew no Flemish and was thus barred from addressing his students through the customary form of knowledge transmission. In a desperate effort to honor the students' wishes to learn, Jacotot made do with the things at hand. One such thing was the bilingual edition of François Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus*, recently published. Jacotot simply distributed the book to the students and, through a translator, asked them to learn the French text with the Flemish translation as their sole aid. The experiment exceeded all expectations and after they had learned the French text, they wrote about it in French. To Jacotot however, the true implications of the experiment did not concern how well the students learned, but the fact that they learned without a model to help them distinguish the essential from the accessory and the adequate method from the inadequate. They learned *without* a master's knowledge on how to progress in the subject matter. Without intending it, Jacotot had simultaneously addressed his students as capable of figuring out these things for themselves and suspended his standard for comparing and determining their intelligence. This confidence in his students *and* the suspension of comparative judgment constitutes Jacotot's affirmation of intelligence as the undifferentiated universal capacity of all. It is worthwhile emphasizing that intellectual emancipation, after its first accidental occurrence, is something Jacotot willfully tried to achieve (Rancière, 1991: 14). While there remains an uncontrollable aspect in this form of emancipation, which should be acknowledged, intellectual emancipation (as well as political and aesthetic emancipation) should fundamentally be conceived as an *intentional practice*. This in itself modifies the dichotomy between necessitation and chance, which characterizes the work of some scholars who have applied Rancière's philosophy to management learning

(Huault and Perret, 2016: 161; cf. Beyes, 2017). Even if educators cannot control or necessitate intellectual emancipation they do not have to rely on mere chance, but can thoroughly prepare, and to a degree plan their practice.

## Politics and social emancipation

The first secession of the Plebs, where the plebeian citizens of republican Rome withdrew to the Aventine hill and thereby left the patrician ruling class to their own devices, constitutes a leitmotif in Rancière's political texts, most notably in *La Mésentente* (1995). In Rancière's narration, the paradigmatic event clearly exposes the double-sidedness of universality in the political arena. As in the context of education, universality concerns the double status of humans as speaking beings, an animal with *logos*:

Politics exists because the *logos* is never simply speech, because it is always, inextricably, also the keeping account [*compte*] of this speech: the accounting through which one emission of sound is heard as speech, capable of enouncing what is just while another is perceived as mere sound signaling pleasure and pain, consent or revolt (Rancière, 1995: 44, our translation).

When the plebs withdrew to the Aventine hill, they did not raise fortifications in preparation for civil war. Instead, they did what they were not supposed to be capable of doing: 'they pronounced imprecations and apotheoses; they delegated one among them to go and consult *their* oracles; they appointed representatives with new titles' (Rancière, 1995: 47, our translation). In short, they revealed themselves to themselves as beings in possession of discursive reason and capable of deliberation and they materially manifested themselves to the patricians as no different from them, thus exposing their inferior place in the social order as unjustified. In exposing this *wrong* [tort], the Aventine hill became the site of a potential recognition of their equality as speaking beings that did not exist before. Fortunately, the established social order or, more precisely one member of it, Menenius Agrippa, reacted to this disruption of the social order by recognition and not by violence. Even though he went to convince the plebs that their significance in the organism of the city was that of the strong but stupid limbs, he also addressed them as deliberative beings in possession of reason. He went there to convince them, just as one senator of patrician rank would try to convince another in the public assembly. In this account, the plebs had two intentions in retracting to the Aventine hill: To carry on an existing process of intellectual emancipation *within* the community, and to manifest this process politically as the wrong of their assigned place.

## Emancipation in the aesthetic regime

The aesthetic capacity of Emma Bovary, the main character of Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary*, is a recurring object of analysis for Rancière in his 'aesthetic period', roughly spanning the years from the publication of *Le partage du sensible* (2000) to present day. Flaubert is emblematic for Rancière, who 'discerns all tensions of the aesthetic regime' (Fjeld, 2018: 92, our translation) (spanning from German romanticism to present day) in the realism of author. Once again, tension is a question of the double character of the universal. On one side, *Madame Bovary* was received as 'democracy in literature' (Rancière, 2014: 24), which, in giving voice and sensibility to the naïve and common Emma Bovary, 'muddles the division between golden souls fated toward exquisite sensibilities and iron souls fated towards prosaic activities' (Rancière, 2014: 25). As a consequence, it is no longer possible to 'distinguish the great souls that think, feel, dream and act from the individuals confined to the repetition of naked life' (Rancière, 2014:27). By incorporating the aesthetic



capacity of *anybody* into printed works available to practically *everyone*, this literary indistinction both inaugurates and emblemizes the potential of a universal ‘new power of sensible equality’ (Rancière, 2014: 35).

However, this ‘democratic reception’ of the artwork and the emancipatory potential of the indistinction it implies, constitutes a fortuitous misunderstanding [*malentendu*] of the artistic program of Flaubert, who had no sympathy for democratic politics (Rancière, 2014: 28). On the contrary, Flaubert takes leave of the freedom and agency of “‘human’ individualities, defined as the unity of a body animated by a soul that determines its own global form and particular expressions and postures’ (Rancière, 2007: 50, our translation). To him the real main character of the novel is not Emma Bovary as a self-determining agent but the ‘pre-human individualities, resulting from an indifferent intermingling of atoms’ that ends up determining the course of her life (Rancière, 2007: 50, cf. 54). In the end, and contrary to what she might believe, Emma is not the master of her own house. In the aesthetic regime, chance and intention are drawn together in a very specific way. To Rancière, what distinguishes admirable works of art is that they refrain from controlling their interpretation and focus all their energy on trying to express what they must in the best possible way (cf. also Rancière’s reading of the work of Rancière, 1991: 68–71). In such works, the artist’s intention confines itself to the will to expression. An example of such will, Flaubert employs herculean work to express the world of pre-human individualities, and by doing merely so takes his unknown addressees’ intellects seriously to the highest possible extent. In effect, this is how the artist affirms chance: by circulating a product of his intellect and by letting the addressees do what they want with it. In effect, doing so was what encouraged his readers’ democratic ‘misunderstanding’. Yet, this endeavor is always at risk, as other readers might want to remove the inverted commas from ‘misunderstanding’, and tell the one true interpretation of the book at the expense of all others. Such is the tension in the aesthetic regime, between the universality of the expressive act of the artwork and the purported universal validity of its authoritative interpretation.

## Part II: The conceptual implications of intellectual emancipation for management education

What unites Rancière’s examinations of pedagogic, political, and artistic phenomena is that they all highlight affirmations of minimal humanism. However, because the specificity of intellectual emancipation has been overlooked in the application of Rancière’s thought within management and organization studies, the specific way he conceives pedagogical emancipation remains underdeveloped. Our contribution addresses this shortcoming by highlighting three distinct features of intellectual emancipation that are of importance to a Rancièrian approach to management education. In order to get the first feature into view, it is useful to point to the significant commonality between Rancière’s narrations of the political and aesthetic situations described above: The plebs on the Aventine hill are depicted solely in terms of how they experience and intentionally manifest *themselves* as emancipated. Flaubert’s work might become emancipatory by *not* intending anything specific with his readers. In contrast, what distinguishes *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*’s account of intellectual emancipation is that the narrative of the book focuses on Jacotot’s aim *to emancipate others through intentional practice*. In contrast to previous applications of Rancière within the field of management learning (Alexandersson and Kalonaityte, 2018; Beyes, 2017; Carrol et al., 2013; Huault and Perret, 2011, 2016; Mack, 2015; Rhodes, 2019; Scott, 2017), our pedagogic experiments have been guided by this paradigm and intentionally pursued intellectual emancipation of our students as well as ourselves. Secondly, focusing on the intention to emancipate others also implies that we have to reject the idea that ‘Rancière’s philosophy denies all positions of authority’ (Huault and Perret, 2016: 163). As we shall see, this undifferentiated anti-authoritarian

reading of Rancière within management learning abstracts from authority as an important feature of intellectual emancipation and thereby also from the crucial role of the *Maitre*. Thirdly, distinguishing intellectual emancipation from political and aesthetic emancipation can help reassess MOS' tendency to reduce emancipation to a matter of disruptive effects in the social order; to disruptive moments of equality and dissensus that might 'cause trouble for the field of management education' (Huault and Perret, 2016: 162; cf. Whittaker, 2011). Such accounts overlook that intellectual emancipation is not merely disruptive but – in virtue of its intention to facilitate *reason between equals* – also, potentially, a constructive practice. Through a closer conceptual examination of each of three distinct features of intellectual emancipation (authority, intention, and reason), as well as their intrinsic connections, we seek to outline how intellectual emancipation can be a constructive practice for management educators.

## The emancipatory master

The master is someone who commands. We often say that this is a horrible thing, a commanding master. We would prefer that it be simply someone that conveys or passes on knowledge. This is not true. The important thing is that the master obliges the other to make use of his own intelligence (Rancière, 2004, our translation).

As the quote emphasizes, extracting a concept of intellectual emancipation is not Rancière's only concern in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. In our reading, another key issue concerns the thorny problem of what it means to affirm a minimal humanism from *within* the asymmetrical pedagogic practice – what it means to emancipate *someone*, to be an emancipatory *master* (Rancière, 2009a: 422): 'What *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* describes is the way in which someone supposedly knowledgeable [the master], in the end, gains access to another way of speaking' (Rancière, 2012a; our translation). These statements, along with the title of the book, clearly indicate that Rancière's inquiry does not concern the abolishment of the authority figure. Rather, it engages with the difficult pedagogical paradox of how to command someone to be autonomous. Rancière's resolution of this paradox consist in avoiding the performative contradiction of simultaneously commanding autonomy and supplying a model to be imitated for how to attain it. In order to command autonomy, the master must affirm his ignorance of how the other attains it. This is what Jacotot did by coincidence: He asked the students to look, think and make up their minds for themselves, without giving them any indications of what that meant. Neither did he point out central knowledge nor the proper method to attain it. By making the command, while being plainly ignorant of all comparative measures for controlling its execution, he implicitly and unknowingly affirmed the undifferentiated capacity of everyone to make use of their intelligence. He affirmed their common humanity as discursive beings. Admittedly, as the proletarians described in *Proletarian nights: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-century France* (Rancière, 2012b) and the Roman plebs depicted in *La Mésentente* demonstrated, intellectual emancipation can happen without an emancipatory master. However, as the case of Jacotot demonstrates, intellectual emancipation can also be the *explicit intention* of pedagogical practice (Rancière, 1991: 136). Even though Jacotot discovered what it means to be an emancipatory master by coincidence, the ramifications of his chance experiment did not share this accidental quality. Instead, 'Jacotot applied himself to varying the experience, *to repeating on purpose* what chance had once produced' (Rancière, 1991: 14; our italics).

## The intention to emancipate others

Rancière is adamant when it comes to separating the intention of the emancipatory master from the well-intentioned enthusiasm for *progress*, pervasive at the time of Jacotot's experiments. In fact,

insisting on a minimal humanism that affirms the presupposition of the equality of intelligences is the only bulwark preventing Jacotot's universal teaching from being 'integrated into [the] renovation of stultification' (Rancière, 1991: 122) inherent in the progressive and progressing learning sciences – preventing it from becoming:

a *natural* method that respects the intellectual development of the child all the while procuring for his mind the best of gymnastics; an *active* method that makes him habituated to reasoning for himself and confronting difficulties alone, that creates self-assurance in speech and a sense of responsibility; a good *classical* foundation, learning language at the school of the great writers, disdaining grammarians jargon; a *practical* and expeditious method that does away with the costly and interminable stages of college to form enlightened and industrious young people, ready to launch themselves into careers useful for the perfecting of society (Rancière, 1991: 122)

As a continuation of Pelletier's argument (2012) in a recent publication on the contemporary relevance of Rancière, we think this distinction between the good intentions of *progressive* humanism and those of Rancière's *minimal* humanism are particularly relevant if the humanities are to be reworked (Braidotti and Gilroy, 2016; Johnsen et al., 2018). The above quote could easily have figured in contemporary EU policy recommendations on 21st century skills (e.g. Beblavý et al., 2019 or EU Science Hub, 2020). Furthermore, progressive constructivist approaches to learning such as case-based learning, experiential learning and problem-based learning (García-Rosell, 2013; Kirschner et al., 2006; Scarbrough et al., 2004) proliferate in current business school education and its preoccupation with 'learning through practice'. Yet, as species of 'pedagogical knowledge' they must renounce and alleviate ignorance of *how* intelligence should progress and *towards* what end. These approaches are progressivist because they do not allow the objective of the pedagogic practice to remain open. Consequently, such approaches easily lend themselves to quantitative and qualitative measurement of whether learning progresses towards the aim of increased learning outcomes. In intellectual emancipation, on the contrary, the pedagogical objective is to keep the students committed to investigating and expressing themselves about a subject matter, and thereby affirming their status as speaking human beings who can reason between equals.

## Reason between equals

'*Reason between equals*' is the title of the central third of the five chapters (lessons) in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. The lesson asks the question of how universality can be singularized *between* equal individuals, within a community of equals (Rancière, 1991: 71). Unlike the third of five chapters in Rancière's major political work, *La mésentente* (1995) entitled 'The reason of disagreement [*mésentente*]' (1995), *reason between equals* does not connote conflict nor disruption of the social order, but community. This community refers to the intellectual emancipation of individuals that takes place in certain relations between speaking beings, as it did *between* the plebs on the Aventine hill or *between* Rancière's proletarians in their nocturnal intellectual adventures. Such individual intellectual emancipation - however it may have been achieved - is logically prior to the political conflict where a collective 'we' is manifested:

Individual intellectual emancipation might well happen without any collective emancipation, but not vice versa. From the moment that collective emancipation takes place there is necessarily individual intellectual *emancipations* operating within collective emancipation (Birnbau, 2018: 91; our translation and italics).

These lines between individual intellectual emancipation and collective emancipation are sharply drawn in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* that explicitly confines itself to the project of intellectual

emancipation. Evidently, an emancipatory master must take into account the social context, but only to secure a lacuna within this context where the unequal logic of the social order, defining how and what to learn, can be suspended (Rancière, 2009a: 422). Reason between equals concerns what can happen in such a lacuna. Rancière's commitment to reasoning connects him to the conception of emancipation in critical theory, making them both, in a broad sense, heirs of the Enlightenment tradition: 'At the heart of Critical Theory is the assumption that human reason is an emancipatory force that is constrained and distorted by historical conditions' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 438). However, whereas the ideal of reason and critique within Critical Theory has been criticized for being elitist and aloof (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992a: 437), Rancière's concept of intellectual emancipation is shaped by the double attempt to combat the settled authority of the expert by taking ignorance upon oneself while remaining committed to the practice of reasoning.

In the first instance, the notion of reason between equals concerns the commitment to giving and receiving accounts of what we see, what we think about it and what we make of it within a communal practice of learning (Rancière, 1991: 20). Our commitment in such communicative situations can have one of two general intentions, or most commonly in practice, a mix of them: The first is that of researchers or artists (Rancière, 2009b: 22) who describes something important enough to care about (cf. Frankfurt, 1998) with the mere intention of communicating it to other speaking beings. This could be Flaubert's pre-human individualities, the intolerability of a social condition, the lack of clarity in a mathematical definition, or the curiosity of the mating dance of the Peacock spider. Such accounts might be picked up by others who translate them in their own accounts. This first intention affirms intellectual emancipation in the communicative situation by wanting to give an account and translate the accounts of others. Here there is no immediate need for an emancipatory authority even though the teacher may of course participate, as a speaker and listener, among others. In the ensuing dialogue where intentions to communicate are picked up and translated by further speakers, the obligation of the listeners consists in verifying whether speakers are moving within the bounds of reason, whether they depart from it, whether they return to it (Rancière, 1991: 41). By taking up this task of facilitation the participants help to ensure that what takes place indeed deserves the name of intellectual emancipation.

The second intention always at stake in the communicative situation is that of willing certain effects of the expression. Teachers may wish to raise social consciousness in their students; a textbook may wish to transmit the essential knowledge of a subject matter to the students. This intention transgresses the boundaries of autonomy by wanting to be *followed* and *acted upon* in a certain way (Rancière, 1991: 68). The role of the emancipatory master is to affirm the first intention and ensure commitment to the process of reasoning between equals by remaining at the level of expression, investigation, and translation. Thereby he seeks to counter the potential transgression of autonomy, which the second intention carries into effect. The emancipatory master, who commits the student to give an account for the other to translate, challenges the student to become and remain committed to make use of his or her own intelligence. In this activity, the emancipatory master is no 'simple good-natured pedagogue; he is an intractable master. The emancipatory commandment knows no compromises. It absolutely commands of a subject what it supposes it is capable of commanding of itself' (Rancière, 1991: 38).

How concrete and unflinching the disposition of the master needs to be to retain the challenge to the students to remain committed to emancipation is vividly illustrated in one of Jacotot's statements cited by Rancière:

If the neighbor asks you to verify the young student's knowledge, you need not hesitate to perform this inquiry, even though you have had no schooling. 'What are you learning, my little friend?' you will ask the child. 'Greek.' 'What?' 'Aesop.' 'What?' 'The Fables.' 'Which ones do you know?' 'The first one.' 'Where

is the first word?’ ‘There it is.’ ‘Give me your book. Tell me the fourth word. Write it. What you have written does not look like the fourth word in the book. Neighbor, the child doesn’t know what he says he knows. This is proof that he wasn’t paying attention while studying or while displaying what he says he knows. Advise him to study; I will return and tell you if he is learning the Greek that I myself don’t know, that I don’t even know how to read (Rancière, 1991: 32).

### Part III: Taking Rancière to (the business) school

For us, the emphasis on the concept of communicative commitment to giving an account and its doubling in pedagogy as intentionally committing someone to such a commitment has been crucial for bringing Rancière back to practice. Over the last 6–7 years this dual configuration of intellectual emancipation has acted as a provocation for thinking about and for practicing collaborative research and for teaching at the business school. The following biographical anecdote on Rancière’s collaborative work around *Reading Capital* (Althusser et al., 2015) gives an idea of what a practice of intellectual emancipation in research could look like:

The reading of texts instead of the adhesion to the [French Communist Party] line [. . .] produces a direct relationship to the materiality of the texts of the Party and reinvents an undomesticated hermeneutics. [. . .] This work [resulting in the publication of *Reading Capital* [. . .] is the work of a collective of thought, which Jacotot never could nor would think. The work displays, without a doubt, a mimetic ‘disciple-effect’ but just as much one feels the effect of intelligence owing to the *sharing of a common ignorance* (Birnbaum, 2018: 118; our translation and italics).

As Birnbaum argues, Jacotot never addressed the relationship between the research community committed to a shared ignorance and the community of the classroom. Neither does Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*. In our view, this ‘blank spot’ is the cost of the conceptual clarity of the book and it constitutes the untimeliness (Pelletier, 2012) or even the implausibility (Cavazzini, 2013) of its project of intellectual emancipation. Bluntly put, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*’s configuration of intellectual emancipation, there is no *class*, only relations between one individual and another. As teachers we can react to Rancière’s omission of the community of the class in several ways of which two are relevant here: We can write of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* as insufficient and irrelevant for real teaching practices or we can accept the challenge. We have tried to do the last, and the vignettes in this section are meant to give a glimpse of this work. For us, accepting this challenge means to ask ourselves how to maintain the commitments of Rancière’s conceptual configurations of intellectual emancipation in the practical conditions of class. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* completely omits the material conditions of the classroom, the social relations between students, the status of classroom discussions, and the fact that teachers seldom are ignorant on the subject they teach, in favour of a conceptually clear account of the relation between the emancipatory master and someone being emancipated. For us, ‘taking Rancière to school’ means carrying *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* back to class and confront the practical issues this turn to practice entails, while staying committed to its idea of intellectual emancipation.

### Our use of vignettes

The following vignettes from our teaching practice all aim at showing how the conceptual work above can be translated into actual teaching practice. They are by no means comprehensive when it comes to the challenges that arises in this process of translation, but they single out what has

proved most important in our practice. Likewise, we do not intend them as programmatic, but more as an invitation to fellow practitioners to join and develop a train of thought and practice if they see their relevance. As such, the vignettes do not condense the results of any controlled study but give a condensed account of a shared and ongoing difficulty, namely that of materializing the intention of intellectual emancipation in our teaching practice. Obviously, intentions are always prone to the suspicion whether they really *are* the true intentions, and that of course counts for the following description of how we tried to pursue intellectual emancipation. However, unless we want to transform all pedagogy into learning science and leave out questions about autonomy, agency and will, this will always be the case.

The vignettes are ordered chronologically to show the dialectics between our intention, its challenges when confronted with practice, the ensuing adjustments to our way of thinking and doing and its re-confrontation with practice. In this stylized narration, many details about student reactions, the material conditions of the classroom, failures and dead ends etc. are necessarily left out in favour of others. The principle for this conscious selection is to be found in the aim of the vignettes. They strive to strike a balance between sincerity and being sufficiently open ended for other practitioners to translate them into their own practice. This approach to vignettes is modeled on Vince's (2008, 2010; Neumann et al., 2019; Vince and Mazen, 2014) use of vignettes, that allows for a way to present how a 'proposed conceptual framework makes sense in real-life practice', without claiming any general applicational validity while still expecting it to at least 'resonate with other, similar contexts [of] organized learning' (Vince, 2008: 98).

Each vignette centres on a *heuristic device* for intellectual emancipation that Rancière extracts from Jacotot's practice but never explicitly adopted in his own teaching practice. The first concerns the use of *a thing in common* as a necessary condition for committing the intellect to focus its account on a shared phenomenon. The second considers the role of the teacher as *standing in the door*, making sure the intellect remains committed to the thing in common. The third engages with *The Ignorant Schoolmaster's* notion of *contempt* that refers to the effects of social stratifications that distracts and obstructs the intellect from an emancipatory enterprise. We have selected these heuristic devices based on their importance for our own practice and understand them as sufficiently general to be translated into different teaching practices. At the same time, however, they lose their relevance if abstracted from a concrete practice. As such, the three heuristic devices require practical content and has limited value unless picked up and used.

## The context of our teaching practice

The teaching experiences described in the vignettes grew out of a context that did not directly concern teaching. Ten years ago, a mixed group of faculty and students at the business school where we are currently employed decided to start a reading group outside the institution. The simple aim of the group was to read classical works of the western philosophical tradition in their entirety, which we did not have the occasion to read during our 'institutional time' – neither as students nor as faculty. The study program to which we were all associated was, admittedly, peculiar in a business school context as it involved venturing into excerpts of such primary texts as a part of the curriculum. During the first couple of years, and without any further comparison, the atmosphere of the group started to resemble Birnbaum's account of what characterized the working community around *Reading capital*: The sharing of a common ignorance (with minor *discipline-effects* to use Birnbaum's term). Intellectually, the possibility to search together, outside of institutional requirements, was a liberating experience. At the time, none of us was acquainted with the work of Rancière. Around 2014 two fortunate coincidences occurred and conspired. Through different detours, participants of the reading group picked up copies of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*;

one followed Antonia Birnbaums course on the book as an exchange student at Université Paris 8, another drew heavily on it in his master's thesis (Worm-Petersen, 2015) and yet another supervised this thesis. Ultimately, we read the book in the reading group. This was the first coincidence. The second concerned changes on the study program, where some participants of the reading group were still teaching faculty, some still students, some newly minted alumni and others new students who had recently joined. Due to budget cuts, the study board responsible for the program had to either cut back on teaching hours or cut costs per teaching hour. In hindsight and as an exception to the rule, this turned out a fortunate coincidence. Originally, lectures on the difficult primary texts had been supported by smaller exercise classes taught by rather expensive faculty. These exercise classes functioned as extra lectures for smaller groups of students. A new policy responding to the budgetary constraints, converted the exercise classes into reading classes modeled on the experiences from the reading group, overseen by inexpensive student instructors hired primarily from the reading group. Consequently, the role of the exercise teacher also had to change, as no one could expect instructors to have authoritative knowledge of the curriculum. So, the role of the teachers changed: they read with the students and committed them to read for themselves instead of lecturing them. Currently, this model for the reading classes has been expanded to other courses on the study program. Undergraduate or graduate students now oversee the new reading classes. The vignettes concern the difficulties of this process of translating *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* into practice of and our concurrent discussions with and of it.

## Introduction of a thing in common

The problem is to reveal an intelligence to itself. *Anything* can be used. *Télemaque*. Or a prayer or a song that the child or the ignorant knows by heart (Rancière, 1991: 28).

The definition of a *thing in common* is straightforward. It is a manifestation of human intelligence, thought materialized. It could even be explicative material, such as textbooks, with a clear intention of controlling the process of progression of the student – because such material can always be read against its controlling intention as simultaneously having the intention to speak to someone that understands. Nonetheless, we have preferred to avoid it. It would have been almost contradictory not to. The advantage of a *thing in common* is precisely that even though it might express a controlling intention, it cannot realize this intention by acting upon it – so why include it in the first place? The other advantage of a *thing in common* is that it offers a locus for intellectual accountability. To translate one expression of human intelligence into one's own involves accountability towards what one translates. Translators are not free to say whatever they want.

At the outset of our experience with the reading classes, we simply tried to do the same thing as we did in the reading group. We put a non-explicative text at the centre and asked the classes of 20–25 students to translate it into their own words. This might seem a naïve gesture; but then again, the teachers *were* naïve and had no teaching experience. It presupposed that all students had the same commitment to translating the text as we did in the reading group. It also presupposed that the students wanted to or were able to accept, right away, an authority figure that did not communicate the essence of the text at hand. Lastly, it presupposed that the teacher would be able to refrain from, unintentionally, making his own reading the authoritative one. Here is what happened: We arranged the tables in a square formation to suggest that we wanted to read together, but each time we sat, the students sat at the three sides where the teacher did not. Sometimes students came unprepared, uninterested, or even hung over and had nothing to say about the text. They just waited. Other students were obviously uncomfortable with expressing themselves and when the reading classes worked well, only a handful took part in the shared reading – usually male students.

Frequently, when good discussions developed, the teacher got carried away by his own reading, resulting in a palpable silence or want of further explication afterwards – signifying a return of the knowledge hierarchy we intended to circumvent.

In spite of these difficulties, the experiment continued. This was mainly due to one feature that seemed to work well: The shared text allowed the teachers to commit the students' work with the text to something other than the teachers themselves and their knowledge. When the students actually did carry out translations of the text into their own words, these translations could always be held accountable to the translated text. Such a demand obliged students to submit their statements to the authority of the mute speech of a text that, to the frustration of many, rarely gave quick definitive answers as to whether their reading was correct or not. At the same time, every student could make inquiries about the statements of another on the basis of their reading of the same text. For the teachers, such obligation quickly became a rule that permitted to focus attention without naming the proper centre of attention. For instance, when a student introduced personal experience or knowledge from another field, the teacher could easily oblige them to stay on track. Not by showing how the subject introduced was irrelevant for the proper understanding of the text, but by committing them to make the connection of relevance themselves – which can only be done if one has read and begun translating the text.

## The significance of standing in the door

The book prevents escape. The route the student will take is unknown. But we know what he cannot escape: the exercise of his liberty. We know too that the master won't have the right to stand anywhere else – only at the door. (Rancière, 1991: 23)

The metaphor of *standing in the door* designates the overall task of the ignorant schoolmaster as keeping students committed to translating the thing in common. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* one sometimes catches a glimpse of Jacotot's exercises designed to do just that. Few of these exercises are directly applicable in the context of business education but need context adjustment and translation. However, the intention of the exercises is summarized in the metaphor: to commit students to make use of their own intelligence and to confine them to the process of translation.

For the teachers supervising the reading classes, this metaphor opened up a space of deliberative experimentation. How, in their specific situation, could they commit the students thus? Some made use of other media than written language and asked the students to represent metaphorical language in the text visually and subsequently give the reasons for the specifics of the representation. Others asked the students to spend a fair amount of time on finding the most precise headline for a paragraph that had none and justify their choices. Another strategy consisted in asking groups of students to ask questions for a paragraph and pick out the one question they most wanted answered. Such questions sometimes guided the rest of the session. One teacher even talked about asking the students to construct, as truthfully as possible, a concept with Lego building blocks.

While these experiments slowly grew into a framework for how to work with the *thing in common*, there were many issues that they did not resolve. One of these issues is what happens to authority relations in the classroom when the established knowledge authority leaves the centre of the room. At this point, the social hierarchies of the classroom often manifest themselves, which potentially elevates self-assertive students to the status of knowledge authorities. Adding to this difficulty is the fact that these students sometimes are the ones who have really committed themselves to a thorough effort of translating the shared text – an effort that they want to discuss with the others, mirroring the teacher being carried away by his own reading. Furthermore, differences in familiarity with the foreign language and the idiom of some of the texts, made it harder to speak for some than for others. Such difficulties cannot be resolved by simply standing in the door.



## Navigating contempt

Inegalitarian passion is equality's vertigo, laziness in the face of the infinite task equality demands, fear in the face of what a reasonable being owes to himself. It is easier to *compare* oneself, to establish social exchange as [. . .] [the] swapmeet of glory and contempt (Rancière, 1991: 80).

Rancière develops the idea of contempt in the fourth chapter (lesson) of the book. In the broadest sense, he defines contempt as speech that wants to incur a certain effect in the addressee, thereby reducing the interlocutory situation to a causal relationship. In the teaching situation, however, contempt takes on a more specific form. Any teacher must recognize that in any classroom students perform differently. This is a fact. The crucial point concerns how we translate this fact. The common way to translate it is to call it *capacity* or *competence*. Generally, this translation is so settled upon that it being in fact a translation goes unnoticed.

Yet, different manifestations of the intellect are not the same as intellectual capacity. In order to equate them one must add to the fact of intellectual manifestations their commensurability, their having the same *measure*. After settling on this equivalence, one can compare intellectual capacity; and only after a comparison of unequal intellectual capacity, it becomes possible to act upon it – whether such action takes the route of separating the sheep from the goats, pushing the excellent towards further excellence, or the route of differentiation, taking into consideration unequal capacity, its causes and its remedies. From the initial translation of different performances into capacity to the progressive work of knowing the causes of inequality in order to combat it; all of it falls under the heading of contempt in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*.

Another way to translate the fact of difference in performance is to understand it as a function of time and exercise:

I will not say that he has done less well because he is less intelligent. I will say that he has produced a poorer work because he has worked more poorly, that he has not seen well because he has not looked well. I will say that he has brought less attention to his work. By this, I may not have advanced very far, but enough (Rancière, 1991: 50).

The sufficiency of this move derives from its reopening of a foreclosed possibility for teaching, namely the possibility of actively suspending contempt in the classroom. Instead of affirming inequality and providing the means for the student's progressive equalization, while retaining the measure of his own capacity, the teacher can commit the student to exercise his intellect *hic et nunc* – thereby affirming the student's capacity to do so as the shared capacity of all to *begin* without any intellectual scaffolding. This also explains why the emancipatory master will not accept 'I can't' for an answer (Rancière, 1991: 57).

In the reading classes, contempt as a heuristic device mainly translated into an extreme rule of caution. Inevitably, the teachers ended up creating situations that somehow put incapacity on display. For instance, not accepting 'I can't' for an answer can easily turn into a display of incompetence if the teacher asks someone a leading question, to which the class senses that only one response is proper. Similarly, committing insecure students to speak about the shared text sometimes turned into mute refusal. However, instead of taking special precautions for disadvantaged students and whatever social, cultural or physical norms that might be the cause of their situation, the teachers concentrated on creating barriers around the speech situations that kept out contempt – both the contempt inherent to leading questions and otherwise internalized forms of contempt. Navigating contempt became a question of creating situations where ideally no students would be able to give 'I can't' for an answer, demonstrating to themselves and each other that they too had something to say.

One way of doing this was to ask all students to read and talk about the same excerpt in pairs, giving them ample time to do so, while circulating among the pairs, asking questions modeled on Jacotot's three core questions: 'What do you see?', 'What do you think about it?' and 'What do you make of it?' (Rancière, 1991: 23). Afterwards, the teacher simply asked the pairs to relate what they had talked about, because he was sure that he had seen them talk. Sometimes only one of them talked and sometimes the other supplemented. Sometimes they even continued a discussion in plenum. If one of the students definitively did not want to talk in front of others, the teacher could relate what he had heard the student say in the paired conversation. Another, similar, way of excluding incapacity was to make the students look at the first page, imagining it to be in a foreign language and simply relate what they *saw* and what they thought about it. Some letters were bigger than other letters, some were italicized or bold, and sometimes there were indents and numbering. What did they think about that? When, subsequently, the teacher let the text return to the familiar language, this sometimes led to discussions of important italicized concepts or the reasons for the specific division into paragraphs.

Yet another consideration concerned the question of when to introduce plenary discussion, which *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* seems to foreclose as an expression of contempt. In the book, discussion is absent from emancipatory practices because it is understood as forcing an interpretation on the other, silencing the other through argument in the pursuit of being right. However, discussions might be very fruitful if the intention behind is not to silence the other by argument, but to commit each other to giving more attentive accounts. As a rule of thumb, discussions worked best at the end of the reading classes, when a maximum of students had been involved in translating the text into their own words or, to paraphrase Rancière, once a maximum of intelligences had become necessary to themselves (Rancière, 1991: 15).

Thus, the teachers worked towards caution against contempt in the community of the class, towards affirmation of reason *between* equals in a community of equals. At a general level, more and more students did participate actively in the reading classes; the teachers did experience shy students slowly coming to the fore and had an impression of equalization of male and female participation. More than once the course evaluations included appreciation of an atmosphere of trust. Yet, all of these initiatives cautious of contempt were only concerned with changes in self-relations and relations to others in a small community. They did not change the relations between the individuals of this community and the broader social stratification, which Rancière designates as *the society of contempt* (Rancière, 1991: 75). Teachers and students alike are all subjects that must abide by employability statistics, university rankings and international learning outcome measures. Intellectual emancipation does not change these. Or, if it does, it only does so in the sense of momentarily forgetting them by demonstrating what it could mean 'to be equal[s] [. . .] in an unequal society' (Rancière, 1991: 133).

## Part IV: Concluding discussion

At the heart of Rancière's conception of emancipation is the idea that every situation of communication between human beings expresses an ambiguous intentionality. On the one hand, communication can seek to establish inequality by making use of categorizations and comparisons within the social order, affirming its asymmetries and hierarchies. The intention with communication is then to express *contempt*, i.e. the aim is to 'put people in their place', or at least establish the measures that determine who belongs in what position in the social order. On the other hand, a situation of address can also express an emancipatory intention to acknowledge and express equality. In this case, the intention of a communicative situation is to affirm the other as a fellow human being, i.e. as a speaking being who can think and express their thoughts discursively. In pedagogical

practices, the intention to establish inequality takes the shape of a *will to measure* which allows categorization and comparison of how student learning progresses. Intellectual emancipation, on the contrary, is irreducible to this ‘progressivism’: it expresses an intention to facilitate a commitment to reason between equals and in the ensuing practice the authority of teacher serves to ensure and uphold this commitment. In thus emphasizing the meaning of intellectual emancipation, both in theory and in practice, we have only touched lightly upon research within the broader field of business school pedagogy. Our line of inquiry hopes to invite relevant responses and objections from this field, which we mainly relate to as interested readers and practitioners. In return, and this is at the heart of our contribution, we have put forth a philosophical invitation to reconnect to reflections on the ends of pedagogy in the practical context of the contemporary business school.

Furthermore, we have shown how intellectual emancipation retains the link between emancipation and humanism which is at the core of the philosophy of the young Marx. To be sure, intellectual emancipation, with its skepticism of categorizations, comparisons, and measures, acknowledges that the grandiose Marxist conception of the sovereign human, which, carried by the logic of history marches towards a utopian emancipation, has been irrevocably unsettled. Rancière’s approach does not imply that inequality could ever be removed from the world. On the contrary, contempt understood as ‘inequality’s passion’ (Rancière, 1991: 80) is a fundamental human phenomenon. What is at stake is rather to pursue the attempt to be equal human beings ‘in an unequal society. This is what *being emancipated* means’ (Rancière, 1991: 133). The unsettled nature of Rancière’s minimal humanism is perhaps most clearly expressed in his ambiguous understanding of human communication where contempt *and* emancipation are both irreducibly at stake. Our essay has thus used Rancière to articulate what an *unsettled humanist approach* to pedagogy and management education could look like. On the basis of this contribution, it would be interesting, in a next step, to discuss why, precisely, we need a humanist approach to business school teaching? In our view, there are both conceptual reasons and disturbing developments in our society that motivates us to (re)commit to humanism in business school education (cf. Colby et al., 2011) but a discussion of this topic lies beyond the scope of this essay.

Finally, our contribution will likely raise the fundamental question concerning the prospects for pursuing intellectual emancipation at business schools. Such a discussion should begin with a recognition of the irreducible difference between intellectual emancipation and the intention of policies typical to business school education. In a business school context, teaching revolves intensely around measures of effect in the attempt to grasp progression in learning. These measures may try to capture whether the education or the program helps the students’ chances for (well-paid) employment and therefore is a sensible investment in human capital; they may focus on individual learning outcomes, or on whether specific learning initiatives develop specific character traits; the measures may try to capture whether education helps the students to solve actual societal problems, or whether it gives them the capacity to transform society according to liberal democratic values. Regardless of the general measure used to capture progression in learning, intellectual emancipation intends something categorically different: it intends to affirm equality where the universality at stake is the common status of the participants as speaking beings.

In our view, the business school institution cannot and will not renounce measures of progression and hierarchy. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* consequently describes intellectual emancipation as a phenomenon that exists in spite of the contemptuous logic of educational institutions, and even as a phenomenon that cannot be institutionalized without reproducing inequality in new shapes, for example in the form of experts in emancipatory learning and education (Rancière, 1991: 109–134). Yet, this does not mean that it cannot be transmitted. Transmission merely requires that an individual teacher or a community of teachers try to re-actualize intellectual emancipation in their given circumstances. In this effort, teachers may, as we have emphasized, begin anywhere, taking

their point of departure in any phenomenon that is likely to act as a thing in common spurring the commitment of the students.

In our case, the commitment to intellectual emancipation began with an attempt to establish a space of free use of time within our institution. For this, the reading group served as a model, a space where we could pursue an *undomesticated hermeneutics* (Birnbbaum, 2018: 118), not only beyond the institutional demands of productivity, but also in which students and faculty could go beyond academic hierarchies by sharing their ignorance and searching together. The experience of intellectual emancipation that took place in the reading group is, in our view, crucial to our ensuing experiments in the study program. Complications inevitably arose, both in the reading group, and when we tried to take Rancière to school, notably related to different forms of contempt. Our efforts were doubtlessly blessed by relatively hospitable, maybe even intellectually emancipated, individuals at crucial positions within our institution. One may thus be skeptical of the broader relevance of our specific application for business school educators. Or, one may even suspect that our the experiments were tolerated and encouraged at our school because they could be interpreted to be in line with institutional pedagogical measures of effect such as ‘critical thinking’. Furthermore, one may object that our chance-given circumstances – allowing us to concentrate on primary texts with minimal intention to control the addressee instead of textbooks, allowing for a certain slack in presenting evidence for the fulfilment of learning goals, and allowing us enough time to pursue our shared ignorance outside of our institution – are not those of business school educators and students in general. While we recognize the truth in such skepticism, we also insist that there is a crack in everything, that most circumstances, even the rather dire ones of Rancière’s Plebs and Proletarians, affords possibilities for intellectual emancipation.

In the end, what must be acknowledged is that intellectual emancipation is consciously naïve: it insists on a phenomenon, equality, as a phenomenon that can always be affirmed within communicative situations even if, from the perspective of the social order, it is impossible.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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