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**Article:**

Wright, A., Kuhn, T., Michailova, S. et al. (2023) Ventriloquial authority in management learning and education: a communication as constitutive of learning and education perspective. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 22 (2). ISSN: 1537-260X

<https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2019.0191>

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Learning &  
Education

**Ventriloquial Authority in Management Learning and Education: A Communication as Constitutive of Learning and Education Perspective**

Journal:	<i>Academy of Management Learning &amp; Education</i>
Manuscript ID	AMLE-2019-0191-RES.R3
Manuscript Type:	Essays
Submission Keywords:	Philosophy and learning; education, Sociology of knowledge, Strategy Education
Abstract:	<p>This theoretical essay argues that management learning and education (MLE) is fundamentally accomplished by communication. Specifically, we utilize a Communication as Constitutive of Organization perspective to advance MLE as fundamentally a communicational accomplishment, which we label 'Communication as Constitutive of Learning and Education'. We focus on authority in the sense that all classroom conversations are authored, showing that the educator who faces the students is but one of many participants authoring classroom conversations. Authority becomes an emergent claim on action shaped by multiple interrelating texts that compete to influence practice. Classroom practice thus is a site of ventriloquial authority: when someone or something is made to speak in a specific way by a present or distant other that makes a difference for a conversational trajectory. We argue that management classrooms are replete with ventriloquial authority and that this is consequential for what educators teach and what students learn. We support our argument by illustrating ventriloquial authority in the classroom through the use of textbooks and visual media. We end with a "Call to Action" for educators to appreciate communication's constitutive quality and to rethink how authority acts in MLE.</p>

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3 **Ventriloquial Authority in Management Learning and Education: A Communication as**  
4 **Constitutive of Learning and Education Perspective**  
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39 **Acknowledgments:**

40 We would like to acknowledge the insightful editorial comments and direction we received  
41 from Bill Foster, and the probing questioning, thoughtful advice and sustained support we  
42 received from our three reviewers.  
43  
44

45  
46  
47 *Editor's note:* The manuscript for this article was accepted for publication during the term of  
48 AMLE's previous Editor-in-Chief, William (Bill) Foster.  
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## ABSTRACT

This theoretical essay argues that management learning and education (MLE) is fundamentally accomplished by communication. Specifically, we utilize a Communication as Constitutive of Organization perspective to advance MLE as fundamentally a communicational accomplishment, which we label ‘Communication as Constitutive of Learning and Education’. We focus on authority in the sense that all classroom conversations are authored, showing that the educator who faces the students is but one of many participants authoring classroom conversations. Authority becomes an emergent claim on action shaped by multiple interrelating texts that compete to influence practice. Classroom practice thus is a site of ventriloquial authority: when someone or something is made to speak in a specific way by a present or distant other that makes a difference for a conversational trajectory. We argue that management classrooms are replete with ventriloquial authority and that this is consequential for what educators teach and what students learn. We support our argument by illustrating ventriloquial authority in the classroom through the use of textbooks and visual media. We end with a “Call to Action” for educators to appreciate communication’s constitutive quality and to rethink how authority acts in MLE.

### **Keywords:**

Ventriloquism, authority, communication as constitutive of organization (CCO), text, discourse, management learning and education

## **Ventriloquial Authority in Management Learning and Education: A Communication as Constitutive of Learning and Education Perspective**

The observation that something is amiss in Management Learning and Education (MLE) is not new: for decades, critics have lodged various versions of this charge, portraying business schools as preparing budding managers poorly for the challenges they will encounter after graduation (Bennis & O’Toole, 2005; Calkins, 1961) or creating social ills through ethically indifferent curricula (Mintzberg, 2004; Morsing & Rovira, 2011). Such critiques tend to focus on concerns broader than the actual conduct of MLE: the cozy relationship between business schools and large corporations (Alajoutsijärvi, Juusola & Siltaoja, 2015; Parker, 2018; Zhang, Zheng & Xi, 2020), an individualistic ideology, and assumption of neoliberalist corporate power (Alakavuklar, Dickson & Stablein, 2017; Fotaki & Prasad, 2015; Jones & Andrews, 2019), and universities’ increasing reliance on student tuition fees (Bunch, 2020; Khurana, 2007). Because these criticisms are focused on MLE’s structural forces, critics who voice such concerns generally consider pedagogical experiences epiphenomenal, as secondary symptoms of broader social arrangements. Such reasoning tends to portray what happens in the classroom as a predictable and straightforward manifestation of the supposed more profound and significant factors that drive educational practice.

This essay aims to disrupt this narrative and offer a novel theoretical lens through which to view MLE, by positioning exposition, inquiry, reflection, and analysis as relational classroom accomplishments. As such, it begins with the presumption that the site of MLE, and of the production of the concerns critics raise, is the classroom and the practices that unfold there. It argues that what is ‘amiss’ is a lack of attention to the interactions that constitute MLE. In particular, we focus on a facet that has long been recognized as central to the realization of tasks of all kinds; that of authority (Barley, 1996; Barnard, 1938; Bourgoin,

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2  
3 Bencherki & Faraj, 2020; Grimes, 1978; Weber, 1978). Framing classroom practices as  
4  
5 thoroughly communicative—a conceptualization we develop in detail below—leads us to the  
6  
7 following guiding question: How is authority performed in the management classroom? To  
8  
9 address this question, we turn to Communication as Constitutive of Organization (CCO)  
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11 scholarship (Brummans et al., 2014) as a body of theory that allows us to look at classroom  
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13 interactions differently.  
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16  
17 Using CCO theorizing as a point of entry allows us to reframe MLE as an ongoing  
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19 communicational accomplishment, which we label ‘Communication as Constitutive of  
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21 Learning and Education’ (CCLE). This enables us to see how classroom interaction is  
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23 fundamentally an emergent, relational and unfolding communicative accomplishment  
24  
25 involving a conjoining of human agents (students, faculty) and nonhuman actors (ideas,  
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27 concepts, theories, online resources, textbooks, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) that interrelate  
28  
29 in teaching and learning. Our specific point is that classroom practice is always authored,  
30  
31 meaning that authority is a key constitutive factor in how teaching and learning unfold. From  
32  
33 a CCLE perspective, authority captures the dispersed practice of who/what authors action.  
34  
35 This essay’s particular provocation is to advance the CCO idea of *ventriloquial authority*,  
36  
37 which we define as a specific kind of claim on action detectable when someone or something  
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39 is made to communicate in a specific way by a present or distant other that makes a  
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41 difference to or establishes a conversational trajectory. Through ventriloquial authority, one  
42  
43 can discern the explicit and implicit elements of a situation that compete to express  
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45 themselves and shape what happens. Classroom interactions are far from predictable and  
46  
47 straightforward and are replete with instances where ventriloquial authority is a present but  
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49 unrecognized contributor to how MLE is enacted.  
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56 Rather than focus on structural forces, which are assumed to have foreseeable effects  
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58 on classroom teaching, we argue that it is necessary to critically consider MLE at the level of  
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3 interaction, as it is through such a focus that we can better understand how teaching and  
4  
5 learning are constituted. Appreciating communication as constitutive of classroom practice  
6  
7 allows us to move beyond descriptive claims and gain a deeper understanding of how MLE is  
8  
9 accomplished through interaction. Therefore, our explication of CCO and ventriloquial  
10  
11 authority enables us to identify key take-aways for management learners and educators.  
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15 In pursuing these theoretical and practical aims, the essay first delves into CCO  
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17 thinking, which we contrast with discourse analytic approaches, before framing authority as a  
18  
19 relational achievement. It then engages with the CCO notion of ventriloquism to address how  
20  
21 multiple sources of agency participate in classroom practices, often in ways imperceptible to  
22  
23 both educators and students. From there, we demonstrate how ventriloquial authority is  
24  
25 central to classroom conversations. Specifically, we use illustrations of textbooks and visual  
26  
27 media to display how this framework enables a new way of understanding MLE practice.  
28  
29 Finally, we outline the implications of our core argument as a ‘call to action’ for enhancing  
30  
31 the conduct of MLE.  
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## 34 35 **CCO, DISCOURSE, AND AUTHORITY**

### 36 37 **Theorizing Communication Differently**

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39 One of the core claims of the organizational communication field (a sub-field of organization  
40  
41 studies) is that communication has productive, generative power: it constitutes organizing  
42  
43 phenomena of all types, including organizations themselves because communication is the  
44  
45 fundamental site of meaning-making (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). However, it is rare  
46  
47 in the management literature to find analyses that treat communication as anything other than  
48  
49 the expression, transmission, or representation of pre-existing information. Communication,  
50  
51 in management studies’ typical rendering, occurs inside or between (putatively pre-existing)  
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53 organizations, as in the many studies of communication networks that locate communicating  
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55 systems inside organizations rather than framing them as constituting that which we consider  
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3 to be organization (Nisar, Prabhakar & Strakova, 2019; Tasselli, Zappa & Lomi, 2020). A  
4  
5 similar view crops up in the internal coordination literature, when communication is  
6  
7 understood as capable of producing moments of coordinated activity, but not as generating  
8  
9 the structures, roles, and routines ‘inside’ of which coordination occurs (Bruns, 2013; Im,  
10  
11 Yates, & Orlikowski, 2005; Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009). This is evident, too, in the area of  
12  
13 corporate communication, typically a branch of branding and public relations concerned with  
14  
15 building stakeholder support for corporate goals (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017). In this  
16  
17 thinking, communication is presented as messages sent from a pre-existing corporate entity  
18  
19 seeking to align audiences with its strategy, but not as a practice that produces the strategy,  
20  
21 much less the organization, itself. (When this field is rendered as corporate communications,  
22  
23 the ‘s’ at the end of ‘communication’ betrays a preference for message transmission over  
24  
25 meaning generation.) The utility of communication is restricted to a mode that merely  
26  
27 represents ontologically ‘deeper’ factors like structures, institutions, psyches, strategies, or  
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29 ideologies that can be talked about but which talk is assumed not to affect. For example, in  
30  
31 the MLE literature, Joullié, Gould and Spillane’s (in press) study of the language of executive  
32  
33 coaching frames conversation as a means of optimizing executives’ performance. This styles  
34  
35 conversation as merely a means by which the broader construct of executive coaching can be  
36  
37 realized more effectively, not as the process by which executive coaching is constituted.  
38  
39 Considering communication in terms of expression, transmission, and representation, in this  
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41 way, leads management scholars to emphasize speed, efficiency, and correspondence with  
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43 some antecedent reality (Axley, 1984; Corman et al., 2002) and leaves communication as  
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45 offering no productive capacity of its own.  
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54 If communication is not wholly about expression, transmission, and representation,  
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56 what is it? From the standpoint of contemporary communication theory (from which CCO  
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58 derives), communication is the practice of meaning creation that *constitutes* organizational  
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3 realities. This scholarship has gradually been influencing some branches of management  
4 thought, particularly in organizational change (Ford & Ford, 1995), occupational identity  
5 (Ashcraft, 2013), paradox (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016), leadership (Fairhurst &  
6 Cooren, 2009; Meier & Carroll, 2020), decision-making (Cabantous & Gond, 2011), cross-  
7 sector partnerships (Koschmann et al., 2012), strategizing (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011), and  
8 technology adoption (Leonardi et al., 2019). In this work, communication is not merely a  
9 vehicle to convey information between people but instead is the process by which  
10 organizations and organizing phenomena arise. Communication creates, reinforces, and  
11 transforms the myriad of temporally fluctuating meanings that are the coordination/control  
12 activities and social orders considered to be organizational (Kuhn, 2008; Putnam & Boys,  
13 2006; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009). These meanings, moreover, exceed human actors: they are  
14 located neither in the messages actors exchange nor in those persons' minds, but in the  
15 practices in which they participate. In other words, communication is not the transient that  
16 stands in contrast with the enduring. What are assumed to be solid organizational structures,  
17 roles, and routines are reframed as nothing but shorthand references to recurrent  
18 accomplishments, which can be generated only in and through communication (Kuhn et al.,  
19 2017).

### 20 21 22 **Constitutive Communication and Discourse Theorizing**

23 At this point comparisons between CCO and the study of discourse are warranted. Discourse  
24 has been approached and analyzed in various ways, typically spanning critical realist,  
25 constructivist, and post-structural paradigms (Carta, 2019). Other typologies that can be  
26 loosely aligned to this categorization also exist (e.g., Cederström & Spicer, 2014), along with  
27 accounts that consider discourse as either (big-D discourse) a dominating, macro-level  
28 'muscular' system, or (little-d discourse) an emergent micro-level phenomenon (Fairhurst &  
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3 Putnam, 2019; Kamoche, Beise-Zee, & Mamman, 2014). However, alternative treatments can  
4 largely be aligned with a paradigm-based classification (Carta, 2019).  
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8 Critical realist accounts focus on the realities presumed to underly individual  
9 experiences, as detected in discourse patterns. Given the presumption of an underlying social  
10 reality, some researchers may use statistical and modelling methods to characterize the  
11 explanatory factors at work through discourse (Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Chiu, 2018). Others  
12 may use qualitative approaches, as in a study that sought to examine how discourse analysis  
13 could be used to help reveal how the reality of concepts such as ‘the Nature of Science’ could  
14 be made more transparent (Plakitsi, Piliouras, & Efthimiou, 2017). Overall, critical realist  
15 approaches to discourse focus on underlying, ‘real’ social structures and their effects.  
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26 Constructivist theorizing emphasizes what can be known about subjective experiences  
27 of phenomena as related in discourse while remaining silent on (the possibility of) underlying  
28 realities. These accounts tend towards an emergent relational focus on how the role of ‘small-  
29 d’ discourse “in social interaction centers on its relationship to the unfolding scene of action,  
30 either in sequences of behavior or category use” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2019: 921). The focus  
31 is on “how language influences communication, persuasion, and the construction of  
32 meaning” (Kahl & Grodal, 2016: 191). Good examples include Mueller, Whittle, Gilchrist,  
33 and Lenney’s (2013: 1168) study of how a group of senior managers “used discourse to  
34 collectively co-author a version of the political landscape of the firm during team meeting  
35 interactions, with practical implications for how the group sought to undertake strategic  
36 change”, emphasizing the effects of their subjective experiences and interpretations. And  
37 Wallmeier, Helmig, and Feeney (2019: 497), whose study uses an “interpretive approach  
38 [that] follows the ontological position of constructivism/subjectivism” to characterize  
39 knowledge construction in public administration. In sum, constructivist approaches focus on  
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3 language and its role in constructing knowledge, which can be seen to have effects without  
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5 the need to claim any durable and underlying reality.  
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8 Post-structuralist accounts see ‘muscular’ discourse as the product and producer of  
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10 social systems (McCabe, 2016). For those working within the ‘muscular’ discourse (or ‘big  
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12 D’, Fairhurst & Putnam, 2019) tradition, “discourse has a substantive impact on the material  
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14 aspect of social and organizational processes” (Ban, 2020: 901). Such theorists often adopt  
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16 the approach of a master theorist such as Foucault (2007) or Derrida (1976, 1978, 1982) to  
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18 illuminate what is being enabled and/or suppressed through discourse or apply a pre-existent  
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20 theory such as feminism (Lucas, D’Enbeau & Heiden, 2016). For example, Jevnaker and Raa  
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22 (2017) apply Foucauldian analysis to underline the significance of British economist Joan  
23  
24 Robinson’s work, and Wright, Middleton, Hibbert and Brazil (2020) apply Derridean  
25  
26 deconstruction as a method to reveal suppressed themes in managerial discourse. Post-  
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28 structuralist approaches tend to focus on narratives and ideologies as (becoming) independent  
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30 of human agency and as having effects on individuals without them having a conscious role  
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32 in the construction or knowing of them.  
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38 CCO does not directly align with any of these approaches to the study of discourse.  
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40 Instead, it ‘sits between’ constructivist and post-structuralist accounts while also offering  
41  
42 several novel conceptual claims. It shares the micro-focus on language that is typical of  
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44 constructivist accounts of discourse but differs in making no claims about the construction of  
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46 durable knowledge with a long-lasting influence. Instead, CCO focuses on what is  
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48 accomplished at the ground level of interaction in the practice of communication as an  
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50 experience and production of a ‘reality’. Thus, for example, where constructivist approaches  
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52 see discourse as the foundation of organizing—we construct an idea of ‘the organization’ that  
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54 becomes shared over time—CCO emphasizes how organizing produces organization as it is  
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56 manifest and understood within the temporally limited practice of communication. CCO also  
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3 shares an overlap with post-structuralist accounts in that it sees agency in the texts, words,  
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5 and material objects that are constituted and materialized in communication. Yet CCO  
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7 refuses to attribute agency to any single (human or nonhuman) entity. As Kuhn and Burk  
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9 (2014: 154) note, “[i]t is not quite right, then, to say that either humans or nonhumans ‘have’  
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11 or ‘possess’ agency; rather, a capacity to act is the product of the marshaling of numerous  
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13 elements of an assemblage in the performative and relational generation of action.” Agency,  
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15 then, is always hybrid and multiple, but what is crucial is that CCO thinking does not posit an  
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17 enduring ideology or narrative that drives action independently of communicative practices.  
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19 CCO reasoning advances a version of a flat ontology, holding that nothing can persist outside  
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21 of communication.  
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26 The foundation of CCO theorizing is, therefore, understanding communication as the  
27  
28 genesis of organization. Several variants of CCO theorizing exist (Schoeneborn, Blaschke,  
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30 Cooren, McPhee, Seidl, & Taylor, 2014), but the one that has received the most attention is  
31  
32 associated with a group of scholars from the Université de Montréal. What has come to be  
33  
34 known as ‘Montréal School’ theorizing began with understanding the mutually reinforcing  
35  
36 relationship between texts and conversations. For these scholars, texts are the foundational  
37  
38 building blocks upon which interaction unfolds. A text could, for example, be a new  
39  
40 governmental regulation that becomes a topic of managers’ sensemaking. Alternately, a text  
41  
42 could be an idea, concept, framework, or theory that students encounter in a classroom.  
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46 Conversations are the interactions that both build upon and produce the texts that persist and  
47  
48 travel (e.g., discussions implicating the new regulation or about the concept), informing and  
49  
50 mediating further conversations (Putnam, 2013; Robichaud & Cooren, 2013). As the  
51  
52 observable linguistic interactions in which human actors construct and exchange messages,  
53  
54 conversations are the ‘sites’ in which organization is accomplished and experienced (Cooren  
55  
56 & Taylor, 1997). In other words, conversations are the lively mode of communication  
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(Ashcraft et al., 2009); they are the means by which sense is made of encountered phenomena, and such sense is always a product of the myriad of texts materializing in conversations.

Consequently, CCO investigations never leave the realm of communicational events at the ground level of interaction—so, in CCLE terms, this primarily means the classroom, whether traditional or online. CCO asserts that communication is the only site at which coordination and control can happen, such that the institutional structures, ideologies, and dollars that are typically portrayed as ‘outside’ and figuratively underlying communication matter to organizing only to the extent they are implicated (not necessarily explicitly named, however) in practices of authoring and authority (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011). Because all communication must be authored, the question of how authority is performed becomes vitally important for a CCLE conceptualization of MLE.

### **CCLE: Classroom Practice and Authority**

The practice of learning in the classroom involves an interplay of texts and conversations. Conversations revolve around specific concepts, produce further ideas and themes that inform future conversations, and result in jointly accomplished learning. For instance, when a professor introduces Michael Porter’s (1980) Five Forces framework to a class of MBA students, they (re)present a text upon which conversations can form (a point to which we return below). The interplay between the Five Forces text and the educator-student and student-student conversations invokes not merely the model and its author, but also the industrial organization economics thinking from where the model originates, along with the notions of scientific rationality and managerialism that underpin it (Cabantous & Gond, 2011; Felin, Koenderink, & Krueger, 2017; Wagner, 1978).

Classroom conversations create the Five Forces framework anew each time it is discussed over a semester (and beyond), at each of its situational unfoldings, building on

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3 preceding conversations and inserting additional textual resources as the conversation  
4  
5 emerges. Perhaps the educator and students' conversations interrogate its assumptive ground;  
6  
7 perhaps they weave into the model lessons from other courses; perhaps they reject its  
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9 Western logic of the firm's existence and operations; perhaps they reference it as an  
10  
11 opportunity to engage with different conceptions of strategy. But as the class's  
12  
13 communicative practice puts texts and conversations into interaction, its collective production  
14  
15 (and not mere reception) of the framework generates subsequent texts and conversations that  
16  
17 form the conception of the Five Forces constituted by the class. Against the assumption that  
18  
19 teaching a framework like the Five Forces is a neutral act, one that transmits it 'objectively'  
20  
21 to students, a CCLE stance suggests that the temporal unfolding of text-conversation  
22  
23 interactions generates sets of meanings that can characterize a collective—and that such a  
24  
25 'collective' might not exist until these sets of meanings emerge in specific space/time  
26  
27 locations. That collective—the class, which itself might become a figurative text deployed in  
28  
29 subsequent conversations, like that of any other organization (e.g., "the class decided", "the  
30  
31 class agreed")—is constituted by both the conversations unfolding in and around the  
32  
33 classroom, as well as the text (Five Forces) written through those conversations. Therefore,  
34  
35 the organization, the class, is composed of texts—like Five Forces—and conversations that  
36  
37 produce a practice trajectory. A CCLE understanding would refer to the conversational and  
38  
39 textual interplay as *organizing*.

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42 The focus, then, of a CCLE explanation of the problems, challenges and opportunities  
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44 MLE faces is the practice of classroom communication. Understanding the contingencies of  
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46 classroom communication—why its conversation-text intersections produce and sustain  
47  
48 certain assumptions about management, organizations and work rather than others—requires  
49  
50 an exploration into authority (Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015; Quinn Trank, 2014). This is  
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52 needed because as authority is fundamental to all organizing (Barley, 1996; Barnard, 1938;  
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3 Bourgoin, et al., 2020; Grimes, 1978; Weber, 1978), it follows that there is no classroom  
4 interaction where authority has not been (collectively) performed.  
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8 Conventional depictions of authority depict it as a legitimate right to perform a  
9 particular role, and Weber's (1978) well-known bases of authority—tradition, charisma, and  
10 rational/legal codes—are the resources upon which actors draw when influencing others  
11 toward collectively valued ends (Gilman, 1962). When it is invested in a particular person or  
12 position, authority is said to induce subordinates' suspension of judgment and voluntary  
13 compliance, enabling smooth organizational action (Barley, 1996; Barnard, 1938; Grimes,  
14 1978). Accordingly, authority conventionally references decidability: a person or position  
15 holding, or being seen to hold, the "right to the last word" (Simon, 1997: 182) in decision-  
16 making situations. Authority then is typically conceived as a resource to be possessed, an  
17 independent variable to induce an actor's aims.  
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31 The recognition by CCO scholars that 'authority' and 'author' share the Latin root  
32 *auctor* indicates that the product 'authority' always has some actor generating—authoring—it  
33 at any moment in time (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Bourgoin, et al., 2020; Cooren, 2010;  
34 Taylor & Van Every, 2000). This encourages us to not just accept authority as possessed by  
35 privileged individuals, but to look for authority's origin and form: who/what is authoring and  
36 how? The CCO response is that authority is a force-like phenomenon manifest in  
37 communication that shapes the trajectory of practice; it is not an independent variable that  
38 enables and/or constrains action. Authority is an expression that captures the dispersed  
39 practice of who/what decides and directs (i.e., authors) action, including classroom practice.  
40 If authority is about decidability, analyzing authority reveals the organizing logic(s) that  
41 guide any given practice. To associate decidability with either expertise or the roles within a  
42 hierarchical system is to portray authority as residing inside either a person or a position, such  
43 that order and status are the straightforward products of knowledgeability or bureaucratic  
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3 legitimacy. Even when authority looks like the simple deployment of expertise or hierarchical  
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5 position, such as might be assumed when a professor lectures to a class of students, a CCLE  
6  
7 stance argues that it is necessary to understand the performance of authoring. As we  
8  
9 demonstrate below, such performances are far more nuanced than the simple professor/class  
10  
11 dyad suggests because analysts cannot understand the organizational trajectory of a practice  
12  
13 without insight into the complex communicative accomplishments that sustain it (Bencherki,  
14  
15 Matte, & Cooren, 2020; Bourgoin, et al., 2020).  
16  
17

18  
19 In MLE, it is frequently taken for granted that individual faculty exercise their  
20  
21 privilege to decide what content is taught in a specific module (Dean & Forray, 2021).  
22  
23 Deferring to subject matter experts in this way resembles a professional bureaucracy where  
24  
25 decision-making is acceded to subject matter experts, reinforcing a logic of role-based  
26  
27 specialization (Lam, 2000; Mintzberg, 1979). Acknowledging that decidability need not be  
28  
29 fixed in a person or position, however, indicates that locating or placing authority is always  
30  
31 an achievement of communicative practices (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008). CCO thinking proceeds  
32  
33 a step further, arguing that it is not merely the faculty member who decides what is taught;  
34  
35 instead, it is always a confluence of agencies, most of which are largely ‘hidden,’ that decides  
36  
37 such matters (Bencherki et al., 2020). And, if many such agencies operate, there is the  
38  
39 possibility of contestation: a competition for authority in writing the trajectory of practice  
40  
41 (Kuhn, 2008). A combustible mix of faculty, students, stakeholders, ideas, and other elements  
42  
43 can author the conversations that constitute how MLE unfolds in the classroom. To  
44  
45 understand how such agencies conjoin and materialize in management classrooms, CCO  
46  
47 provides us with a new way of viewing how teaching and learning are accomplished.  
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54 Examining authority in MLE, then, is based on the assumption that classroom practice  
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56 is always ‘authored’ and that it is not necessarily educators who get to decide. In other words,  
57  
58 the trajectory of MLE practice is the product of the unfolding text-conversation dynamic, as  
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3 decided and directed by authority. Authority, then, is an emergent claim on action shaped by  
4 multiple interrelating texts that cohere in the continual here and now of conversation. Some  
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8 of these contenders for authority, like autonomous faculty, will be highly visible, while others  
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10 remain obscure without a framework by which analyses can uncover them. The CCO notion  
11  
12 of ventriloquism provides just such a framework.  
13

### 14 **VENTRILOQUISM**

15  
16 Management and organization studies, including research associated with discourse and  
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18 language perspectives, tend to restrict agency to human actors (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, &  
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20 Kärreman, 2019). Scholars associated with the Montréal School, in contrast, argue not merely  
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22 for attending to the nonhuman alongside the human; they assert that all action is produced by  
23  
24 a multiplicity of agencies brought together in the conduct of action. Employing the idea of  
25  
26 ventriloquism, they suggest that communication is the process by which various human and  
27  
28 nonhuman actors make others speak and, in turn, speak through those others:  
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32  
33 The activity that consists of making someone or something say or do something—which is  
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35 what I mean by ventriloquism—can thus be considered coextensive with any conversation,  
36  
37 any discourse, whether we end up ventriloquizing not only policies and organizations, but  
38  
39 also languages, accents, ideologies, speech communities, rules, norms, values, identities,  
40  
41 statuses, etc. (Cooren, 2012: 5).  
42

43 And, further:

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45 If I ventriloquize a language or an accent, it is also this language or accent that ventriloquizes  
46  
47 me. If I invoke a policy or a principle, it is also (my attachment to) this policy or principle that  
48  
49 enjoins me to act in a specific way. If I ventriloquize an ideology, whether consciously or  
50  
51 unconsciously, it is also this ideology that impels me to defend positions to which I feel  
52  
53 attached. The effects of ventriloquism therefore are bidirectional and mark an  
54  
55 oscillation/vacillation (Cooren, 2012: 6).  
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3 Although the multiplicity of agencies must become voiced by humans for them to enter a  
4 conversation, the notion of ventriloquism problematizes who (or what) is talking. What  
5 humans say and do is often the result of other voices speaking through them (Caronia &  
6 Cooren, 2014; Cooren, 2012). If, as argued in the preceding section, organizing is a contest  
7 over which elements get to author the trajectory of a practice, ventriloquism is a valuable  
8 construct for examining how classroom practice unfolds (Basque & Langley, 2018; Cooren,  
9 2020; Fauré, Cooren & Matte, 2019; Fauré, Martine, Milburn & Peters, 2020; Wilhoit &  
10 Kisselburgh, 2019). It problematizes, for example, who is actually speaking when an educator  
11 is addressing students. While it may be the educator's voice students hear, ventriloquism  
12 submits that there may be other agencies making the educator say what they say—some of  
13 these they may be aware of, others they may not.

14  
15 Ventriloquism surfaces memories of ventriloquist acts in vaudeville-style variety  
16 shows, where the ventriloquist makes their dummy 'speak.' While it is the ventriloquist's  
17 voice that is heard, their lips remain (mostly) fixed and unmoving. The audience, in turn, is  
18 drawn to the spectacle of the dummy's lips moving in time to the words spoken by the  
19 ventriloquist. The effect, and the deceit, is that the dummy appears to be speaking, but it is  
20 the ventriloquist's voice that is heard. (The fact that Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy had  
21 a popular ventriloquist show on the radio is a testament to audiences' training to suspend  
22 disbelief and participate in the deceit.) 'Vent' is the name ventriloquists sometimes use to  
23 refer to themselves, and 'figure' is the term they use for their dummies (Fauré et al., 2019).  
24 Ventriloquial investigations of daily organizing aid in detecting sources of authority (vents)  
25 that might otherwise be ignored, generate insight into the tensions arising from across the  
26 array of actors and enable a critique of figures' efforts to speak on behalf of (i.e.,  
27 ventriloquize) others.

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3 Ventriloquism encourages us to recognize and examine the multiple elements (e.g.,  
4 theories, individual/group interests, facts, policies, etc.) expressing themselves in classroom  
5 conversations. Whereas conventional observations would tend to focus on the human actors  
6 and the topics they introduce into such conversations, a ventriloquial sensitivity turns the  
7 analytical lens around, directing attention to who or what is making actors say and do things  
8 in organizing situations (Cooren, 2010, 2020). When we encounter conversations in the  
9 classroom or online, we can begin to ask questions like “just who or what is really speaking  
10 here?” and “who or what is actually being talked about”? (Nathues, Van Vuuren, & Cooren,  
11 2020)

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24 There are two routes here, distinct only analytically. The first is *animation* (Nathues et  
25 al., 2020): the tracing ‘upstream’ of human and nonhuman influencers that provide reasons  
26 for conducting conversations in a particular register. The introduction of the Five Forces  
27 framework could thus be animated by multiple vents and figures representing historical  
28 precedent. To start with, the model has been on course syllabi since it was first proposed.  
29 From its initial airings four decades ago, there has always been an assumed anticipation of  
30 stakeholders’ (e.g., student, colleague, and donor) expectations—for strategy courses to be  
31 perceived as credible, the model must be taught. Moreover, the ready availability of  
32 associated teaching resources for time-strapped instructors (e.g., PowerPoint slides and  
33 activities) already exists, and the model’s utility and strengths are asserted—it appears in  
34 course textbooks (as we illustrate below). In addition, there are the assumed demands of the  
35 mainstream strategic management field to be accounted for—which, for some, Five Forces  
36 has redefined (shown below).

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54 A second route is *mobilization*: the invocation of figures in conversation to make  
55 them speak in particular ways to shape what happens downstream (Nathues et al., 2020). For  
56 instance, mobilizing additional figures by introducing challenges, extensions, and theoretical  
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3 re-framings into the conversation (Grundy, 2006) induces instructors and students to become  
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5 figures themselves: to speak on critics' behalf, to allow Porter's responses to speak through  
6  
7 them, and perhaps to make present the concerns (e.g., social-environmental) that tend to be  
8  
9 ignored in such conversations (Gandhi, Selladurai, & Santhi, 2006). Whether students'  
10  
11 statements are offered as earnest contributions or as Devil's Advocate provocations may be  
12  
13 relevant to the conduct of classroom practice, but the analytical focus would remain on the  
14  
15 interplay of figures competing for authority in a conversation. Figures, then, can be explicit  
16  
17 or direct invocations, but they can also be implicit allusions enfolded in a statement<sup>1</sup>.  
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20  
21 What, then, is the relationship between a CCO vision of authority and ventriloquism?  
22  
23 Ventriloquism directs our attention to processes of communication and helps us unpack the  
24  
25 participants—the vents and figures—that constitute conversation. In turn, it addresses the  
26  
27 trajectory of classroom practice. In recognizing an oscillation between roles (vents speaking  
28  
29 through figures and figures speaking through vents), ventriloquism suggests that authority  
30  
31 within MLE is not a simple matter of a faculty member's intentions deployed in the  
32  
33 classroom. Instead of framing the faculty member as the primary locus of authority,  
34  
35 ventriloquism shows that authority—again, in terms of decidability concerning the trajectory  
36  
37 of classroom practice—is an ongoing achievement, the always-provisional result of many  
38  
39 kinds of agency vying for (or being made to vie for) influence. What gets authored, therefore,  
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41 is not only the classroom conversation but the developing conceptions of 'management',  
42  
43 'organization' and 'work' in both a given classroom and upon the students themselves. This  
44  
45 means that focusing attention on broader structural mechanisms will reveal little about what  
46  
47 actually happens in the classroom, for if we are to understand how content is decided upon  
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49 and taught we need to assert a communicational rendering of MLE, i.e., CCLE.  
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59 <sup>1</sup> Scholars of ventriloquism (e.g., Nathues, van Vuuren, & Cooren, 2020) have developed methodological  
60 guidelines for locating and tracing figures and vents in conversation. Because our interest is in illustrating the value of ventriloquism for MLE, addressing methodological concerns is outside our scope.

## VENTRILOQUIAL AUTHORITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Our CCO rendering of authority presupposes that we cannot *a priori* define who or what performs authority (Bencherki, et al., 2020) in the management classroom. It may be assumed that it is the teacher/educator (Dean & Forray, 2021; Vasilyeva, Robles, Saludadez, Schwägerl, & Castor, 2020), playing an identifiable formal role, who decides what is to be taught and how learning is to be accomplished. However, a CCO lens dictates that we will only be able to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of who/what decides MLE if we examine how teaching and learning unfold as communicational accomplishments.

Ventriloquism enables us to discern the multiple ways authority acts in determining the management curriculum's content and delivery. It highlights how communication in the classroom depends on conversation-text dialectics and directs attention to the figures shaping the progress of practice. Thus, a CCO perspective on authority makes knowable the often hidden moves that constitute MLE, making these visible and, consequently, the subject of our reflections.

To address the question we posed at the beginning of our essay: "How is authority performed in the management classroom?", we now demonstrate through the use of two different illustrations of MLE practice how ventriloquial authority manufactures what educators teach and what students learn. We show how ventriloquial authority emerges in typical classroom interactions. Both illustrations can be seen as examples of animations, as explained in the preceding section, as they demonstrate how 'upstream' agencies influence the trajectory of 'downstream' activity. We argue that such an approach is needed to better understand and address what is amiss in MLE.

Above, we referenced a mainstay of introductory strategy, international business, and marketing education: Michael Porter's Five Forces framework. We now consider two alternative ways that students experience ventriloquial authority during the teaching of

Porter's work, both of which have proved of interest to MLE previously: from textbooks and the use of audio-visual media in the form of a video excerpt accessed from YouTube. The illustrations are necessarily uneven. Our first relates to textbooks and their agency, of which Five Forces is but one of many constructs typically contained within them. The second illustration, in contrast, relates to the showing of a video where Michael Porter speaks about the Five Forces model, so is the sole focus of the task described. Our aim with these illustrations is to show, in different ways, how authority does not lie within a single source but that its performance in the classroom is accomplished by a relational coming together of agencies, most of which remain hidden from both educators and students, and that these agential influencers matter for how MLE practice is realized.

### **Ventriloquial Authority in Textbooks**

#### *The Unfolding Practice of MLE*

The use and role of textbooks in teaching and learning have been a consistent focus of research in MLE (Cameron, Ireland, Lussier, New, & Robbins, 2003; Errington & Bubna-Litic, 2015; Gilbert Jr., 2003; Moss & Gras, 2012; Stambaugh & Quinn Trank, 2010). The range of topics these studies pursue includes how new research areas that have gained traction in the academic literature are integrated into new editions of well-known textbooks (Stambaugh & Quinn Trank, 2010), whether textbooks are ideological and should be considered propaganda (Cameron et al., 2003), and if the use of textbooks limits students' ability to develop and sustain a critical appreciation of the material they encounter (Errington & Bubna-Litic, 2015).

Stambaugh and Quinn Trank (2010) found significant variation regarding if and how new research findings were integrated into future editions of standard textbooks. They highlight that the authors and the publishers (vents and figures) of textbooks valued coherence and consistency in content that the integration of new research themes has the

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2  
3 potential to disrupt. More critically, Errington and Bubna-Litic (2010) see the use of  
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5 textbooks in both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching as encouraging a surface learning  
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7 approach to knowledge, marginalizing alternative views, and advancing an uncritical and  
8  
9 exclusively managerialist view of management education. Cameron et al. (2003) asked four  
10  
11 well-established management textbook authors to respond to set questions about how they  
12  
13 view textbooks and their authoring. All four authors accepted that their works present a  
14  
15 conservative managerial(ist) ideology and that this drives their writing. Only one pushed back  
16  
17 against the idea of textbooks as propaganda; the others appeared far more comfortable with  
18  
19 the notion that “[p]ersuading students to believe in the truth—no matter how propaganda-  
20  
21 like—is still a virtue” (Cameron et al., 2003: 720).  
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26 While insightful, our knowledge and understanding of how textbooks influence and  
27  
28 shape what and how students learn are enhanced when we consider them as ventriloquizing  
29  
30 phenomena. This is not merely a bland observation that authors ventriloquize when they  
31  
32 make theorists and researchers ‘speak’ on textbooks’ pages. Rather, it illustrates how  
33  
34 textbooks have an effect on faculty that extends far beyond their role as mere texts.  
35  
36 Stambaugh and Quinn Trank (2010), for instance, open their article with a quotation that  
37  
38 describes the experience of a newly appointed teaching assistant who, searching for any help  
39  
40 she could find, adopted an advised textbook and instructors’ manual and found that these  
41  
42 texts “defined the field for my students—and for me” (p. 663). From a ventriloquial  
43  
44 perspective, we have a textbook acting authoritatively in authoring conversations about (in  
45  
46 this case) institutional theory; this reinforces our earlier claim that it is not merely faculty  
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48 who authorize content in the management classroom. This example illustrates that while it  
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50 may be the educator who is positioned at the front of the class, speaking while the students  
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52 listen, the textbook makes the educator speak in the way she does.  
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3 One of the authors of this essay is based at an institution that insists that, for each  
4 class that is taught, a key textbook must be identified in the class guide. Such a requirement  
5 can run counter to instructions not to textbook-teach and that teaching should be research-led.  
6  
7 In a ventriloquial sense, the institution is acting as a vent by requiring the identification of a  
8 textbook by the instructor, as the figure, to be included in the class guide. This is because the  
9 educator is being made to do something they may prefer not to. Including an identified  
10 textbook is consequential for how students learn. Aside from the situation Stambaugh and  
11 Quinn Trank (2010) recognized above, when the educator becomes complicit in assuming the  
12 role of the figure, it can make textbook-teaching more likely and research-led teaching less  
13 probable, as the importance of the textbook and the content it contains has been signified as  
14 having special importance for students as it is the ‘key’ text for the module. Moreover, the  
15 requirement to use textbooks—a genre of academic writing prizing broad overviews and  
16 illustrations of direct idea application—is likely to crowd out other forms of academic work  
17 and shape classroom conversation. While the educator may resolve not to textbook-teach,  
18 students as figures for the multiple vents of the institution, the publisher, the textbook and its  
19 mode of representation, the textbook authors, the class guide, and the instructor are pushed by  
20 these interacting vents toward textbook-learning.  
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42 Ventriloquial authority points toward the acknowledgment that potent influences  
43 shape how MLE unfolds. Management textbooks can be misleadingly understood as static  
44 and passive nonhuman actors that only become active when human agents ‘draw upon them’  
45 in their teaching. However, this characterization underplays the agency of such nonhuman  
46 texts. Those involved in MLE need to recognize ventriloquial authority as a key driver of  
47 learning and education, as it is pervasive in the classrooms and online learning environments  
48 that our students inhabit.  
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58 *Classroom Implications*  
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3 The notion of ventriloquism and its associations of vents and figures, or ventriloquists and  
4 dummies, is not intended to denote any derogatory associations. As Bencherki et al. (2020:  
5 89) note, “human interactants are not only ventriloquists, they are also, whether they like it or  
6 not, dummies.” As educators, authors, and researchers, all of us ventriloquise and are the  
7 object of the ventriloquial acts of others. The point is not to try to deny being a vent or a  
8 figure; rather, it is to become reflexively aware (Hibbert, 2021; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015)  
9 that ventriloquism happens both to others *and* ourselves. Educators need to understand when  
10 they are acting as figures of other vents, and when their communication with students  
11 requires them (students) to act as figures for their (educators’) vents. For example, educators  
12 are figures when the textbook is one of many vents, and vents when students are made to  
13 reproduce the material covered in the classroom in their assessments. One benefit of a CCLE  
14 lens is the insight that as educators, we must become more aware of how authority in the  
15 classroom is not exclusively invested in a single individual who is formally expected to lead  
16 the class, but that authority emerges from the conjoining agencies that dynamically assemble  
17 in the classroom afresh each time students, educator, and nonhuman texts converge.

18  
19 So, a ventriloquially aware MLE would seek to address vents and figures in multiple  
20 ways. The removal of ventriloquial acts that are detrimental to student learning (and educator  
21 teaching) is called for. For example, where there is a requirement for a key text for every  
22 class to be identified, that stipulation should be reviewed. Such practices make educators  
23 include things they would not necessarily choose and contribute to students adopting an  
24 uncritical stance towards management education (Errington & Bubna-Litic, 2010). If the  
25 textbook-focused approach continues, educators need to be very explicit with their students  
26 about how they intend to incorporate the textbook into their class. Resisting the passive role  
27 of figure can be difficult, but it is necessary if educators are to develop an active teaching  
28 approach. Faculty should explain to students the shortcomings of an over-reliance on  
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3 textbooks and its mere reproduction in assessments for their development as future managers  
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5 and leaders. It should be made clear to students that textbook content is not neutral: that it  
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7 tends to reinforce managerialist assumptions (Errington & Bubna-Litic, 2015), while failing  
8  
9 to acknowledge that many such assumptions have been challenged and questioned by more  
10  
11 critical approaches. In this sense, resistance to passivity can be imagined not merely as  
12  
13 negation, but by assuming the role of vent who introduces alternative figures into a practice.  
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17 Where textbooks can be useful is as inputs into generative conversations educators  
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19 hold with students, in which the aim is to develop a collective but polysemic understanding of  
20  
21 a topic. This can happen when, for example, an educator draws from textbook content to  
22  
23 present Five Forces and provides an explanation of each force that reproduces how they are  
24  
25 explained in the textbook (e.g., Whittington, Regnér, Angwin, Johnson & Scholes, 2020), but  
26  
27 then enjoins the class to identify the influences (the vents and figures) that are vying to author  
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29 the class's conversation on the issue. Educators could encourage students to engage with the  
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31 model at a deeper level and encourage them to discuss, in groups, questions such as: How  
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33 does the textbook intend Five Forces to be understood? How does it act to achieve this? What  
34  
35 assumptions make the authors present the Five Forces in this way, rather than following  
36  
37 another route? How does this portrayal align with the views on management, organization,  
38  
39 and work expanded elsewhere in the text? What does its depiction of Five Forces tell us about  
40  
41 the textbook and its aims? How does the format of textbook presentation—a consideration of  
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43 hard copy versus electronic format, along with supporting stock photos, tables, and insertion  
44  
45 of evidence from recognizable firms—engage in persuasion? Where do our (the class's)  
46  
47 assumptions about the significance of frameworks and models like the Five Forces come  
48  
49 from? When might these influences on learning conflict with one another? And, more  
50  
51 broadly, considering the ubiquity of textbooks in management learning, do textbooks act in  
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53 opening-up learning, through stimulating generative conversations; or, do they close-off  
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3 learning by presenting content that precludes engagement and dissuades students from  
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5 actively exploring their material?  
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### 7 **Visual Media and Ventriloquial Authority**

#### 8 *The Unfolding Practice of MLE*

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10 Studies that consider the use of visual media in the classroom, especially cases featuring  
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12 notable individuals, have tended to uncritically assign authoritative influence to a single  
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14 person's presence or to the implied power of a particular medium (Fee and Budde-Sung,  
15  
16 2014; O'Connell, McCarthy and Hall, 2004; Tejeda, 2008). In contrast to this, more critical  
17  
18 considerations have been offered of how visual media exert influence over MLE, often in  
19  
20 ways that are easy to pass over (Ayikoru & Park, 2019; Bell, Panayiotou & Sayers, 2019;  
21  
22 O'Doherty, 2020). For example, Ayikoru and Park (2019) are concerned with critically  
23  
24 assessing the role of documentary films in undergraduate management education. They assert  
25  
26 that one of the limitations of this kind of approach is that it can encourage students to adopt a  
27  
28 passive mode of reception where they fail to engage critically with the content they are  
29  
30 exposed to (Ayikoru & Park, 2019: 417). O'Doherty's (2020) focus is "the Leviathan of  
31  
32 rationality" and he uses film to develop creativity and imagination among students. He finds  
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34 that traditionally film use has been problematic and has been restricted to dogmatic  
35  
36 applications "in rather superficial ways" (O'Doherty, 2020: 368).  
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45 However, it is Bell et al's. (2019) examination of TED (Technology, Entertainment,  
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47 Design) talks that resonates closest with our illustration below. Bell and colleagues offer a  
48  
49 fine critique of TED talks and how students receive them. They note that they can encourage  
50  
51 a surface learning approach among students who are spoon-fed information entertainingly by  
52  
53 talks that are more "enthusiastic sales pitches" than "critical assessments" (Bell et al., 2019:  
54  
55 555). Layering a ventriloquial understanding on Bell et al's. (2019: 557) work would, for  
56  
57 instance, reveal how the TED producers' notion of 'naturalness' in presentation style and the  
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3 staged construction of authenticity make the speakers act and talk in ways that are intended to  
4 demonstrate these characteristics to their audiences. Bell et al. (2019: 559) expose how TED  
5 talks are anchored in the particular onto-epistemological assumptions of “positivist,  
6 experimental research, primarily in behavioral neuroscience and behavioral and evolutionary  
7 psychology” while “working to silence alternative ways of producing knowledge”. A  
8 ventriloquial perspective would frame these constructs as vents that make others speak and  
9 act in ways they may not choose. The students who passively watch TED talks, in part for  
10 their entertainment value, become figures accepting the partial accounts of knowledge TED  
11 talks promulgate. In the illustration below, we contrast how the students experienced TED  
12 talks with how such circumstances can be recognized and their ventriloquial effects exposed  
13 and used as a basis for class discussion.

14  
15 We explicate an activity that one of the authors has undertaken with their MBA  
16 strategy class when they played a video, sourced from YouTube, to accompany a lecture on  
17 industry analysis: “The Five Competitive Forces that Shape Strategy: An Interview with  
18 Michael E. Porter, Professor Harvard University”. We reproduce specific excerpts from the  
19 session that match our aim to articulate how ventriloquial authority is performed in MLE.

20  
21 Following the CCLE tenet of understanding how authority emerges through  
22 ventriloquism, Porter was introduced as belonging to the industrial organization school of  
23 thought, a subfield of economics, which explores the structural reasons why some industries  
24 are more profitable than others. Therefore, it was explained that his work should be viewed  
25 and interpreted with attention to how the assumptions of industrial organization likely shaped  
26 the model’s foundations. This is because industrial organization is also a vent that will have  
27 determined Porter’s (as the figure, or ‘dummy’) belief that as external environments exist  
28 separately to the firms that act within them, it would be productive for a firm considering  
29 entry into a market to establish the forces that have shaped its configuration. The class was  
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3 then told that the remainder of the session would focus on the Five Forces framework and  
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5 that Porter developed it to determine the attractiveness of an industry environment for the  
6  
7 ‘average’ competitor within it. A 13-minute video was shown  
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9  
10 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYF2\\_FBCvXw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYF2_FBCvXw)) where students could see and hear  
11  
12 Porter talking about the Five Forces framework<sup>2</sup>. As an aside, the exercise provides two  
13  
14 illustrations of the conversation-text dialectic (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). First, the video  
15  
16 shows human actors in conversation about texts: the Five Forces framework and a  
17  
18 forthcoming article, amongst others. And second, when the educator stops the video to speak  
19  
20 with the class, this conversation revolves around the Five Forces text, the video medium,  
21  
22 strategy, academia, consultancy work and many more figures and vents.  
23  
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25

26 We have become so accustomed to authority claims that they can often be missed, so  
27  
28 having pressed the play button, the video is immediately stopped, and it is pointed out to the  
29  
30 students that the video is produced by Harvard Business Publishing (another vent). “Why is  
31  
32 this important to know?” the class is asked. The response is that Harvard Business Publishing  
33  
34 publishes much of Porter’s work, no doubt effecting its content, so what is being watched is  
35  
36 an academic publisher’s video production of one of its own authors. The video is subtitled  
37  
38 “An interview with...”. The class is asked to consider what kind of ‘interview’ it will  
39  
40 witness. The interviewer introduces himself as Tom Stewart, Editor and Managing Director  
41  
42 of the *Harvard Business Review* at the time, a journal that has published close to 40 single  
43  
44 and co-authored articles Porter has written; five of his articles have been front cover stories.  
45  
46 The class is asked if it thinks this information is important, and whether it feels it will  
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48 influence how the ‘interview’ unfolds. One student, at this point, commented that “the  
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50 *Harvard Business Review* really loves Michael Porter.”  
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58 <sup>2</sup> The video was uploaded to YouTube in November 2008 and, as of 8.00am on November 18th 2021, YouTube  
59 shows it has been viewed 2,498,891 times. It is reasonable to assume that the majority of these viewings are  
60 academic-related: either in-class as will be discussed here, or, by students wishing to learn more about Professor  
Michael Porter and the Five Forces framework.

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2  
3 Both Tom Stewart (TS) and Michael Porter (MP) are dressed formally in suits, shirts  
4 and ties. They sit facing each other but with their chairs turned toward the camera. Behind  
5 them is a bookcase containing hardback volumes, on one shelf is what appears to be a  
6 certificate or commendation of some sort. Bodies, attire and staging are additional figures,  
7 perhaps implicit, that support the claim to authoritativeness of the material presented. The  
8 vents acting are a confluence of authority markers, that dictate how the serious academic and  
9 the serious academic publisher must present themselves. It appears to work, as students are  
10 asked what they feel the setting is intended to convey. Responses include adjectives like  
11 “professional,” “formal” and “clever.” The class is only 14 seconds into the interview at this  
12 point, but already students have been invited to think in a much deeper way about how the  
13 communicational moves, the (explicit and implicit) authority claims, the vents and figures,  
14 are working to affect a setting and present a conversational trajectory—what is taught and  
15 learned.

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33 TS points out that MP conceived of the framework “nearly three decades ago” (from  
34 2008, when the video was produced) and describes Five Forces as “the most extensively  
35 used, both in management scholarship and management practice, of any strategy framework  
36 and it has changed the definition of strategy in a lot of ways” (5:41). The video is stopped  
37 again and the instructor asks students about the implications of the final part of the statement;  
38 that Five Forces has changed the definition of strategy in many ways. Such a statement  
39 demonstrates the power of authority and authoring. What TS is claiming here is that the vent,  
40 Five Forces, has become so powerful as to define what strategy means for faculty, the figures,  
41 who, in turn, as vents, communicate this definition of strategy to generations of students  
42 (figures). This illustrates several key points; authority does not lie within a single source, but  
43 is performed when humans (faculty, students) and nonhumans (Five Forces text, industrial  
44 organization, Harvard Business Publishing) interrelate to the author and authorize

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3 conversations. That such conversations can change the definition of topics such as strategy  
4  
5 demonstrates how communication constitutes, in this case, an academic field. TS closes the  
6  
7 ‘interview’ by saying “the new article is just fabulous” and thanks MP (12:54).  
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### 10 *Classroom Implications*

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12 In contrast with how textbooks are drawn upon in classroom teaching, the recourse to the use  
13  
14 of visual media can sometimes result in educators (in addition to students [Ayikoru & Partk,  
15  
16 2019; Bell et al., 2019]) assuming passive roles while students watch the video, physically  
17  
18 removing themselves from students’ eyeline while it is playing. What this does is hand over  
19  
20 responsibility for the class to the video medium. When the video is allowed to play through  
21  
22 until the end, students witness a monologue, or dialogue in our illustration, with which they  
23  
24 are not involved. The conversational trajectory in such instances is monopolized by the video  
25  
26 (Bell et al., 2019). By the educator stopping the video and interjecting to highlight a key point  
27  
28 or contentious remark and inviting students to comment on and discuss them, students  
29  
30 become part of a generative conversation. When a student commented (“the *Harvard*  
31  
32 *Business Review* really loves Michael Porter”) on Harvard Business Publishing’s relationship  
33  
34 with Michael Porter, some of the authority that relationship suggests was reduced. When  
35  
36 students discussed the comment that Five Forces has in some way redefined strategy, this  
37  
38 claim was not accepted unquestioningly but critiqued and challenged. Stopping the video for  
39  
40 discussion means that the class engages in dialogue and becomes active in its own learning  
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42 (Ayikoru & Park, 2019; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015).  
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50 Previous research (Ayikoru & Park, 2019; Bell et al., 2019; O’Doherty, 2020) has  
51  
52 highlighted some of the shortcomings of visual media. This means that students need help to  
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54 resist the clear temptation to relate to films and videos shown in class in the same way they  
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56 watch films and videos as entertainment. Highlighting that the messages they are witnessing  
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58 are authored, and therefore authorized, helps reveal how authority is performed in MLE. It  
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3 should be explained to students that authority can be neither absolute nor solitary.  
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6 Consequently, when students watch and listen to someone speaking, there is much happening  
7  
8 around and behind that person that makes a difference to what they hear and see. Students  
9  
10 should be encouraged to think through and debate who and what is making actors, as figures,  
11  
12 speak in the way that they are. This is not easily done, of course, which is why exercises like  
13  
14 those outlined above are so important: They allow students to focus on a well-known concept  
15  
16 and to dissect what is happening and how influence is being brought to bear.  
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19  
20 Video and film are visual media (Bell et al., 2019), so the symbolic and sensory  
21  
22 communicative moves they project contribute to and are consequential for how conversations  
23  
24 become authored. In the illustration, the formal attire of TS and MP and their seating in front  
25  
26 of a full bookcase act as forms of impression management and are designed to enhance the  
27  
28 legitimacy and importance of the messages they convey. Prior to showing such videos,  
29  
30 educators may flag up these to prepare students for what they will encounter, highlighting  
31  
32 how visual moves are often deliberately chosen for how they support the aims of the speaker.  
33  
34 We have all become accustomed to online meetings and online teaching with full bookcases  
35  
36 proudly displayed behind the faculty member. Educators can explain to students that the  
37  
38 language of business typically includes sensory elements, such as physical appearance and  
39  
40 the business suit, which themselves are open to criticism. Such norms favor certain  
41  
42 conventions and exclude others, often resulting in those who look, appear and sound outside  
43  
44 of this orthodoxy having themselves and their input marginalized. What students understand  
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46 by management, organization and work is often the product of their sensory perceptions  
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48 (Ashcraft, et al., 2009) as much as what occurs during formal learning.  
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#### 54 **CALL TO ACTION**

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56 In this essay we have advocated for an appreciation that communication is constitutive of  
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58 MLE, that it is not just a medium for the transmission of pre-existing ideas. This has led us to  
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3 argue for a CCLE understanding of how learning and education relationally unfold. We have  
4  
5 aimed to articulate how teaching and learning are interactive classroom accomplishments and  
6  
7 argue that exposition, inquiry, reflection and analysis are always communicational  
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9  
10 phenomena. Therefore, it places communication at the forefront of management education  
11  
12 and asserts how a CCLE approach can help to reveal the often hidden force-like elements that  
13  
14 make a difference to how education is accomplished and learning takes place. CCLE  
15  
16 reorients attention from the convention of treating pedagogical experiences as epiphenomenal  
17  
18 towards a central focus on classroom interactions—our flat ontology—that emerge and are  
19  
20 experienced by educators and students. Centering interactions highlights the need for  
21  
22 reflexivity, so that we become more aware and conscious of what and who is making us  
23  
24 speak and act in the ways that we do (Hibbert, 2021; Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015). A  
25  
26 ventriloquial sensitivity is needed that results in a change to how we communicate learning  
27  
28 and education into existence. Table 1 sets out further how some of the core principles of CCO  
29  
30 motivate us to question existing MLE assumptions and outline what changes to teaching and  
31  
32 learning a constitutive understanding of communication encourages us to progress. We also  
33  
34 appreciate that our students will transition into the workplace and will become managers and  
35  
36 leaders, so we propose some benefits that students can accrue once they become more aware  
37  
38 of communication's power to produce, not just express, transmit, or represent.  
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47 Insert Table 1 about here  
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51 A CCLE approach to understanding what happens in the classroom enables students  
52  
53 to become more questioning and less accepting of corporate actions. While students are often  
54  
55 enjoined to become better social and corporate citizens and to exercise their voice in  
56  
57 important debates (Ayikoru & Park, 2019), finding the best 'way in' to ask questions is not  
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3 easy and requires practice. Understanding communication's constitutive quality, however,  
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5 can benefit students by equipping them with a critical outlook. There is always more  
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7 happening than is immediately observable and having some understanding of what to listen  
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9 out for (e.g., "who is speaking *and* who or what is making them speak in the way that they  
10  
11 do?"), can help them become more critically engaged in their roles. We hope that our  
12  
13 students will become the responsible managers and leaders of the future, so it important that  
14  
15 as well as questioning of others, there is reflexive questioning of the self (Hibbert, Callagher,  
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17 Siedlok, Windahl & Kim, 2019). We are both vents and figures simultaneously (Bourgoin et  
18  
19 al., 2020), so students and educators need to be self-aware and reflexive enough to  
20  
21 understand who or what is speaking even when their own voices are heard.  
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26 Authority has been situated as fundamental to how tasks get done (Barley, 1996;  
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28 Barnard, 1938, Grimes, 1978; Weber, 1978), but our CCLE position goes further and locates  
29  
30 it as a fundamentally communicational achievement (Bourgoin et al., 2020). This means that  
31  
32 authority is conceptualized as the ability to author conversations. Classroom conversations  
33  
34 are authored and their authoring is always a relational occurrence where multiple agents vie  
35  
36 to author the trajectory of talk. A CCLE understanding enables us to move away from the  
37  
38 assumption that single sources of authority (the educator) are the sole authors of what  
39  
40 happens in the classroom. Instead, authoring conversations is seen as a complex and  
41  
42 contentious undertaking where often hidden agencies compete to exert influence. Our  
43  
44 illustrations demonstrated this in two different ways. That textbooks are predominantly  
45  
46 managerialist in tone (Errington & Bubna-Litic, 2010) and convey a propaganda type quality  
47  
48 (Cameron, et al., 2003) has been highlighted previously. Still, ventriloquism enables  
49  
50 educators to tease out with students how textbooks seek to dominate classroom conversations  
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52 and how, through their deployment, particular notions of management and managerial  
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54 activity are put into effect and are sustained. The visual media illustration enhanced existing  
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3 work (Ayikoru & Park, 2019; Bell, et al., 2019; O’Doherty, 2020) by showing how authored  
4 conversational directions of travel are established when students watch a film or video. The  
5 importance of orchestrating moments when the preferred trajectory of a film can be  
6 interrupted and questioned was demonstrated, this avoids the danger of passive student  
7 learning (and passive educator teaching) and results in students’ voices becoming active in  
8 the learning process.  
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12 A ventriloquial mindset, identifying who or what is making others speak or do things  
13 they may not otherwise do, enables the active participation of students in their learning. It  
14 facilitates the development of the kind of generative conversations needed for students to  
15 become engaged learners. They not only feel permitted to question deeply held truths (or  
16 propaganda), but they see it as a necessary part of a critical (in the broadest terms)  
17 management education. As discussed above, though, this is not easy for students to do. They  
18 need help to develop an awareness about authority and communication that equips them with  
19 the wherewithal to ask probing questions and participate in crafting their own learning. The  
20 notions of management, business, organization and work they are confronted with in the  
21 classroom should be the starting points for them, through dialogue, to compose their own  
22 understanding of these. The educator in the classroom then becomes an additional source of  
23 authoring, one who, through their research-led knowledge, helps students to develop their  
24 comprehension.  
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29 While something may be amiss in MLE, there is also great hope for what is possible.  
30 Education always has and always will be achieved by communication. This simple truism  
31 appeared in danger of being forgotten as institutions, technologies, systems, structures and  
32 ideologies seemingly became the focus of concern, with communication seen merely as a  
33 way of expressing these. In this essay we have sought to re-center communication as  
34 paramount to all that happens in our classrooms. We have illustrated the practical  
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3 implications of CCO's flat ontology and encourage educators to adopt our constitutive view  
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5 of communication which, we believe, is better equipped to (a) enable educators to develop an  
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7 understanding of communication as the means by which MLE is achieved; b) ensure  
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9 educators realize how in their teaching they communicate authority, and therefore legitimacy  
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11 and importance; and (c) help students become more knowledgeable, questioning and  
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13 critically aware managers and leaders when they move into their work contexts.  
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**TABLE 1**  
**CCLE Impact on Management Teaching and Learning**

<b>CCLE principles</b>	<b>Changes to teaching and learning</b>	<b>Workplace benefits</b>
<p>No subject within the MLE curriculum should be taught with reference to only one dominant “key” text. Students need to be made aware that legitimate, alternative views exist on all subjects we teach.</p>	<p>Educators should cease any over-reliance on a single or a narrow range of teaching sources. Student learning should encompass alternative and competing perspectives. Where a dominant view exists in a body of literature, students should be made aware that alternative ideas will have been marginalized for that dominant view to emerge and take hold. Students need to expect and be comfortable with multiplicity in the production of authority, as this closely resembles their fluid work environments.</p>	<p>Students, as future managers, should be alert to the dominant ideas that are advanced as if no alternatives need to be considered. The workplace should be viewed as a space where competing ideas are authored. Seeking out different viewpoints on a topic should be commonplace and seen as an indicator of thoughtful management.</p>
<p>Students encounter a plethora of texts during their MLE, in the form of books, book chapters, journal articles, frameworks, models, theories, blogs, etc. These are bidirectional ‘vents’ in the ventriloquial sense. Their authors have written them in certain ways as a result of the influence of multiple other participating vents. When authors act as vents, they make figures (educators) say and do things.</p>	<p>When encountering texts, students rarely appreciate how they become part of an ongoing flow of communication that materializes at a particular moment in time in the classroom. Understanding some of the ventriloquial forces that have converged in the classroom should help them understand how networks of influence exert authority, determining what is taught and how they learn.</p> <p>Students come to understand management as involving more than simple control and, instead, develop a sensitivity to the shaping effects of ventriloquism in communication.</p>	<p>In a managerial role, the notion of ventriloquism can equip (former) students with the necessary conceptual knowledge to better understand how dominant ideas take form and are sustained. Managers cannot stop ventriloquizing, but they can become more aware of how their own ventriloquial acts are formed and how they ventriloquize others.</p> <p>As managers, students will have a sensitivity to the animation and mobilization of figures/vents in organizing and will recognize that authority equals neither person nor position, but is the result of</p>

		communicative practices that require careful and close attention.
<p>MLE is replete with the competing agendas advanced by authors, journals, publishers, schools, alumni, academic societies, potential employers, donors, etc., which inevitably influence the student learning experience. Students should understand that curriculum choices are not value-free and that decisions about what to teach and what not to teach represent ideological choices.</p>	<p>Students can be made aware of the agendas at play in the classroom quite readily. Different texts represent different outlooks on a subject/topic. Appreciating this can serve as a useful way for students to discern the different agendas authors, journals and publishers seek to advance. This can convey to students that not all academic articles are of the same hue. More generally, students can learn to identify how particular figures and vents are introduced into and excluded from decisional interaction.</p>	<p>Different organizational, departmental, team, and external stakeholder agendas are a constant presence in management practice. Figures/vents that carry particular models of rationality and responsibility are likewise common. Equipping students with the knowledge that authority (as decidability) is the ongoing product of the interplay of these figures/vents can sensitize them to the potential to (re)shape organizational action. The competent manager will need to manage the inclusion and exclusion of figures and vents, which is a vital skill in the (re)creation of authority.</p>
<p>Like all social experiences, MLE is suffused with ventriloquial activity: when a ‘vent’ speaks through a ‘figure’. Educators have a responsibility to help students understand why and when this happens and the effects ventriloquism produces.</p>	<p>Ventriloquial communication can occur through many forms: when the inexperienced educator over-relies on the textbook or when an idea, concept, framework, or theory ‘speaks’ during a lecture, for example. Knowing this obliges the educator to engage critically with the content they teach. Educators do not want to act as mere ‘figures’, or worse, as ‘dummies’, as the mouthpieces for some distant ‘vent’ or ventriloquist.</p> <p>Classroom activities provide opportunities for students to perform decision-making activities as both vents and figures, enabling</p>	<p>As practicing managers, students will need to develop the ability to recognize when a figure speaks the vent’s words. When “the report says”, “the policy dictates”, “the figure shows”, “the rule states”, etc., it is the vent speaking through the mouthpiece of a figure. Students need to develop the necessary appreciation of communication’s constitutive quality to discern when the ‘vent’ speaking is detrimental to effective, moral organizing and where more critical scrutiny is called for.</p> <p>Recognition of decision-making as a site of ventriloquial practice suggests possibilities for the bridging, (de)coupling, and resisting</p>

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	them to become reflexively aware of how ventriloquial forces shape MLE practices.	of figures/vents participation in everyday organizing.
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Peer Review Proof – Not Final Version

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