

# Triologue in academic institutions

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The document is meant to be used as documentation in conferences and in client work and be a subject of continual revision.

## PREFACE: FROM TEACHING TO LEARNING IN ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS – REFLECTIONS ON THE PARADIGM SHIFT

In this paper, we demonstrate how Triologue has been applied in academic institutions to promote self-awareness, better communication and teamwork. We also see that some institutions use the model of Red, Blue and Green as a way of creating a space more open for different perspectives in a way that promotes learning, knowledge and innovation – both for individuals and teams. One of the institutions described in the paper, IÉSEG in Lille, France, looks upon it as a way of training students for their future challenges of working in global teams.

The emerging practice that we see in these academic institutions is an internalisation of a practice that businesses have been applying for almost 40 years. “This is how they do it out in the ‘real world’ – as one of my academic colleagues has expressed it. In the OD (organizational development) practice, there are some major ideas that, after they were tried out, have been presented in different, pivotal publications. In relation to the paradigm shift from teaching to learning, there are some major ideas from the OD tradition that are central. In my opinion, there are three major influences in history dating back to the period from 1980 to 1990:

1. The literature on organisational culture that emerged at the beginning of the 80-ies, focused on how values and models rule in the language and collective mind-sets in organisations (Schein). There are implicit and unconscious levels that can only be seen and understood through dialogues and external perspectives.
2. The dialogue practice that promotes learning organisations (Argyris & Schön) focuses on awareness of implicit understanding and group discourses and dialogues in order to see and understand.
3. The systemic perspective added an understanding of complex systems where mental models interacted with the real world. Handbooks like “The 5<sup>th</sup> discipline” (Senge) become standard literature in change management in the 90-ies. Still, there was a strong focus on people dialoguing in groups in order to see more than what they could see alone.

New technologies and the Internet, the standardisation of academic degrees, more and more free access to information and massive online open courses (MOOCs) – have led us into a situation where the university building is less central as a place where teaching and learning take place. Learning for individuals and groups can position themselves anywhere in new institutional contexts. Global Learning Larvik (GLL) established in 2015 is a physical and mental place without professors or

academic staff. GLL offers supervision on learning, career guidance and blended learning in different ways in cooperation with different academic institutions worldwide. The first MOOC at GLL took place in the fall of 2015, during which 15 persons followed MIT's introduction to "Theory U – from Ego to Eco" by Otto Scharmer. We are now in processes where we search for ways of applying Red, Blue and Green for both local and virtual learning spaces, such as GLL.

It will be exciting to see where this leads us.

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## INTRODUCTION – TRIALOGUE

We are all different in the way we communicate, interact with others and learn. Trialogue is a training and development concept that helps people to get to know themselves and each other better in this regard. It also provides groups with a shared vocabulary and mental models in order to discuss and use diversity in the best possible way.

The tool consists of a psychological, ISO-certified questionnaire applied in an engaging workshop form. It can be used for groups from 9 to 200 and more; the basic workshop lasts between 1 and 1.5 hours.

The model behind the tool is based on categorization of various preferences for communication, interaction and learning into three preferences labelled Red (people-orientation, feelings, community), Blue (facts, details, logic), and Green (big picture, future-orientation, new ideas). These three preferences reflect how we differ in the ways we perceive the reality, act upon it and influence others.

It is also relevant to look upon the Red, Blue and Green as different learning and teaching styles. For example, the students high on Red may prefer information conveyed orally, group work, and value teacher's consideration and personal engagement; those high on Blue will appreciate clear and detailed curriculum, access to resources and facts-checking; while the Green may value originality of the taught material, individual learning and how the knowledge they acquire applies to their entire studying career.

Furthermore, the content describing the Red, Blue, and Green categories originally emerged when we searched for communication forms that could lead to a behavioural change. They are therefore relevant as means for creating a real, behavioural change and are now employed in workshops, where the participants develop a new, good interaction practice together – changing the way in which they behave.

And, learning is about behavioural change. Thus, good teaching is about conveying information and setting up context in order to promote good learning processes for students. For these reasons, Trialogue is relevant for academic institutions that wish to provide best teaching for their students as well as create an empowering learning culture, where they can *learn to learn* from each other, together.

## BACKGROUND

### Paradigm shift in schools and academic institutions

In academic institutions, there has been a dilemma present between the focus on teaching vs. learning. Teaching involves professors and tutors who convey expert information to the illiterate. Learning focuses on students and on how they themselves can grow their competencies. The teacher is in power when gives his expertise. The student is in power when one asks the following questions: “What do I already know? What do I need?, and, What is my best way of learning?”

A shift from teaching to learning implies a shift in the power balance, and for this reason, it is a radical cultural change for many academic institutions. Such changes need to be worked with systematically in order to succeed. Professors today have been recruited due to their research activities. Facilitating learning among students is rarely a career promoting activity.

### Organizations are more change-oriented

The business context, and thus also the competencies sought after in the graduates, have changed in many ways since the World War II. Until the early 70-ies, everything was growing in predictable ways in the western world. Following the oil-crisis, however, change management become a critical competence. Capability for reading the market opportunities, followed by the ability to shift production and service delivery strategies, decided if businesses would live or die. The economic growth moved from classic production to services, and knowledge management become a central element in changing business. Social interaction and problem solving become more critical in order to master the new growth areas, especially those linked to innovation and change.

In order to be a competent worker today, one needs to bring to the table explicit knowledge from established professional disciplines. However, at the same time, this knowledge needs to be integrated in the business processes specific for each company. Change processes cannot be managed by new ideas coming from the outside alone but need to be built up in prolongation of each instruction's/organization's history. Challenges for individual carriers of knowledge will, for example, be: the ability to understand organizational/institutional history, being able to read implicit and tacit knowledge in organisational contexts, involving and communicating with stakeholders, and integrating their knowledge and values in new solutions.

For academic institutions it is important to design student learning that fosters student's capabilities relevant for these context.

### Technological changes concerning access to explicit knowledge

How to get access to the explicit knowledge?

Traditionally students are taught at the universities where professors teach explicit knowledge based upon their in-depth academic knowledge. This is a transfer of knowledge taking place between generations.

Today, the Internet and library search engines have removed the need for professionals to carry voluminous, updated and explicit knowledge in their long-term memory. Today, we see that what is important is the capability of finding and processing relevant and high quality information through search engines and the Internet. Moreover, in our view, it is the capability of being an 'intellectual broker' in interdisciplinary social contexts that is the competence most critical to address at universities today.

In sum, we see a power shift from teachers to students, from the explicit knowledge to managing intellectual knowledge in social contexts for change. Trialogue as a concept has many elements that can contribute to the desired changes in academic institutions and students learning culture.

We will now present how the concept has been used and could be used in academic contexts. A conceptual presentation will be followed with case studies and client-references.

## APPLICATION OF TRIALOGUE IN ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

### With the staff

Triologue is often used in workshops where one gathers employees from across all levels of the organisation.

At the Sami University College in Kautokeino, we used Trialogue in a two-day workshop to create a positive climate for open and sincere discussion. During the workshop, we grouped the participants in Red, Blue and Green groups in order to reinforce diversified perspectives. At the end, we returned to the more practical projects relevant for the institution's reality, but continuing with the positive climate for open discussions where Red, Blue and Green perspectives were one out of many ways of perceiving challenges and solutions. This application is parallel to what we see in non-academic institutions.

### In teaching

Red, Blue and Green are different ways of teaching and learning, and both teachers and students may vary in their preferences in this regard. Teachers may change their styles in different ways in order to create an alignment and fit for different students.

The use of various styles have also been looked upon as a way of strengthening the learning process by using different modalities. In an international teaching conference in Finland, in 2013, we asked teachers, who participated in a Trialogue workshop we led, to describe the typical teaching styles, which could correspond with Red, Blue and Green. The results and summary of that exercise is now a part of Trialogue training material, relating the language of Red, Blue and Green to various teaching techniques, modalities, materials and approaches. Following the classic Trialogue workshop, this material makes it easier for the teachers to:

- Reflect upon their own teaching style and methods.
- Prepare materials and teaching scenarios integrating elements of Red, Blue and Green, thus satisfying the needs of a larger body of students. For example, a lecture with short, engaging questions and short discussion between students (Red), clear PowerPoints with graphs and facts (Blue), and vision and reference to the big picture where the conveyed knowledge fits in.
- Using Red, Blue and Green to set up project groups with students in an optimal way.
- Discover the various needs of individual students more easily.
- After participating in the Trialogue-workshop, both students and teacher know the language of Red, Blue and Green, which allows them to communicate more precisely about what should be the best framework for the student's learning and development (e.g. "You're quite Green and Blue, do you need more individual projects and less guidance from the teacher?")

- They also know each other better and can constructively discuss the differences between them (e.g. “you’re quite Green and I’m mostly Red and Blue – what consequences will it have for us?”)

## Use in student groups

The students themselves can and will use their knowledge about Red, Blue, and Green and the learning points from the workshop to improve group work:

- assign themselves different roles and make a relevant division of labour
- create a self-managed groups by using the Red, Blue and Green language to manage how they work at a given time (“we need to get more Blue now, the deadline’s approaching”, “we all need to use our Red sides more when we meet, and listen to each other”, etc.)
- increase students’ understanding that group work has different phases characterized by different contributions from different colours; it also helps the group to move smoother from phase to phase
- acknowledge each other’s differences; acknowledgement is one of the most important building blocks of all kind of team work
- reflect on a meta-level about how they cooperate

## Institutional alignment concerning increased focus on learning culture

One of the major learning points concerning experiences with large change processes is the need for top management’s commitment and organizational alignment. Among our academic clients, we see large differences concerning this institutional grounding. We find examples of award winning student programs evolved over many years where Trialogue is pivotal in learning processes. But the program emerged as pedagogical project for the people involved with little institutional interest. Exchange of learning practices among departments seems to be rare in academic institutions.

On the other hand, the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Oslo had a thorough discussion upfront with the entirety of the academic staff about how they could make radical change in the learning culture among students. Following, the staff took part full time in two-day workshop, in the beginning of the semester, with the first-year students participating, among other activities, in the Trialogue workshops. They learnt together about Red, Blue and Green, discussed implications for learning culture among students and the interaction between teachers and students. During these two days, accountability and expectations for learning were discussed and clarified. During these days, discussion may rise concerning expectations for self-management, participation in group-work, learning from others – including learning from others having a different learning style (“learning to learn”).

Such a shared process implies a power change in between teachers and students. It does not change the power of expertise, but it clarifies new reciprocal roles in a way that facilitates learning processes among students.

Another of our partners that also have made a major institutional alignment relevant for the use of Trialogue among students is the IÉSEG School of Management, part of the Catholic University in Lille, France.

At the IÉSEG, a growing number of students have been recruited globally. Traditional training of foreign students to accommodate to local teaching culture was the model and approach the institution recognized needed to be challenged when the percentage of students from foreign countries increased rapidly (there are currently 1900 international students from 68 countries).

IÉSEG started a program for 500 students, both foreign students and locals, to manage diversity in learning teams in the autumn of 2012. This was further developed in 2014 and now involves over 800 students at the Bachelor's level. In September 2015, IÉSEG announced the creation of a « People and Intercultural Competences » pole which marks another important step in the school's development towards becoming not only international but consciously intercultural.

IÉSEG's mission is to prepare students to become complete and international managers who initiate change, and contribute to the development of responsible, innovative and enlightened organizations. IÉSEG is internationally oriented and highly rigorous, with a strong commitment to social responsibility.

This mission is rooted in the history of the School, which since its creation has always highlighted the necessity of giving students in-depth, multi-disciplinary knowledge and operational know-how combined with a strategic vision.

It stresses the international orientation of the School, which has become a truly multicultural community of students, faculty and administrative staff. Working in such a mix of cultures adds an important dimension to the School's education project, and IÉSEG is a business school where all students actually receive training in an international and multicultural environment and in an explicit way.

The culture of IÉSEG illustrates its passion for progress. The school strives to identify and develop the true potential of each student and it is proud of this iconoclastic approach to management studies which, since the beginning, has tried to transmit the core values of respect, tolerance and responsibility in the students.

(A case study outlining where Trialogue had been positioned in the whole students development program is presented in the next section.)

## Learning Culture

When the concepts of Red, Blue and Green emerged in mid-90's, there were significantly influenced by the theories of learnings styles and communication models. The Red, Blue and Green model has a similar trilemma structure that you find in the VAK-model: Visual (Green), Auditive (Red) and Kinaesthetic (Blue). The original VAK concepts were first developed by psychologists and children teaching specialists such as Fernald, Keller, Orton, Gillingham, Stillman, and Montessori, beginning in the 1920's.

The VAK theory is now one of the preferred models of the accelerated learning community because its principles and benefits extend to all types of learning and development, far beyond its early applications. There are other learning style models in the academic world and in the market. Howard Gardner's model of 7 – 8 intelligences is among the most elaborated concerning the number of different styles.

However, even though there are differences in the learning style concepts, there are some shared assumptions important for a good learning culture:

students differ between each other in what is the most effective way of learning for them

students aware of their preferences can use this at best and when needed

however, in order to deepen the learning and increase their flexibility, it is important that they train in the application of the other than their preferred styles

In accelerated learning programs, students are trained in different ways of learning based upon different style concepts. Applying the individual's most preferred style in the project work and learning, with more than one students involved, implies that he/she will contribute better, will be seen as more competent and probably will receive more positive feedback. This fosters a positive learning environment.

Playing with your strengths in teamwork leads to higher success for the whole team, both in task accomplishment as well as at the group level where everyone feels integrated in a positive way with their role contribution.

Triologue as a concept has elements that are clearly in line with these ideals. In addition, when teachers run Triologue workshops with student groups and focus upon teamwork these values and ideals easily evolve. At the end of the seminar, when we ask participants about learning moments, these ideals often seem to become a norm for social interaction and group behavior. In such a way, the Triologue session has the precise normative conclusions considering the learning culture among students. The Triologue workshops create positive experiences for the individuals and this strengthens this normative effect.

## Reinforcement of sharing

Students often experience a competitive attitude at the universities for various and obvious reasons. But, learning and problem solving together needs a collaborative *attitude of sharing*. Hiding information and not sharing it is not a positive contribution to learning processes – nor is it a wanted quality later on in work life contexts.

In the Triologue workshops, we see that positive reinforcement of sharing happens because of uncertainty linked to *not-knowing*. This happens three times during a typical Triologue workshop. Application of learning theory to explain the increased dialogue curiosity and sharing leads to the following descriptions of the processes:

The *first* uncertainty emerges when the participants are asked to fill out the Triologue questionnaire and do not know what results will they get, nor understand the meaning of the three colour categories. The first relief from anxiety emerges when participants are grouped together with others sharing the same qualities (i.e. received similar results), and when they come into a productive group that easily finds an insightful, shared and positive understanding of themselves (while answering the first part of the task they receive, i.e. describing themselves).

The *second* uncertainty emerges when they look at that their collective “flip over product” at the end of the group work, with descriptions of themselves and others. The description are often perceived as one-sided, politically incorrect, prejudiced, etc. (positive about themselves and somewhat negative about the other colours). For this reason, both shame and anxiety, expecting negative reactions from the other groups upon presentation, evolve without the group being granted time to discuss these issues. The relief comes when they can laugh, engaging in self-deprecating humour, together with others during their group's presentation of themselves. Reconciliation emerges in both themselves and others when they see that the others have also a similar product, due to a similar

process they went through. Furthermore, they also see that there are many common ideas across the groups.

The *third* uncertainty is about how the different group functions can be integrated at a higher level. This is solved through a collective reflection initiated by the question: “What can we learn from this process?” At this stage, typical conclusions are of a more integrative and unifying character, e.g.: “we are different, but need each other”; “a perfect group should consist of a balance depending on the task”; “it is strangely easy to cooperate in groups when people of the same qualities are brought together for cooperative efforts”; “language and categories are important for how we see each other, and for how we interact with others”; “A positive 'I need you'-attitude will make it easier for the others to speak up”; etc.

This iterative process of “uncertainty–sharing–learning by insight–reinforcement through relief and joy” strengthens the practice of learning from the others. We see that this contributes to the reinforcement of the ideal of a good learning culture. We also state that this sharing of information is the core process for learning groups that makes them capable of combining the challenges related to sharing the diversified expert-knowledge. This is where innovation emerges based upon good dialogues. These processes makes it possible to throw light on tacit knowledge, revisit basic assumptions and implicit knowledge (Ekelund & Moe, Innovation booklet, 2016). It also makes it possible to highlight more complex second-order learning processes through reflection.

## ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS ALREADY USING TRIALOGUE

### Chosen case studies

#### 1) **Bocconi University – School of Economics, Milano, Italia**

A simple application of the Trialogue in kick-offs of the semesters with new students. The objectives here are to provide the students with a positive experience, get them to know each other better and create a language to talk about the diversity shared by all.

#### 2) **University of Oslo (UiO), Norway**

The students stay at a resort with the university staff and tutors, and undergo a 2-day training in groups between 30 and 60 participants. The classic Trialogue workshop and the three colours are used as starting-point for a discussion and group work about how should the optimal learning culture look like:

- What is the best way of learning?
- How can we achieve this in dialog with the professors?
- How do we relate to other students?
- How can we work better together (project, teams, etc.)?
- 

#### 3) **Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway**

At NTNU in Trondheim, every year since 2011, Marte Pettersen Buvik has been using Trialogue as a kick-off exercise, at the beginning of a semester for 100-150 first year students of Industrial Economics and Technology Management (INDØK). Following the classic workshop (2hours), the students apply the knowledge gained from this in the compulsory assignments in the course and use Red, Blue and Green as perspective-lenses in reflexivity processes



#### 4) Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, Norway

The Trialogue is used to create a shared language that contributes to that the students from different disciplines and cultures communicate better with each other and can reflect on the practice together. This shared platform promotes project groups in their learning from experience through theoretical reflections.

#### 5) IÉSEG School of Management, Lille, France

IÉSEG in Lille, France is the institution that today applies Trialogue in the most integrated and ambitious way. The tool is used as the first module of five in Part 1 of a course called “Understanding Cultural Diversity”. The overall goal of the program is to develop students’ cultural intelligence and make them more competent to work in groups across cultures and disciplines, so that they make an innovative impact and create a better world together. This competence, the innovative capability, leading to global impact has been integrated into the institution’s vision (quoted above).

The first part of the program consists of the following 5 modules:

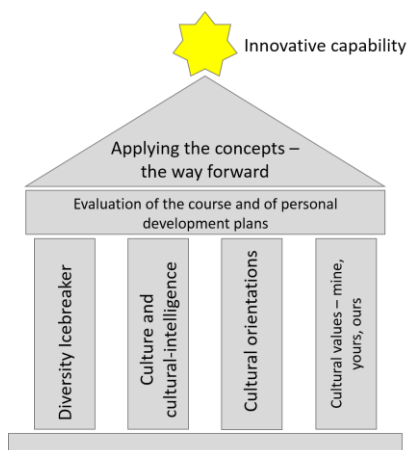
- I. Trialogue – used to increase the understanding of oneself and others, learn about diversity (in the general sense) and the importance of equality and complementarity for cooperation, different learning styles and learning strategies.
- II. Culture and cultural intelligence – exploring the concepts
- III. Cultural orientations
- IV. Cultural values – mine, yours, ours
- V. Course evaluation and evaluation of personal intercultural development plans.



Applying the concepts - the way forward

The result is that the students are capable to participate in groups with members from different disciplines and cultures, and that this cooperation contributes to their shared *innovative capability*.

The program and its goals can be illustrated in the following way:



**6) University of Linköping, Sweden**

The Linköping University Innovation Office organised a 4 days entrepreneur competition for students called NEST48. It was based on a concept of a TV show – the Dragon’s Den – and it had students competing in teams to create a best solution for a real market problem.

Triologue was used to kick-off the competition with 27 students, and as a mean for learning about diversity in teams and to enhance “effective communication between different personalities”.

Following the classic workshop, the participants were organised as best possible based upon the idea of combining three persons with differences in Red, Blue and Green.

Analysis of the students’ group work results and research conducted afterwards suggested that the most heterogeneous groups produced most ideas but had less innovation and less satisfaction.

**7) Oslo School of Architecture and Design (AHO), Oslo, Norway and the University of Agder (UiA), Dept. of Economics and Finance, Kristiansand/Grimstad, Norway**

Triologue was used for a combined group of 25 students from AHO and 15 students from UiA who worked together in projects related to urban development in Risør, Norway.

The group used Triologue as a kick-off in order to get to know each other better and establish connection across disciplines, as well to organise the groups. There were significant differences between the two student groups when it comes to Red, Blue and Green preferences. For example, the design students from AHO scored 0.5 standard deviation (i.e. 3.25 points) higher on Green than the economy students from UiA, who at the same time were also 0.5 standard deviation higher on Green compared our established norm based on other economy students. In other words, quite a Green group altogether but with the design students being exceptionally Green.

In this project, Triologue was used to enhance the awareness of differences within and between the two student groups and how to overcome them. And of course the aim was also to help the students cooperate better in their week long project.

**8) Global Learning Larvik, Larvik, Norway**

Global Learning Larvik used Triologue to promote a better learning environment over time. Since the students enrolled in Global Learning Larvik study many different topics in a relatively small facility, Triologue will be used as an “enabler” and “glue” to promote a better learning together.

In the future, the goal is to conduct Triologue for all the students. Both for the more “obvious” learning-environment reasons, but also to use it in strength-based learning groups in a learn-to-learn-perspective.

The times DI was used in the Global Learning Larvik, some of the statements shared by the participants were: “since we are different as human beings/learners, we get a wider perspective when using each other’s strengths”; “the learning aspect can be strong when addressed as strength, not as weakness, and Triologue addresses it in this way”; “I think Red,

Blue and Green challenges the syllabus in a complementary way and, ideally, opens up more perspectives on it”, etc.

### A selection of our academic partners and clients

(name of institution, area of application of Trialogue, contact person)

1. Copenhagen Business School, Project management and design thinking, Carsten Arnfjord Thomsen and Jesper Sonne
2. D’Amore-McKim School of Business, Northeastern University, Introduction to international management, tailor-made executive education programs, Harry Lane
3. University of South Florida, communication, design thinking, Fred Steier
4. INSEAD, customer event, Stephen Mezas
5. IMD, Strategy and Organization, Bettina Büchel
6. University of Agder, Norwegian School of Management BI, project management, Michel Esnault
7. Nord University, leadership development, teamwork, Torill Moe
8. Norwegian University of Life Sciences, project-learning culture, Geir Lieblein
9. Sámi University of Applied Sciences, staff development, student introduction, Jelena Porsanger
10. University of Oslo, mentoring for post-docs, Kirsten M. Poulsen
11. University of Oslo, student-learning culture, Ilan Dehli Villanger
12. NTNU, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, teamwork and learning processes, Marte Buvik
13. NTNU, Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Introduction course to Master of Work and Organizational Psychology. Eva Langvik
14. The Arctic University of Norway, international management, teambuilding, Bjørn Z. Ekelund,
15. Universität der Bundeswehr München, communication, Kazuma Matoba
16. Linköping University, LiU Innovation, Oscar Jönsson
17. Hebrew University, communication, identity, Lilach Sagiv
18. Open University in Israel, communication, identity, voice, Sharon Arieli
19. Jakob’s Universität Bremen, Marieke von Egmond
20. University of Applied Science, Stenden, multicultural student learning culture, Manja Zijlstra and Nikki Webster
21. IESEG School of Management, Lille Catholic University, see case above in this document for application, Grant Douglas & Ingrid Richard
22. Biennio in Management, Scuola Graduate, Università Bocconi, Milano Italy, semester start, team work, soft skills, Gabriella Bagnato

23. Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Institute of Education, Courses on Intercultural Communication and IC Competence Development, Prof. Jürgen Henze.
24. Oulu University of Applied Sciences, diversity and communication workshops, Taina Vuorela
25. EAE Business School in Barcelona, cross-cultural competence workshop, Maria Mateu
26. University of Mississippi, international business communication, Julia Welch
27. University of Vermont, Signature Staff Development days, Oleh Karmik
28. Stockholm School of Economics, communication, diversity, Laurence Romani
29. Global Learning Larvik, Norway, creating learning space, Eskil Domben
30. University College of Oslo and Akershus, international communication, Kristin A. Orgeret

## FURTHER READINGS

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Orgeret, K. S. (2012). Intercultural educational practices: opening paths for dialogue. New Media, Mediated Communication and Globalization. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 21(1), 189-204

Romani, L. (2013) Diversity Icebreaker for Cross-Cultural Management teaching: Much more than breaking the ice! *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, special issue on Cross-Cultural Management, 12(3), 534-536.

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