MEMBERS' VOICES | メンバーの声

Finding Myself in Self-Access

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Two years have passed since I became an advisor at a self-access learning center (SALC) and, with a lot more to learn about this field, I still find it a bit challenging to explain this context and what I actually do in an understandable way. Put simply, SALCs are places where students are encouraged to develop more autonomous learning skills (see Gardner and Miller, 1999, for the definitive look at these spaces). In our center, like many others in Japan and abroad, we try to help students acquire these skills by offering language learning advising, study resources, and social opportunities for learners to collaborate with peers. Though my official title is "language learning advisor," that is only one facet of the work I do. It also includes things like student staff development and running a conversation program. Usually to casual acquaintances or relatives I keep it simple by saying "I teach at a university." To those who are interested I provide more details, but I sometimes feel less than eloquent in breaking down the related jargon. I get caught off guard by reactions like surprise at the fact that I am not a classroom-based teacher or confusion about what self-access learning means. I appreciate that these exchanges challenge me to reflect more deeply on what I do. While not always easy to define, I'm thankful that I discovered a role that allows me to really get to know students and collaborate with them to find ways to improve their learning and make our SALC better.

I've always had a natural curiosity about others' lived experiences—an interest that deepened after I took part in international exchange programs in high school and began to study cultural and linguistic anthropology in college. Feeling inspired by my courses and these experiences, I looked for more opportunities to get involved with international education. As an undergraduate orientation leader for international students I was asked questions that forced me to rethink my assumptions. I had to figure out how to explain things to groups of people with different backgrounds and levels of English fluency for the first time. Through positions like these I learned to love helping students, getting to know what motivated them, and trying to understand where they were coming from. As I was interested in linguistics and wanted to continue working with international students, I decided to make a career out of it and earned a master's degree in TESOL. Before becoming an advisor at my current institution, I taught English part time at a university in Japan. This reaffirmed my interest in teaching this age group, but left me feeling somewhat frustrated. With big class sizes, only meeting each group once a week, and having almost no extra time after class to help students who were struggling or had questions, I felt that I wasn't able to have much of a positive impact. I could get to know some of the students in courses that included interactive speaking or writing exercises, but it felt like the semester was over before I knew it and the next would begin with a totally new batch of students. When the opportunity came to accept a position that took me out of the classroom, I jumped at it.

Now, every day, I directly interact with students in more meaningful ways. I chat with students who are using the center, catch up with frequent users on how their studies and off-campus lives are going, work with a team of domestic and international student staff in facilitating an English conversation program, lead one-on-one learning advising sessions, help to supervise student staff who contribute to make the center better, and collaborate with other advisors and teachers. It has been so rewarding to be able to explore the complexity of each student's relationship with language learning and observe them changing. One student, initially such a reluctant SALC user that I did not know her face, suddenly applied to be a conversation partner. After a lot of practice speaking with other students and chances to

explore her insecurities and set goals for herself through reflective writing and discussions with fellow staff members and me, she has become a role model for other students. She now radiates a totally different energy than she did before. Another student who enjoyed using English, but was not satisfied with her class placement started to make a habit of coming to the center regularly to study, often asking questions and telling me and other teachers what she was working on. Just recently she excitedly updated me that she was able to test out of remedial grammar classes and eagerly shared what her next goal was. Seeing achievements like these, big and small, has not only been gratifying, it has also made me reflect on my own experiences and learning habits. For many students, coming to use the center and taking part in advising sessions provide some of the first chances they have ever had to actually think about how they learn and to meaningfully use English outside of the classroom. I am grateful to be a part of those experiences and in a space that enables them to happen.

Taking on this new position forced me to reassess my place in relation to learners. While advisors like me have important tasks, the relationships students make with each other may be the most crucial to an effective SALC, a dynamic I did not consider as a classroom teacher. Students supporting each other and sharing ideas, acting as role models, and socializing peers into the culture of the center have been for learners the greatest impacts that I have observed in these two years. For this to happen organically we as advisors must try to step into supporting roles to give students the tools to create a better environment. What has been especially challenging for me has been becoming a better active listener, learning how to lead students in the right direction without being prescriptive, and deciding when to give student staff suggestions and when to let them decide and discover what works on their own.

As of writing this our SALC is in the middle of major renovations. Previously containing the English department's main office, the new space will be completely dedicated to learning and all departmental administrative functions will be done in a totally separate room. It was difficult to keep the expectation that the space be used predominantly for studying and using English while it was also being used, with good reason, for tasks like registering for exams or discussing issues with coursework, usually done in Japanese. With previous issues and student feedback in mind, we hope the improved SALC will enable more active English use and feel more accessible and attractive to students from any department within the university who want to improve their language skills. Student staff will have a designated front desk, giving them more of a central role, and there will be two main rooms: one for quiet study and one for more interactive activities like conversation, cultural events, and short presentations from students and teachers. The next challenge will be communicating how to use the new space, with different features and policies, and supporting the continuing development of the community within it along with our student staff. I look forward to helping our students take the lead in making these changes and to the opportunity to learn more about self-access and reflect on what my role is in this space.

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Learning and Researching, a Journey

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"I should check my classmate's work? Well, that's the teacher's job." This was what one of my senior high school students muttered under her breath after I asked my class to check each other's work and underline things that they were unsure of. I joined the Learner Development SIG for the first time back in 2013, after my friend and colleague, Caroline, highly recommended it to me. When I heard this comment, I was only just starting to experiment with learner development and I was a little taken aback by it. I could very well understand the feeling. My own journey as a learner (language or otherwise) did not really equip me with much autonomy. I had never been asked to read what anything that my friends had just written. I had never been asked to write any comments about a presentation a classmate had just given, or to grade my own performance after watching a video of it. Now I was asking my students to do so, and naturally, some of them were reluctant. Going to the SIG get-togethers in Tokyo helped me greatly to refine what, how and why I was asking my students to check each other's work or write comments. I needed to be more specific about what I wanted them to check for, and guide them, so that they would know what to look for. I also needed to fully understand myself why the process of reviewing and reflecting is important for students.

Between 2015 and 2019 I took a break from the Learner Development SIG after becoming a parent, twice, but my journey to improve my knowledge on this topic did not stop then. In 2013, I also started a three-year-long part-time, online Masters degree in education. During that time, I undertook an insider-led transformative research into my own practice. My main research questions were *"How would students as co-researchers and a funds of knowledge approach help me connect with my students?"* and *"How might this affect the power relationship at play, and promote inclusion, diversity and equality in my own practice?"* I chose the funds of knowledge approach in the same way as Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) describe it as the knowledge that has been historically and culturally accumulated and evolved for individual use. In my context, funds of knowledge is the English that is either used by my students in their home context (for instance, through text messages, social media, ...) or that is around them (local signs, food wrappers, songs, ...). I chose this particular approach as I wanted to make a link between the classroom, and the knowledge and skills that students have access to in their home context. I found this approach useful as it builds on the partnership between the students and the teachers described by Fielding (2004).

In order to carry out this research, I used photo elicitation, an unstructured interview, and field notes for my methodology. I was inspired by how Nind, Boorman, and Clarke (2012) used digital technologies and focused on visual methods, rather than textual, so that their young participants could easily express themselves. As my students are not native speakers of English, I had hoped that this photo elicitation method would help them to efficiently show how English is present in their everyday lives. I chose to give an unstructured interview, as I wanted my participants to be involved in the direction of the interview as much as possible (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010). I also wanted to find out the reasons behind why they would choose particular pictures, and their views on the English that is present in their everyday lives.

Tomson and Gunter (2007) point out that knowledge is linked to power. My expectations were that the photo elicitation would show me what my students recognized to be the English that they have available around them. McLaren (1989/2013) adds that critical theory questions the reasons behind the construction of knowledge and how some constructions are expected and not others. In this regard, I had hoped to find evidence of my students' knowledge through their photographs. An interview would then subsequently help me to discuss and further understand my students' knowledge, leading me to connect with them and transform my practice by rebalancing the power that I held with regards to

my dominant position as a teacher and being regarded as holding the knowledge of English. I have certainly endeavoured to keep this status quo through requiring my students to only use English in the classroom—which I would characterise as a personal choice as much as a perceived requirement from my colleagues and superiors.

During the research process, I experienced several setbacks such as the difficulty of recruiting participants, finding myself influencing the direction of the interview the whole time rather than giving my students the opportunity to take charge (Costley, et al., 2010). In addition, I did not have the time to include my students in the research process by transcribing the interviews and analysing them together with my students. Now that I am back from the haze of parental leave and coming to "some" of the get-togethers in 2019, I would very much like to continue researching this topic. It is quite clear that the setbacks described above are related to the idea of power relationships, and I would like to address this issue both in my research and in the classroom. I hope that this study will help my students become more involved in their own learning. I also hope to show that English is not the property of native speakers. Through my research I would like to find out more about what my students already know, how I can incorporate this diversity of English language use into my practice, and subsequently prepare lessons that are more relevant to my students' everyday lives.

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Active Learning in an Accepting Learner-centered Environment

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Something I appreciate about the place that I grew up is the general acceptance of people of different backgrounds. Hawaii has the largest population of multi-ethnic people (people of two or more races) in the United States at 23.8%, far surpassing the second largest population in Alaska, which trails at 8.5% (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Everyone is a minority in Hawaii. The largest group at 38% is Asian but usually identified by locals with their subgroup such as Japanese, Filipinos, Chinese, and others. The next largest ethnic group is Whites who make up 25.1%. Again, locals will often identify with their subgroup as German, Irish, or others, further breaking up into smaller entities. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders follow at 10% and other ethnic groups represented by even smaller percentages. Seeing people from an array of language and cultural backgrounds communicating with each other cultivates tolerance, understanding, and even a sense of humor, which Barack Obama referred to as the "Aloha

spirit" (Obama, 2019; Velasquez-Manoff, 2019). I never expected to find any similarity to this kind of environment in Japan. After living in Japan for over 25 years, I became used to teaching English primarily to Japanese students in exclusive schools. This changed when I accepted a full-time position several years ago at a downtown Tokyo junior and senior high school and found the student body included Korean, Chinese, and Filipino students. I hadn't known that schools like this existed.

Now, in my present position at a four-year women's university, I am once again delighted to find my class roster with Vietnamese, Chinese, South American, and Malaysian names. It hadn't occurred to me that the decreasing Japanese population would prompt universities to accept more students from abroad. My students have responded to me with an "Aloha!" and a smile when I tell them that our diverse class feels like a little piece of Hawaii. I grew up in middle class neighborhoods with Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Hawaiian, German, and Portuguese families all living on the same street. From the time that I was a child, my friends and I were used to hearing that so-and-so's mother only spoke Japanese, or Korean, or we heard broken or pidgin (Creole) English and responded accordingly. Of course the food from different cultures was fantastic and shared during various celebrations. It is my intention to cultivate that atmosphere of inclusion and warmth to encourage students to be open and take risks to learn (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). I've noticed that when I take the time to personally talk with students and show them that I accept their ideas and opinions, their attitude in class improves and they participate more willingly in class.

One of my present challenges will be to teach an elective pronunciation class this autumn. As my undergraduate degree from the University of Hawaii is in speech pathology and audiology, I couldn't be happier to be given this opportunity. I have pulled out my old faithful Ladefoged's (1982) phonetics textbook to give myself a refresher

course, and I'll be able to use information on articulation characteristics and common syntactic and morphological differences of Asian languages from Shipley and McAfee's (2016) textbook called "Assessment in Speech-Language Pathology." In this last term, I could hardly understand some of my students' spoken English, so I anticipate doing some articulation coaching.

There are many things that Keisen University includes in its curriculum to foster learner-centered classes. Teachers are encouraged to set weekly goals in our courses, so I will start off with a mini-needs analysis to discover what each student's thoughts are regarding their current pronunciation ability and have them set some feasible personal goals. Nunan's (2003) "Nine Steps to Learner Autonomy" is one of my go-to papers when I am setting up a course. Nunan discusses helping students to form goals and raise their awareness of their learning styles and learning processes, as well as have students teach each other and research what interests them. In order to encourage reflection in a course, Keisen University requires students to keep a paper-based portfolio of their work to be able to review their learning and progress. This portfolio is assessed at the end of the term as part of their course grade. My students have also stored some of their work in their Google Classroom file. To increase the incentive to organize their paper-based portfolios, I had my students take an open portfolio test where they could use whatever was in their file to answer both closed and open questions of the issues we covered in class. I gave out a list of topics and questions to think about and prepare for and hoped that students would review and synthesize ideas we discussed in class. Some of those discussions include the 8 or 10% consumption tax increase coming on October 1, being forced to wear high heels to work, and social justice issues of utilitarianism and libertarianism. In the test, I again asked students to tell me what kind of society they want to have in Japan. We had discussed this

question many times in class with students often scrambling for their portfolios to quote things they had written earlier. As for my personal reflection of this term, I need to ask more metacognitive questions to encourage students to evaluate their study methods and success at learning. I hope to improve and take more advantage of this portfolio task by creating reference materials to file in their portfolio that will help them to become more aware of how they can and are improving their pronunciation skills.

I also hope to inspire my class to think about different ways they might be able to demonstrate their progress on their pronunciation. Keisen University requires their first- and second-year students to enroll in an online program to do extensive listening as well as participate in a separate online program for extensive reading. I want students to come up with ways they can use these materials for their pronunciation. One easy way is that the online program has a built-in pronunciation practice for words the student selects from a short video they watch. The program judges the student's pronunciation of each word and gives them a percentage of their accuracy. I also want each student to pick a particular phoneme (the smallest unit of sound that distinguishes one word from another) to focus on improving. They can find a book from the extensive reading section in our library, and identify the places where the phoneme appears in a short reading selection. Then, after receiving coaching in class, they can practice using the reading selection of their choice. I want them to realize that the phoneme will generally be easier in an initial position in a word, more difficult at the end, and most difficult in the middle because of the sound being sandwiched between two others, and so they might be able to say it in one position, but not in another. I might break the students into groups according to the phoneme they are working on and have them practice with each other. We will finish off the course with students teaching each other

how to pronounce something. It would be ideal if a student teaches us how to pronounce something in another language they speak besides English. Here is where the students who struggle in English but speak other languages can turn the tables on their teacher and classmates. I am looking forward to a great term and can't wait to see how all the students in my class (myself included as I study Japanese) personally develop as learners while improving our language ability.

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Conducting Relevant Research with Effective Application in Elementary Schools

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This past spring I conducted my first research seminar for a local elementary school in Fukui City, which brought together 13 teachers, including the school's principal and head of teachers. Before conducting the seminar, which focused on ways to use English storybooks for children, the way to break into the world of research at elementary schools felt like foreign territory. Unfortunately, no map or guide was provided to make clear what was truly unfamiliar. Fellow elementary school teachers who have an interest in pursuing research may share my sentiment. By sharing here some insights into my own experiences as a teacher-researcher, I hope to unpack some of the realities of research conducted at public elementary schools with a focus on the available opportunities for budding English as foreign language (EFL) practitioner-researchers.

I work with Japanese homeroom teachers (HRTs) on a daily basis conducting team-teaching lessons for students ages 8-12 across seven elementary schools in Fukui City. The main responsibilities of my work include teaching skills in the four language areas, while also exposing students to natural and communicative English language. Beyond the classroom hours, I have fostered close relationships with the HRTs in an effort to better manage and execute lessons through curriculum and instruction development.

Moving into my current role, it became clear to me that Japanese elementary school teachers take on multiple roles and teach various disparate disciplines besides managing English lessons and the inclusion of English within the broader course of study. This is different from my home country based on conversations I have had with elementary school teachers in Canada, who do not conduct foreign language lessons. How teachers manage to fulfill their duties is still unimaginable to me, something I truly respect. Is much of the work dependent on good time management? Or do teachers tend to focus this attention on aspects most appealing or pressing? Thus, my query of relevant research and its implementation as it applies to the overall growth of teacher practice and school development began, in particular the impact it may have on HRTs when it comes to EFL teaching in elementary schools.

While the HRTs are required to fulfill the requirement of teaching English, they do not necessarily have the training or experience to do so. Frequent professional development can encourage new conversations about effective practices in the classroom, in effect enabling them to see change and growth as teachers. I approached my interactions with my colleagues with several goals. I wanted to appreciate how talented they are as professional elementary school teachers. I hoped that I would be able to undertake with them relevant research about teacher development within our shared elementary school work. I also wished to ease any tension or anxiety brought on by English language teaching. Although I find it challenging to voice my exact thoughts about the need for the research that I feel passionately about, I want to respect my colleagues and develop any inquiries in close partnership with them, filling potential gaps in the path towards successful language acquisition.

When it comes to EFL, in my experience, I've noticed that HRTs are open to considering practical methodologies that can be used in the English

classroom. Aside from the disciplined observation lessons teachers frequently take part in, the Boards of Education are adamant about creating better teachers, ones that are more than simply familiar with the material of the EFL discipline. Recently, development has focused on the building of teachers' repertoire of English language teaching skills, which has led to an ambitious move to improve overall language proficiency and pedagogic versatility. Teachers are aware of the challenges they may face, and their openness is certainly refreshing. I have found this, for example, when I have discussed with my colleagues my research project on English storybooks for children. Teachers were moved by the passion I spoke with regarding the benefits of including children's books in the classroom. In many ways, I believe my foresight was shared among teachers who felt a connection to children's books in their own ways, either through their students' interests or through other disciplines in which children's books appear.

Bringing this all together, I would like to leave you with some words of wisdom when approaching research in-house as a non-Japanese teacher. First, take time to talk to your fellow co-workers on a frequent basis. You'll find out their true passions; what impacts their teaching on a daily basis and how they want to make an impact on students. It often leads one to find a niche in which research can be applied. Second, you'll notice that schools themselves have a lot of leeway when it comes to learning a new skill or bringing effective measures into the classroom. With the transition of the current curriculum and the introduction of English as a subject for 5th and 6th graders in 2020, the timing is favorable for conducting such research. While there may be some hurdles to overcome, good hard work will lead to rewarding connections and impacts that will serve both students and teachers well. This should also lead to invaluable research results that will hopefully be included in future teaching. Give it a try!

Facilitation of Motivation Among Non-English Major Students Through Practical Project-based Learning

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I have been an EFL teacher in Japan for almost two decades and clearly can see that English language education here has failed to facilitate learner motivation and to cultivate sufficient communicative English abilities in students. In my current research on motivation, I rely on Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to this theory, individuals are more internally motivated when the following three basic psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2002). When these needs are satisfied, students feel psychologically happier, more autonomous, and more motivated to learn in the classroom. There are many ways teachers can provide support to satisfy psychological needs in the English language classroom. Autonomy-supportive teachers facilitate students' autonomy by providing students choices and opportunities to take responsibility and initiative for the learning process. An autonomy need is not a need for independence as some may think, but rather a desire for personal internal acceptance, purpose, and endorsement of one's own learning. If the students' need for autonomy is satisfied, they are more willing to participate actively in the classroom and show higher achievement and less procrastination. I try to provide students with small choices of additional activities they have to do in class and their order, for example: playing *Quizlet* (an online education platform) games, doing a video quiz or working on a project with groups. I also give them the chance to choose test dates and project themes.

I have conducted two studies addressing self-determined motivation in high school and college

students in Japan (Yazawa, 2019). The first study was conducted in a Tokyo metropolitan high school where the academic level is ranked just slightly above the national average. First- and second-year students were asked to participate in this study at the end of the academic year. The second study was conducted in a private middle rank women's college in central Tokyo. The students in both studies completed a questionnaire adapted from a new SDT motivational scale created by Agawa and Takeuchi (2016). One of the most distinctive similarities between these two studies is that older students demonstrate a lower perceived autonomy need fulfillment relative to first-year students. Second-year high school students and third-year college students had a higher proficiency level in English related to the first-year students; but despite this fact, they also reported a greater drop in satisfaction with English teachers as facilitators of their autonomy in the classroom.

One of the reasons why students lose motivation over time to learn English, as they get older, is the change in goals and priorities for older students. For example, college students do not need to pass difficult entrance examinations anymore; and memorization and grammar-based learning that they relied so heavily on to prepare for the tests, are no longer useful in college. At this point, some students fail to envision new goals for learning English altogether; others are not equipped with enough means to pursue them. Skill-based classes replace grammar-based instructions during their first year, but students continue to grow more and more helpless in acquiring English.

To satisfy the autonomy need better in third-year students taking a Business English course, I have started using a practical speciality-related project-based teaching and learning approach. There are usually two creative and content-based projects that students enrolled in my Business English classes must prepare each semester of study. One such project is creating an advertisement brochure. Preparation for the project's presentation is carried out in several stages. In the first stage, students study new

vocabulary by discovering and figuring out the meaning of new words. Discovery is a very important process for self-determination. By not giving out answers and allowing students to figure out the meanings by themselves positively reflects on the autonomy need support. In the next stage, the new vocabulary is reviewed in content-based texts and videos of relevant marketing topics. In the last stage, the students are involved in role-playing games. The role-playing games are indispensable for satisfying student relatedness need and thus enhancing their self-determination. An example of such a game is "Journey: Pros and Cons", in which students are actively involved in team work. Students are divided into two groups: the first group are tourists who love to travel, and the second group are those who do not like traveling. The first group has to persuade the second group of students to go with them on a journey.

After preparation, students are finally embarked on a project, which allows them to do and independent research and creates autonomy supportive atmosphere in the classroom. The goal of the project is to create an advertising travel brochure using existing and accumulated knowledge. They present their final products in the form of a presentation on behalf of imaginary travel companies. I allow students to choose their travel destination by themselves, they also choose the categories which they want to include into the brochure. The only requirement is the number of categories, which is usually limited to the number of team members. Each group of students represents independent experts who decide during the discussion which advertising techniques should be used. The duration of the project and the presentation is usually about four weeks. Group work should be equally divided between all project participants: someone is responsible for researching, someone for the design and so on. Each student takes active participation in the group discussion and chooses the area of his or her expertise. In carrying out the project, students learn how to be responsible for their own learning, evaluate their own work, give feedback to team

members—in other words, how to act more autonomously in learning English.

While SDT is still one of the most popular theoretical frameworks currently employed in the Japanese context, in the last few years, a new theory of Directed Motivational Currents (DMC) has emerged in psycholinguistics, and has not yet been sufficiently researched in Japanese educational settings (Dörnyei, Ibrahim, & Muir, 2015). By concentrating on this new theory in my further studies, I hope to reach a better understanding of what motivates Japanese English learners in tertiary educational levels, and how teachers can influence this motivation in group settings.

One of the initial proposals of the DMC theory is that it is possible for teachers to facilitate directed motivational currents in the foreign language classroom. Project learning is considered to be the best framework to launch and maintain a long-term English learning motivation according to this theory. It connects the real world with the classroom, brings authenticity, autonomy and relatedness to the learning environment. All of the students in the Business Design Department of the university I work for go on a long-term study abroad program at the end of their freshman year. A study-abroad period by definition can work as a trigger to launch group DMC, as students need to commit to this goal at the very beginning of their studies. I am currently working on creating a suitable project framework, similar to the study-abroad preoperational program developed by Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, and Street (2001) as a way to induce motivational currents in the classroom.

English is a compulsory subject for the majority of college students in Japan. Having an autonomy supportive teacher to teach English adds positively to the students' motivation to learn the language. Project work is one of the modern methods of teaching a foreign language that supports students' autonomy needs and self-determined motivation. The motivational value of the project-based learning lies in the fact that students can see their real work results, correct mistakes, supplement and evaluate outcome. It puts a new meaning in

learning activities. And it is more likely than anything else to trigger directed motivational currents.

I hope the results of my current and future research and work will be useful for educators and researchers in the learner development field to link the theory of English learning motivation with practice and further explore methods and techniques to facilitate long-term motivation and create a more autonomy-supportive educational environment in Japan.

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