

**TAR (THEATRE AS REPRESENTATION)**  
**AS A PROVOCATIVE TEACHING TOOL IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION:**  
**A DRAMATIZED INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM SCENARIO**

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The following dramatized classroom scenario depicts a teacher struggling with the nature of an inclusive learning environment, with instructional leadership and supervision of instruction as the theoretical and practical backdrop. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how the use of a TAR (theatre as representation) case study can be used as a provocative teaching tool by those engaged in the professional development of in-service administrators, aspiring administrators, and students enrolled in a graduate level educational administration program. In addition to the scenario's text, teaching notes in the form of discussion questions, complete with accompanying rationales, are provided.

Most if not all Canadian educational systems have inclusive schooling as a priority. Of course, this movement towards inclusive schools, which has largely occurred in the past two to three decades, has resulted in both positives and negatives for all those involved in the field of education. Many teachers continue to struggle with inclusionary practices, and, certainly, the administration of so-called inclusive schools continues to provoke much heated debate in terms of best practices (Ryan, 2006). Some of the problems associated with inclusion are real, such as lack of resources, both financial and human, as well as inadequate preparation and training, while others are perhaps more about perceptions, such as teachers feeling alone in their struggle to enact inclusion. Although the implementation of inclusion is often left to individual teachers

in their own classrooms, it is important to keep in mind that ultimately, the responsibility for inclusion falls under the leadership purview of the school administration (Young, 2010). Suffice to say, twenty-first century school administrators need to be exposed to both the theory and practice of inclusion if they are to create schools where students and staff alike “belong.”

As professors of school administration, the authors have often struggled with developing pedagogical constructs that both stimulate curiosity and at the same time foster comprehension and synthesis. As some have stated, case studies have been used for many years as vehicles to assist in the expedition of learning (Fossey & Crow, 2011; Merriam, 1998). Whether or not the case is inspired by imagination or real-life incidents, case studies provide a provocation vehicle that assists in classroom discussion and content analysis.

In this article, it is believed that by situating student learning within a scripted dramatic case study scenario, both in-service administrators and students of educational administration can affectively and cognitively engage in the exploration of chosen issues through the use of a script. The vehicle employed in this dramatized case study scenario is Theatre as Representation, or TAR (Meyer, 1998, 2001a, 2001b), which has been used successfully in different learning settings. The TAR concept was originated by Meyer (1998) as a professional development protocol for in-service school administrators to facilitate bridging administrative theory with actual school-based practice. At the time TAR emerged in the field of educational administration, there was no such use of TAR-like drama and theatre application. Since then, a number of drama and theatre adaptations have evolved. TAR has also morphed, so-to-speak, into other iterations by the author (see bibliography) which presently seems more like a cross-pollination between process drama and readers’ theatre.

### **The Theoretical Foundations of TAR**

The TAR application is built on two bodies of knowledge. The first is specific artistic drama, theatre, and production practices as passed down through centuries of performance practice along with concepts espoused by such theorists as Beckerman (1970) in his discussion of the comparisons and contrasts between dramatic and theatre activity; Bolton (1979) who suggests a connection between internal action (the fusion of subjective and objective meanings in a text) with external action (the fusion of actual and make-believe contexts); and especially Brecht's (1948/1964) view on the importance of telling truth and suffering in textual reality. The second body of knowledge comes from a fusion of social constructivist learning theories (Fosnot et al., 1996), Goleman's (1995) notion of emotional intelligence, and Hutchins' (1995) thoughts on cognition. When TAR is used as a teaching tool, all students have the opportunity to take on character roles in the piece (either as actors or readers) and to be audience members. Each TAR scenario incorporates fundamental aspects of legal, administrative, and organizational theory (e.g., sources and uses of power and micro-politics). As well, TAR also brings to light possible ambiguities between perceived and real problems and solutions administrators might encounter in terms of inclusive education, such as classroom pedagogy and management. As in many TAR scenarios, much of the dialogue and themes are based on field research, analyses of interviews with practitioners, and observation of classroom dynamics as well as common knowledge of school-based practices; as such, dialogue is based on real phraseology and pacing that helps to create the sense of verisimilitude necessary to immerse both actors and audience into the scenario.

### **TAR as a Dramatized Case Study Scenario**

The purpose of this case is to demonstrate how the use of a dramatized case study scenario can be used by those engaged in the training of aspiring and current administrators, either in a graduate level educational administration program or within an in-service professional development session. The foundation for this approach to teaching rests on the belief that many issues in education remain somewhat esoteric unless conveyed in a manner that is meaningful to practitioners. By placing either research findings or current pedagogical concerns within a scripted dramatic piece, participants can grapple with issues within the safety of a script. Unlike role-play improvisation (staging, memorization, and character interpretation), TAR is safe because participants are more engaged in the content of the case study rather than the presentation aspects of the scenario.

This case will further explore how the following dramatic scenario serves as a stepping stone for discussion on the issue of instructional leadership in light of school-based inclusion. This dramatized case study scenario was written founded on classroom conversations with graduate students who are also in-service teachers and administrators. As well, a leading clinical educational psychologist vetted the content. The scenario depicts a grade 9 general math class of 28 students, 4 of whom are on individual learning plan (IPP)/individual education plans (IEP). The classroom teacher in this particular case study wrestles with allotting sufficient time to both her mainstream and exceptional students. Ultimately, this time management issue can negatively impact her capacity to differentiate her teaching practice. For aspiring and current school administrators, this is a real dilemma in that as an instructional leader, one must ensure teachers are creating inclusive learning environments for all the children under his or her charge. As stated previously, the responsibility for inclusion falls on the school principal. Thus, the

following case, under the broad umbrella of inclusion, will serve to foster debate around the issues of school administration and leadership.

### **Scenario: An Issue of Inclusion in a Middle-School Setting<sup>1</sup>**

This case unfolds at Macmillan Middle School, located in Meadowbrook in Eastern Canada,<sup>2</sup> a blue and white collar town with a population of approximately 10,000 people. The catchment area for the school includes an additional 5,000 people. Macmillan Middle School has a student body of 854, with a staff compliment of 35 full- and part-time teachers, one principal, and a teaching vice-principal. The Grade 9 classroom in question, arranged in rows, consists of 28 students, 4 with IPPs. The teacher has just finished an arithmetical lesson on long division and is concluding her/his instructions to the class for an assignment. She/he is not comfortable working with exceptional students in an inclusionary classroom. Along with her B.Ed. preparatory courses in inclusion, she/he has taken mandatory professional development on inclusion and feels that the non-IPP students are being disenfranchised because of the time he/she must spend with IPP students. It is the period before lunch, and there is much tension in the class. The teacher's classroom is a transformed double classroom with the back half of the room serving as a file storage area filled with several rows of file cabinets. For the past three days, school administrators have been going through the cabinets. On this particular day the principal is doing the sort-through. By this time, both the students and teacher are oblivious to the principal's presence in the room and hence he/she is ignored. However, he/she does not ignore the goings on in the class. The groups mentioned below are seated just in front of the file

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the vocabulary used in the dialogue is based on direct references to actual classroom conversations as witnessed by in-service teachers/administrators.

<sup>2</sup> Both the name of the school and community are pseudonyms.

cabinets well within the visual perusal and earshot of the principal. Hence he/she is clandestinely observing both the class and the teacher's actions.

### *Characters*

- Principal Revett
- Teacher: Mr./Ms./Mrs. Walp (early 30s); 8 years teaching experience;

*Exceptionality group (they are sitting in the last seats of the first four rows):*

- Student 1 (Toni/Tony) has pragmatic language impairment (LD);
- Student 2 (Bobbie/Bob) has AD/HD and Asperger's syndrome;
- Student 3 (Charlotte/Charley) is mildly agoraphobic, especially in social situations;
- Student 4 (Drew) has no identified exceptionalities, but is "lazy" and fakes academic inability; furthermore, he has been assumed to have a disorder because of his/her constant class disturbances;

*Mainstream group (two mainstream students are sitting away from the exceptional students:)*

- Student 5 (Adrienne/Adrian) is an average student;
- Student 6 (Jaime) is highly advanced, quite bored with the teacher, the class, and waiting around

**Teacher:** O.K. class, let's simply review what is expected here. For the remainder of the class, in your notebooks, do the following four long division problems that I wrote here are on the board. I'll be going around to see how you are each doing. This is not a team effort; please work independently, so get to work. I'll give a few minutes to get started and then I'll come around and see how you are doing [*walks over to the exceptional student group and starts talking to them*].

*General noise getting papers out—action shifts to exceptional students.*

**Drew:** Look you retards; don't ask me for any help. You got that?

**Bobbie:** Don't worry, you're useless anyway and a jackass—so just leave us alone—we'll figure it out.

**Drew:** Yeah with who—none of you can do math. Walp will come here and show you how to do it anyway—and you still won't understand anything. You're all too stupid . . . especially Tony.

**Toni:** Leave me alone. At least I'm trying—you're just lazy.

**Drew:** I can at least fake my way through this and still pass in the end—you can't even count to 10 and Charley's afraid of his/her own shadow. Thinks the paper is going to bite him/her or something.

*Charley becomes very paranoid as if he/she is being watched.*

**Bobbie:** [*Defending Charley.*] You leave him/her alone.

**Drew:** Or what retard? Pop a few pills and beat me up?

*Walp and Revett hear the insult. Revett watches Walp give a stern concerned look towards Drew with no verbal comment. Revett mentally notes that there was no interjection on Walp's part.*

**Toni:** Shut up! Walp's going to over here and give us detention if you don't stop [*to Bobbie*].

Thanks Bobbie. What really sucks is he's right. I really can't understand numbers. I have no idea what the hell I'm doing.

**Bobbie:** [*To Toni.*] Toni, you really don't understand numbers? I mean, really?

**Toni:** Look Bobbie, I . . . can't tell time either. See that clock up there with the hands? If it's not a digital clock, I can't read it. [*Pause.*] I feel so useless sometimes and I want to scream and if I could I'd punch Drew in the face for what he says to us.

**Bobbie:** What do you do when you have to go buy something?

**Toni:** My parents buy stuff for me, because they know I suck at money. Walp is spying the room—look busy.

*Action shifts to Adrienne and Jaime.*

**Adrienne:** [*Raises hand to ask a question; the teacher nods in acknowledgment and gives a gesture to wait a few seconds as she/he goes to the LD students; Adrienne watches the teacher go to the LD students. Turns to Jaime.*] You think it might be a good idea to play dumb so one of us can ask a question? For once I would like to be a “special student.” Those dummies have it made—they don’t have to work, they pass, and they get all the attention.

**Jaime:** That’s just the way it is [*begins to work*]. This is so easy—what a waste of time. Once I would like to do something that’s a little bit challenging. We’ve been doing this stuff since grade 3.

**Adrienne:** Well maybe for you. I still make little mistakes. How do you do it?

**Jaime:** Do what?

**Adrienne:** You know—do this stuff without working—you never make mistakes.

**Jaime:** It’s easy—I don’t know. Anyway here goes the routine; there he/she [*the teacher*] goes—look, today she goes to faker 1 [*as the teacher talks to the exceptional group, Adrienne and Jaime occasionally watch with a look of mutual disgust*].

**Teacher:** [*Talking to exceptional students as a group.*] Do you all understand what you have to do. [*Blank stares from the exceptional students to teacher—teacher sighs.*] Ok, let’s go over the steps again . . .



**Drew:** Ya' know we're not deaf and dumb—we understand—if I have any questions I'll ask, OK?

**Teacher:** Just want to make sure. Your work history does not tell me that?

**Drew:** Well, maybe if you didn't treat us like retards all the time and teach us something maybe my work history would be better.

**Teacher:** I will not respond to your rudeness. Would a chat from the Vice Principal regarding your work habits encourage you? Now please get to work . . . [*there is a short stare down confrontation and Drew begins to scribble; teacher turns to Toni*]. Toni, do you understand what to do?

**Toni:** [*Pause.*] Yes.

**Teacher:** Yes, that's good—do you understand the order of steps?

**Toni:** [*After a long pause and at the blackboard.*] I believe so.

**Teacher:** Are you sure?

**Toni:** [*Pause.*] . . . Yeah . . . yeah.

**Teacher:** O.K. I'll check back in a while. [*Turns to Bobbie who is fidgeting and focusing on the board.*] Bobbie . . . [*Bobbie shows no response.*] Bobbie [*still no response*], Bobbie, wake up! Have you had your medication today?

**Bobbie:** [*Angry.*] Yeah. Have you had yours? And I'm not sleeping. Just because I'm on medication, doesn't mean I'm stoned. Don't you know anything yet? I'm thinking how to *do* long division. [*Speaking as fast as possible with attitude.*] You take the quantity number on the left and guess if it goes into the first single or first and second digit group on the other side of the division box and if it does you put it on top of the box then multiply it times the quantity number and then write that underneath the digits it

was going into then subtract the difference and if its smaller than the original then bring down the next digit and start the whole silly thing over again until all the digits are done.

**Teacher:** [*A bit annoyed.*] Thank you for that review of steps. Now please answer the equation, as we've done before, neatly, so I can read them this time in your scribbler Please start the problems on the board.

**Bobbie:** Which one?

**Teacher:** Which one what?

**Bobbie:** Which scribbler?

**Teacher:** [*Getting frustrated.*] Your math scribbler . . . do you have it here?

**Bobbie:** Maybe.

**Teacher:** Please look through your book bag and if you don't have it simply use a piece of paper. Please make sure you hand it in [*goes to Charley*].

*Charley has been nervously waiting this moment with great apprehension. She/he is afraid of the teacher, about to panic, and on the verge of tears.*

Charley, are you O.K. Do you know what you have to do?

**Charley:** [*Looking as if he/she is cornered and is about to be pounced on by an attacking animal.*] Everyone is watching me. I can't stay here. They are all going to start yelling at me, I have to leave.

*In silence and mime, the teacher is attempting to calm Charley. Action shifts to Adrienne and Jaime.*

**Adrienne:** [To Jaime.] Well—it's another tearjerker about to happen. How can he/she [referring to the teacher] fall for that every time?

**Jaime:** Well they are “special” and they do take up a lot of our “special” time. I just hope she doesn't ask me to help her or Toni. They can't do anything and I hate having to help them. They are so dumb, they can't count or anything.

**Adrienne:** They should be in a lower grade or something. They're always the same in all the classes. It's not fair to us.

**Jaime:** It's not fair to anybody.

*Action shifts back to teacher and Charley.*

**Teacher:** Now Charley, I see that you're getting very nervous here. Try and calm down and we'll slowly go over each step...

**Charley:** I have to go now...I can't stay here any longer [begins to collect her/his things in an agitated manner]. I'll just go to the library and work there [she/he's eyeing the doorway].

**Teacher:** [Almost keeping her/him from rising.] No Charley, you are staying here and will at least attempt to work. Let's just focus on this task.

**Charley:** No, no, no! I can't work here, I can't stay here, I have to leave. [Teacher and Charley keep conversing, with Charley getting more and more agitated. . . . Action shifts back to Adrienne and Jaime while the other LD students stop working and watch the Teacher-Charlie confrontation.]

**Jaime:** Here it goes again; Walp will be arguing with Charley for the rest of the period for sure....

**Adrienne:** I'm having trouble with number 2 [raises hand for the teacher].

**Teacher:** *[After a few moments, notices Jaime's hand up.]* Yes Adrienne?

**Adrienne:** Can you come here please? I'm having trouble with question 2.

**Teacher:** I'm occupied here Adrienne, please ask Jaime to help you, I'm sure she/he has finished it. I'm sure she/he won't mind. Jaime please help Adrienne? *[Teacher goes back to negotiating with Charley.]*

**Jaime:** *[To Adrienne.]* What else is new? It happens every class.

**Adrienne:** *[Looking at Jaime's work.]* You're already done as usual. Can I see your answers? How does this work, where did I go off Jaime? Walp is so busy with them; she/he doesn't notice anything else.

**Jaime:** Sure *[looks at the work]*; you subtracted wrong that's all. Maybe I should teach this class?

**Adrienne:** That would be great, I would learn math for sure—probably everyone else too.

### **Teaching Notes**

“Schools are about teaching and learning: all other activities are secondary to these basic goals. Teaching and learning are elaborate processes that need careful attention and study” (Hoy & Hoy, 2003, p. 1). Instructional leadership in the current context sees the administrator more involved in the daily classroom happenings than locked away in his or her office. Implicitly, the administrator must be involved in the execution of curriculum at the classroom level. Explicitly this also demands that administrators have more than an “us and them” relationship with teaching faculty. Instructional leadership also requires that administrators take a more complete responsibility for the supervision of instruction. Consequently, administrators must have a strong physical presence in classrooms, corridors, playgrounds, and at school events.

“Activities such as student growth and achievement, school climate, teaching and student motivation, and faculty morale should be monitored and assessed regularly with the aim of improvement” (p. 2).

With this in mind, the purpose of this case study is to provoke current and aspiring administrators to question the attitudes and actions of the portrayed classroom teacher towards his/her students; and how they would, if faced with a similar situation, address the issues present in this case from an instructional leadership standpoint. Aspects of school climate, motivation, and morale are clandestinely revealed within this TAR scenario.

With the current movement in public education for more accountability, many state and provincial departments of education are using both formative and summative evaluation of student achievement as a means of evaluating teachers. It is our belief that administrators participating in such a TAR scenario would discuss issues of *supervision of instruction* and *leadership* in a formal setting such as a PD session or a graduate course. Among the most salient points participants would grapple with are: altering the inherent power dynamic between teachers and students; complaints by school community constituents (students and parents) in regards to teacher behaviors such as in-class student neglect, rudeness, frustration, and poor classroom management and time management skills; and the response from school administration to the various constituents. School climate and culture in tandem with issues of instructional leadership can be vividly discussed using a TAR vehicle.

Experience has shown us that the most successful classroom application is to have the scenario distributed at the beginning of the PD session or graduate class (Meyer & Young, 2011). Character roles are assigned at random. The scenario is *read out loud* in a readers' theatre

like setting.<sup>3</sup> Acting is not required; however, it is inevitable that most if not all readers, once they understand their respective characters, will add their own flair to their assigned role. After the reading of the script aloud, key discussion questions are put forward by the course instructor. In this particular TAR application, the following questions are grounded on Fossey and Crow's (2011) four elements of a good journal of cases in educational leadership (context, complexity, ambiguity, and relevance).

We have found that the following initial question, discussed either in small groups or as an entire class, can serve as the ice-breaker.

*Question 1: What just happened here?*

*Rationale.* Using this broad, open-ended question as a starting point, participants can discuss the case in terms of issues of concern such as leadership, supervision of instruction, and judgemental and non-judgemental debate concerning character(s) dialogue, actions, and reactions. The moderator can then assist the participants in organizing these points around various areas of concern.

*Question 2: What is the causal thematic statement that describes the management, environment, or supervision of instruction dilemma(s) of the scene?*

*Rationale.* A causal thematic statement requires an abstract idea as shown by a plot sequence (character and action sequences). For example, in this case study one possible thematic statement would be of educator frustration (abstract idea) as shown by the teacher's inability to deal adequately with all students' needs (plot sequence). By using causal thematic statements participants focus more on the psychological, sociological, and environmental issues as opposed

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<sup>3</sup> In this application, readers' theatre is contrived as participants with script in hand reading aloud.

to simple explanation of actions. This will assist administrators, when faced with real-life situations, to more clearly define the reality of that situation.

*Question 3: What are the leading characters' individual personality traits and how do these traits influence their behavior within the scene?*

*Rationale.* Character analyses provide insight into the actions and reactions of the involved characters. These analyses are useful for administrators in providing possible alternative dialogue or reaction if involved in a similar situation in their school.

*Question 4: What are the complexities and ambiguities of this scene?*

*Rationale.* Discussing the complexities and ambiguities of this scene could involve several facets. For example, one complexity discussion could focus on the power and control components of the various constituents as viewed by the administrator. The administrator could examine how the involved teacher controls student behavior collectively within the class and individually within the groups in the classroom. A subsequent discussion could revolve around the inappropriate use of language by students (text referring to use of “retard”) and the teacher response to such language.

*Question 5: What are the possible resolutions to this scene?*

*Rationale.* By creating alternative endings, class participants can redirect any character's intent and response to further either the character's agenda (e.g., power brokering, psychological alteration), or that of others.

*Question 6: What are the moral or values issues (conflicts) within the scene?*

*Rationale.* According to Starratt (2004), “the work of educational leadership should be work that is simultaneously intellectual and moral; an activity characterized by a blend of human, professional, and civic concerns; a work of cultivating an environment for learning that is humanly fulfilling and socially responsible” (p. 3). Discussions around this question are many. Was there a blend of human, professional, and civic (classroom) concerns portrayed or illuminated in this scene? The teacher in this TAR seems torn between executing her/his pedagogical responsibilities as fully as possible in light of the moral value systems challenged within the classroom.

*Question 7: How do legal or professional constructs come into play?*

*Rationale.* The content of this scenario has been derived from conversations with provincial in-service administrators and teachers. Under the banner of the province’s Department of Education’s *Essential Graduation Learnings (EGLs)*, at all grade levels, student, teacher, and subject course evaluations have been moving towards fulfilling the *specific course outcomes (SCOs)* within the more generic *general course outcomes (GCOs)* of all aspects of the curriculum guidelines. Public school administrators must oversee the supervision of instruction with these EGLs and outcomes in mind.

*Question 8: As the school principal observing this classroom teacher, how successful was the educator in this case in fulfilling his or her pedagogical and professional responsibilities within the context of the EGLs, SCOs, and GCOs?*

*Rationale.* Pursuant to the provincial *Education Act*, and specifically the curriculum



guidelines, teachers are expected to create lesson plans that fulfill the expectations of the EGLs, SCO, and GCO in each lesson. Whether an administrator formally, informally, or by casual observation experiences a teacher's lesson presentation, the administrator must ascertain whether or not these mandated components have been successfully executed.

*Question 9: As the school administrator in this case, what leadership direction would you initiate to deal with the teacher in this TAR scenario?*

*Rationale.* "What are the tasks of supervision that can bring about improved instruction? They are direct assistance to teachers, group development, professional development, [and] curriculum development..." (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2007, p. 299). This question permits class participants the opportunity to assume the role of the school administrator, whereby decisions regarding the supervision of instruction, or evaluation of the teacher, or issues of classroom management, or classroom behavior, can be broached.

*Question 10: As a school administrator, how would you address the concerns of a parent of a mainstream or exceptional student who claims that her/his child is being under-served by this teacher?*

*Rationale.* In this case, the teacher is struggling with adequately meeting the divergent needs of both mainstream pupils as well as students who have learning and behavioral challenges. As such, school administrators may be called upon to reconcile issues of equality and equity. As Strike, Haller, and Soltis (1998) point out, "... whenever we are faced with a choice, the best and most just decision is the one that results in the most good or the greatest benefit for the most people" (p. 16). Of course, making choices is ambiguous by its nature and engaging

with the process of decision-making is a worthwhile endeavor for administrators to consider.

Provided that these types of discussions have been fruitful, course instructors can make a judgment call as to whether or not the participants would be comfortable at this juncture to take on role-playing activities. Role-playing activities could have students take on the various character roles from the case study scenario, and improvise alternative actions and reactions, perhaps dialogue alterations, conflict resolutions, and additional scenes depicting administrator intervention in either the classroom or privately with the classroom teacher (within the parameters of supervision of instruction).

### **Conclusion**

The use of TAR as a provocative teaching tool is highly successful in furthering the understanding and implementation of instructional leadership under the aegis of supervision of instruction. TAR as a bridging mechanism between educational administration theory and the practice of school-based decision making clarifies both the roles and issues of content-specific situations. Having participants actively and simultaneously immersed in either character role-playing or being armchair analysts creates a learning milieu of judging whether or not a particular leadership style resonates with real-world (school) dynamics.

Clearly, a specific audience's response—individually or collectively—and receptivity to a TAR case study scenario is a matter of individual interpretation. In order for the connections to be made between the content of the case study and classroom practice as experienced by practitioners, individuals need to be cognitively, affectively, and perhaps even physically involved in the direction of the ideas vis-à-vis their own practice. Greene states, “the classroom situation most provocative of thoughtfulness and critical consciousness is the one in which

teachers and learners find themselves conducting a kind of collaborative search, each from her or his lived situation” (1995, p. 23). If school principals as instructional leaders are to become more critically conscious of their relationships with their staff and students, perhaps the TAR vehicle can serve in this capacity.

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