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The Need for Improving Intercultural Collaborative Activities With Structured Institutional Systems of Support

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Abstract

Evaluation of an international, grant-funded program must communicate the program's value to a variety of stakeholders: the funder, the agency operating the program and its community, and the citizens of the country where the program is implemented. An intercultural research team can achieve that goal only through a thought-out strategy. This article summarizes the challenges that intercultural teams of researchers faced as they crisscrossed a host country while evaluating a teaching and learning materials program. It concludes with three recommendations for effective collaboration: (1) Research coordinators must use rigor in selecting researchers and research assistants. (2) Researchers must receive in-depth and extensive training in both intercultural collaboration and evaluation skills. (3) Institutions involved in intercultural collaborative projects should have an intentional structure for ensuring that orientation curricula are aligned or adjusted to project objectives and that logistical arrangements are coordinated through an intercultural response mechanism.

Introduction

The ultimate purpose of program evaluation is "contributing to the provision of quality services to people in need" *(Posavac, 2011, p. 13)*. In collaborative program evaluation, as well as other community-based research or service-learning activities involving different cultures, accomplishing this purpose can be a challenge. Challenges may include communication *(Lin, Chen, & Chiu, 2012; O'Brien, Alfano, & Magnusson, 2007; Oetzel, 2002)*, ethical issues in program evaluation design and field access *(Marshall & Batten, 2003)*, realities of the context of the partnership *(McIntyre, 2008)*, and the decision-making process among groups *(Freeman & Gahungu, 2013)*. These challenges seem to originate both from visiting evaluators' unfamiliarity with the cultural context of the program being evaluated and the extent to which members of the host community share the same understanding of the purpose of the evaluation. For example, in their evaluation of health programs for Hispanics in rural settings, Aguado Loi and

McDermott *(2010)* recommended that evaluators be skilled; have experience and training in cultural competence in the population affected by the program; be well versed in techniques of program evaluation, including interpersonal skills; and be able to gain and maintain the trust of key stakeholders of the program *(p. 255)*.

In particular, in projects that employ students as assistant field researchers, Latimore, Dreelin, and Burroughs *(2014)* recommended that students participating in such outreach and engagement activities "should be provided opportunities to learn effective communication and engagement strategies through coursework and experiences that are integrated into their degree programs" *(p. 147)*. The authors also stressed the dilemma faced by university units in providing guidance and support to faculty advisors and students regarding effective outreach and engagement. On one hand, engagement and outreach activities are expected to be part of the mission of universities in the 21st century. As Ramaley *(2014)* challenges,

> In the 21st century, universities will focus on a number of signature themes that reflect both their academic interests and the characteristics of the communities and regions that they serve. Institutions will build extensive collaborative partnerships with other universities, sectors of society, local communities, and even nations to generate knowledge, address societal challenges, and create learning environments in which to educate their students. Universities will work together to address the needs of a much more diverse student population and to enhance the overall level of persistence and success in the educational environments created both by individual institutions and by networks of cooperating institutions. *(p. 18)*

On the other hand, however, creating a responsive culture of engagement can be difficult because promotion and tenure systems do not encourage such activities, and they receive inadequate financial support *(Demb & Wade, 2012)*.

Using the case of a cross-cultural collaborative evaluation of a grant-funded learning materials project conducted by a team of researchers from the host country and the United States, this article aimed to explore the extent to which the following factors influenced effective intercultural collaboration on program evaluation: research skills, intercultural competence, establishment of a shared

performance system, and navigation of the institutional bureaucracy maze. The authors propose simple guidelines from the field for effective collaboration on international, intercultural program evaluation, as well as recommendations for providing necessary support for international outreach and engagement activities at the institutional level.

Literature Review

The extent to which collaborative teams, in general, and intercultural teams, in particular, achieve responsive and effective program evaluation can be gauged using the lofty premises of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation's *Program Evaluation Standards (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011)*. The Joint Committee identified 30 standards for program evaluation and grouped them into five categories: utility standards, feasibility standards, propriety standards, accuracy standards, and evaluation accountability standards. Although program evaluators are expected to demonstrate satisfactory skills in all 30 standards, three standards particularly stand out in an intercultural collaborative context. First and foremost is the evaluator credibility standard—the first utility standard—which emphatically prescribes, "Evaluations should be conducted by qualified people who establish and maintain credibility in the evaluation context" (U1 Evaluator Credibility). Equally important is the fifth accuracy standard: "Evaluations should employ systematic information collection, review, verification, and storage methods" (A5 Information Management). The numbering of standards is illustrated below. Most important is the expectation of the second propriety standard (P2 Formal Agreements): "Evaluation agreements should be negotiated to make obligations explicit and take into account the needs, expectations, and cultural contexts of clients and other stakeholders." All in all, however, satisfactory performance of an evaluation task must be assessed against all five program evaluation categories:

1. Utility: Utility discusses use, usefulness, influence, and misuse.

2. Feasibility: Feasibility discusses the effects of contexts, cultures, costs, politics, power, available resources, and other factors on evaluations.

3. Propriety: Propriety (refers) to the moral, ethical, and legal concerns related to evaluation quality

4. Accuracy: Accuracy discusses reliability, validity, and reduction of error and bias.

5. Accountability: Evaluation accountability… results from balancing utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy. *(Yarbrough et al., 2011, p. xxviii)*

Within these expectations, international intercultural collaboration in program evaluation, as part of university-sponsored activities involving faculty, staff, and students, falls within the broader context of international engagement *(DeZure et al., 2012)*. In their study of four U.S. university teaching centers in Egypt, Iraq, Singapore, and Thailand, DeZure et al. *(2012)* indicated that an institution that encourages "international education and intercultural partnerships can expect to broaden the perspectives and enhance the learning of students, staff, faculty, academic leaders, and the broader community it serves" *(p. 32)*. However, this outcome depends on many factors, chief among which are that collaborating institutions know the context of their international partner(s), both parties can benefit from the venture, and both can create a common ground.

Similarly, in a study of U.S. students' personal challenges in a service-learning project in Tanzania, Nickols, Rothenberg, Moshi, and Tetloff *(2013)* identified several barriers to the intercultural competence required to function effectively in an international context. These challenges included feelings of being "too American" *(p. 106)* to understand the context of the project and a recognition of "gaps in expectations" *(p. 112)* between community participants and visiting students. This lack of mutual understanding could jeopardize, in turn, the best intentions of mixed teams of evaluators to be responsive to the program's "changes in context, data availability, or their own evolving understanding of the context" *(Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010, p. 18)*. It could be argued that Aguado Lao and McDermott's *(2010)* evaluation of programs for Hispanics in rural settings did not call for skills comparable to the intercultural competency required for cross-border collaborative projects and that Nickols et al.'s *(2013)* service-learning project in Tanzania was not program evaluation per se. Nonetheless, both activities addressed the "provision of quality services to people in need" in another cul-

ture *(Posavac, 2011, p. 13)*. For both activities, the risk of imposing, or being afraid of imposing, one's ethnocentric value system onto a host community is of paramount concern.

As Schneider and Romberg *(2011)* cautioned, this lack of mutual understanding will persist as long as cross-cultural teams continue to receive training that emphasizes communication barriers alone. Such training does not provide the foundation for high-performing intercultural teams. According to the authors, intercultural teams must experience three phases to achieve effective performance: intercultural awareness, a shared performance system, and intercultural communication. At the intercultural awareness phase, "the goal is not to fully understand the other culture, but rather to accept that each culture has a valid logic" *(p. 46)*. At the shared awareness phase, team members aim to "negotiate a shared performance system" *(p. 46).* The authors explain, "If there is little agreement about what performance should look like, it is hard to work together cohesively" *(p. 46).* After teams have developed a shared performance system, they can learn "skills for communicating effectively in work situations" *(p. 47)*. Otherwise, cross-cultural teams will continue exhibiting "insecurities in interactions with each other" *(p. 47).*

Although most universities include international community outreach and engagement in their missions, the statements do not always translate into policies or support commitment. According to Demb and Wade's *(2012)* survey, not only are such activities time consuming, but the current tenure system did not encourage faculty to participate in engagement activities, financial support for such activities was inadequate, and faculty participation lacked a support infrastructure. Rather than sending faculty and students to those culturally sensitive and adventurous activities without a backup infrastructure or a form of extrinsic motivation, Demb and Wade *(2012)* recommended that

> institutions could assist faculty with identifying community partners, and/or developing standard patterns for collaborative agreements, that can support either research partnerships or responsibilities for student internships. This might mean creating a category of "partnership specialists" who offer support across the campus. *(p. 362)*

Methods

Research Design

This report is a case study in which the authors tell the stories of the collaboration between a group of U.S. faculty, staff, and students on one side and a group of African faculty, staff, and students on the other side. The authors reviewed notes and reflections about the collaboration between and within the two groups from different sources—notes from a preorientation course that the students took, comments from a 1-week predeparture workshop in the United States, comments from a 1-week combined workshop in the host country, field journal reflections, notes from field briefings and debriefings, notes from an unpublished student-created postfield video and pamphlet, and a reflection forum. In addition, the authors asked researchers via e-mail to provide their thoughts about how the African and American researchers worked together within teams, the challenges they faced, and recommendations for future projects. The same questions were asked by telephone for clarification. In this article, the country where the evaluation took place will be referred to as the host country.

The authors chose a method of inquiry that used the voices of the researchers exclusively because, as Savin-Baden and van Niekerk *(2007)* advocated, "stories are the closest we can come to shared experience" *(p. 462)*. This case study is both a restorying *(Creswell, 2007)* of the events that happened during 2 months of collaboration between African and American researchers on a federally funded project and a reflection of two key researchers—one American researcher who was born and educated in Africa, who was also the evaluation coordinator, and one American researcher who led one of the research teams. As Creswell clarified, "active participation with the participant is necessary, and researchers need to discuss the participants' stories as well as be reflective about their own personal and political background, which shapes how they restory the account" *(p. 57)*.

Study Background

In 2005, with a grant from an American agency, a U.S. university embarked on a collaborative project with officials of an African country to produce and disseminate school materials for the country's early childhood programs. The materials were distributed nationwide to the schools in 2008 and 2009. Toward the end of 2009 and after the first 2 years of the program, a team of

researchers from the university developed a proposal for evaluating the extent of use of the materials and their impact. The proposal was vetted by partners in the host country. The final version of the evaluation proposal and protocols was completed in March 2010 and approved by both the receiving country's ministry of education and the university's institutional review board in May 2010.

In June 2010, after 2 weeks of intensive training in program evaluation methodology, five researchers and six student interns from the university traveled to Africa, where they were joined by three researchers and six students from the host country. On the American side, the researchers, including the evaluation coordinator, were selected because of their involvement in the development of the project and affiliation with the center that administered the project. The African side selected researchers from two education universities, primarily because of the universities' role in the adoption of the teaching and learning materials produced by the project. Both groups received more methodology training together for another week. The evaluation coordinator used the manual *Program Assessment Guidelines for Field Researchers (Gahungu, 2010)*, tailoring it to the specific program evaluation project. In order to cover the whole country, researchers and interns were divided into five teams. Each team, composed of host country and American researchers, covered several contiguous school districts where they observed teachers and students using the materials and interviewed teachers and parents. In addition, the researchers also administered and collected surveys from teachers, head teachers, and other high-ranking administrators.

Each day during the fieldwork, researchers were required to keep a journal of their activities and lessons learned from the excursions. The experiences were shared within each of the five groups. After the individual group sessions, the evaluation coordinator hosted a teleconference with all team leaders to review the work progress and challenges met. All of those experiences culminated in a 1-day postevaluation reflection for all groups, where researchers shared their research and intercultural lessons. Key stakeholders of the program—the funding agency director in the host country, representatives from the country's ministry of education, members of the project advisory boards, and other officials—joined the researchers for the discussions. The last 2 hours of the postevaluation day were devoted to a short play in which the researchers portrayed their 2 months on the road, living in unfamiliar conditions, working with people from a different culture, eating different kinds of foods, and (for the first time for some

interns) conducting field research. The activities discussed in this article were approved by the U.S. university's institutional review board, as well as by the ministry of education in the host country.

Stories From the Field

The analyses reported in the following paragraphs summarize both the voices of the participants and the authors' retrospective self-reflections as research coordinators. The following summaries thus serve as an assessment of dispositions, performance, and resources needed for similar intercultural collaborative activities. Analyses are grouped around the following themes: (a) adherence to procedures and professionalism, (b) intercultural competence, (c) establishment of a shared performance system, and (d) navigating the institutional bureaucracy maze. These analyses lay the foundation for the Discussion and Recommendations sections of this article, which address obstacles to readiness for participants as well as requirements for institutional readiness for international outreach and engagement.

Adherence to Procedures and Professionalism

Verifying whether the evaluation teams were composed of qualified people who had the necessary research and evaluation skills was not easy. For the project at hand, the main research activities consisted of interviewing teachers and parents; observing teachers; and administering a survey to teachers, head teachers, district administrators, and national officials in order to ascertain the extent of use and impact of the materials on the end users. For both groups of evaluators, the main task was to verify that the materials had not only been produced and delivered to the schools, but were utilized and were having an impact in the classrooms. Each group also had specific expectations. Each researcher from the host country was assigned to a group and an area reflecting his or her understanding of the communities using the materials coupled with a good knowledge of the languages of communication, the customs of the places, and the physical terrain. Since the Americans' knowledge of the terrain was limited, they were expected to contribute mainly in the execution of the evaluation and analysis procedures.

Consistently, in all teams, team leaders' main task was to facilitate debriefings after each day's work and briefings in the morning about the work ahead. They verified that all instruments were assembled prior to field trips and reviewed the data collected for

thoroughness every evening. Team leaders were the main interviewers of teachers, head teachers, and other higher level officials. Host country team researchers were primarily responsible for interviewing parents. For transportation to field sites, the project had subcontracted drivers. Although the drivers were not part of the research teams and did not participate in orientation sessions, they knew the terrain and the languages and thus served as indispensable guides, translators, and cultural liaisons.

In addition to performing fieldwork, researchers took the time to visit places of cultural interest. Knowledgeable in-country team members and a logistics coordinator for the project were instrumental to these activities. At the conclusion of the summer project, U.S. student researchers were required to complete a survey about these cultural experiences and their fieldwork. Once the survey was completed and returned to the Office of International Programs, the students received a grade for the summer experience. The following paragraphs describe the five teams of researchers in terms of their complementary skills.

Team 1 conducted the evaluation around the host country's capital city. It consisted of four members. The team leader was an assistant professor of reading in the U.S. Although she had not conducted research overseas before, her prior experience as a school principal in the United States, coupled with her reading credentials, enabled her to understand the evaluation tasks at hand, particularly the observations of teachers. There were two U.S. undergraduate students on this team, a physical education major and a business major. The fourth member of the team was an undergraduate education major in the host country. In addition to being a student, the fourth member had been a teacher for several years. She played an essential role as translator, guide, interviewer, and go-to person for any outstanding questions about the local context.

Team 2 conducted research in the eastern, central, and western regions of the country. It consisted of a U.S. team leader, two student interns from the host country, one U.S. student intern, and a driver. The team leader, an assistant professor of elementary education in the United States, had participated in the design of the evaluation project and had been to the host country with the evaluation coordinator to conduct preassessment activities the previous year. The two student interns from the host country were both education majors, one at the undergraduate level and the other at the graduate level. Both were familiar with the languages spoken there. Because the American student intern, a graduate art education major, was a teacher, she was instrumental in interviewing and observations.

Team 3 was in the northern part of the country, the farthest from the capital city. The team leader was the evaluation project coordinator and a professor of educational leadership and administration in the United States. He codesigned the methodology of the evaluation project and developed field research guidelines that he used to train the researchers. His previous experiences included working on international projects. He also had participated in the preassessment of the project the previous year. The team members consisted of a researcher from the host country's university, a student intern majoring in business in the United States, and a driver. Although the host country researcher was not from that region, he was familiar with the region's language and customs. In that capacity, he served as the team's guide, translator, interviewer, and observer. The U.S. student's business skills were very useful in organizing interview and observation transcripts and in returning survey questionnaires. She also helped with taking notes during interviews and class observations.

Team 4 consisted of two team leaders, a co–team leader, two students, and a driver. It conducted the evaluation in part of the northern region of the country. One of the team leaders was a high official from the host country. This official was able to attend only the combined training in field research methodology; however, because of professional obligations, the official was unable to join the team in the field. Because of the official's absence, the U.S. logistics coordinator for the project was selected to act as co-team leader. The researcher on the team was a doctoral student from the host country, as well as an educator and a university-affiliated professional who had previously conducted program evaluations. Although not the leader of the team, he helped with all the aspects of the work including interviewing, observing teachers, and serving as liaison with the community. The U.S. student was a graduate business major who was traveling abroad for the first time.

Team 5 conducted research in the eastern and central regions of the country. It was led by a researcher in the host country's curriculum and research development office. She was assisted by a doctoral student from the United States who was also writing his dissertation on the project. With them were a graduate business major intern from the U.S. and a host country undergraduate education major. As in other teams, the citizens from the host country were primarily responsible for the interviews and translation.

As the description above shows, teams were unequally balanced both in group representation and in skills. The disparity came from several sources. First, some U.S. evaluators asked to

work relatively near the country's capital; they did not want to venture too far. Thus, Team 1 did not have an evaluator who had previously worked on a grant-funded project. Similarly, one of the teams did not have a researcher from the U.S., and its experienced team leader from the host country was unable to participate in activities.

In addition, criticism was expressed regarding the backgrounds of the researchers, and the overall qualification of some U.S. student interns was questioned. Some researchers were concerned that student interns did not have enough background to conduct research in schools, particularly since they had to observe teaching, interview teachers and parents, and assess the worth of teaching materials used in schools. One host country evaluator commented,

> However, when education research is being conducted, I think that all of those involved need to be education majors or working in the field of education. Only two of the six students from the U.S. were students majoring in education. All of those participating who were from [the host country] were students majoring in education, teachers and/or working in an area of education. The U.S. students were productive and cooperative, but we were conducting education research in schools. It seemed to show a lack of regard for the field to send people to observe classes and do the research who were not members of the field. I wonder if it sends a message that one's training does not matter when it comes to education; anyone can do whatever is necessary to complete the educational task.

Intercultural Competence

Although the American student interns had taken an entire semester of a study abroad course in which they learned about the culture of the host country, followed by 3 weeks of orientation to field research and evaluation methodologies, some researchers reported that they had had inadequate or incomplete orientation about the research context. They observed that little was done to allay researchers' fears about where they would be going and what they would be doing. One researcher voiced disappointment in the shortcomings of the orientation:

> Some field researchers were upset that they were being asked to go to certain areas. Some field researchers were

> so afraid of the area they were being posted because the orientation was that such areas were without good drinking water, electricity or internet. A better orientation on the research context is needed in the future.

Other researchers countered the criticism by pointing to the educational nature of the project. Notably, one researcher described the steep learning curve she faced as a result of misinformation about Africa she had acquired through school. According to her, a short orientation course away from the field could not calm her fears of doing research in a foreign culture. The researcher reflected,

> Traveling to [the host country] on this research trip gradually dispelled so many of my indoctrinations and beliefs. I was so impressed with the students. In [the host country], education is a prized possession.

Indeed, most student interns from the United States, as well as some seasoned researchers, had not traveled abroad, let alone in the host country. Their thought processes initially revolved around contrasts in the learning and teaching environment. Slowly, those thought processes shifted from misunderstandings to appreciation of the context. Statements by several American researchers illustrate that gradual shift:

> The largest class we visited had about 70 students. There was no indoor space for them. The Head Teacher placed benches and a blackboard under the trees to protect the children from the sun and rain. Some children sat on the ground because there was no space on the benches. Those children without a bench seat sat on the ground and completed the assigned exercises in their books [*sic*].

> The schools place the students into classes according to their academic ability. There were 8-year olds in the Kindergarten classes. I witnessed a 14 and a 16-year old in a Kindergarten class because this was their first time in school. The older students participated just as the younger members of the class.

> Classes were observed with over 50 children in a class with one teacher and sometimes as many as 150 4- and 5-year olds.
>
> Why do we, in the U.S., think that more than 30 children in a class is catastrophe?
>
> The children were amazing. Regardless of their learning environment, they were smiling and seemed happy to be learning.
>
> Some schools did not have the amenities of schools in the U.S. (electricity in the classroom, indoor plumbing for restrooms, computers, smart boards, etc.), but the 5-year-old children were quite capable of reading and able to use phonics in a manner that would challenge 3rd and 4th graders in the U.S.

By the end of the project, because the initial apprehensions had been sufficiently allayed, researchers of both countries were learning from the experiences of working in mixed teams, interviewing parents and teachers, and going to cultural sites such as the slave castles and baths. Interns from both countries offered statements that reflected their new understandings:

> [The project] helped me gain a better understanding of the lives and hearts of others. (Host country intern)
>
> [I] visited [a] slave castle again. It had more of an impact because I was with American students. (Host country intern)
>
> I gained an understanding of my own soul. (U.S. intern)

The transformation from curious, fearful interns and researchers was so powerful that these startling assessments were made at the end of the project:

> It was a blessing to go. (U.S. intern)

> I want to return to [the host country]. I want to return to [the host country], become involved in education and recreation. (U.S. intern)

> I want to return to [the host country] and bring my children to live here. (U.S. intern)

> There were misconceptions and misinformation of the African students concerning the U.S. "People in the U.S. are rich. They acquire material items without exerting much effort." (Host country intern)

As a matter of fact, one U.S. student intern has returned to the host country and is now considering making it her country. However, beyond adaptation, one must understand the complexity of conducting research in another culture. Researchers, both African and American, observed how difficult it was for members of the visiting culture to be fully accepted. One American researcher shared:

> The U.S. members, although treated politely, were considered foreigners. Being in and being seen in a group with those who lived in [host country] gave our group more acceptance.

One host country researcher went further and suggested that interview respondents may have not provided truthful responses to questions, but rather purposely appealed to the foreignness of the interviewers. In other words, the responses may not have reflected the extent of use of the materials provided by the school materials project or whether they had had an impact. Instead, respondents may have purposely depicted inadequate use and negative impact of the materials so that the assistance would continue. One of the researchers then recommended that the report should account for that "social desirability" effect:

> What I observed particularly in [location redacted] is that some respondents were purposively giving responses that suggest they had a message for the American group. The responses were not addressing the questions but rather tilted towards expressing "a concern for help". I also think that the foreigner dimensions made some respondents to give fit for purpose

> responses to the questions [*sic*]. I believe some of the responses were products of "social desirability effects." I think the analysis (and the methodology section) should account for that possibility.

Adaptation was made even more challenging by unavoidable incidents among team members. For instance, on the first day of fieldwork, one U.S. team member stopped at a "squatting" toilet. The toilet became a subject of conversations, giggling, and jokes, which almost divided the teams along cultural lines. In retrospect, had the team leaders addressed the issue not only in terms of the functionality of the toilet, but also by drawing attention to the pervasiveness of the technology in the United States and the rest of the world, the rifts would have been avoided. The real issue, it seems, was ignorance and limited instruction prior to the trip, which led such a trivial incident to escalate into a subject of mockery, bashing, teasing, and tensions between the groups.

Finally, successful team leaders were people-to-people ambassadors who truly understood the political and social context of the evaluation. Several had never worked in a system where one had to be chauffeured to research sites. Managing and receiving guidance from the driver was a new learning opportunity. The drivers acted as interpreters and liaisons but were not invited to field orientation meetings and did not participate in briefings and debriefings; the cost of their involvement beyond driving was not included in the project. Consequently, there was little guarantee that drivers conveyed the information on the scripts, which presented potential problems with respect to the ethical conduct of the field research. After all, drivers were not trained researchers. On the other hand, team leaders were aware that overrelying on the good will of subcontracted drivers was not an easy arrangement; besides, team leaders had no supervisory authority over the drivers.

Similarly, adjusting to the use of the correct etiquette when interacting with host country stakeholders was significant. A number of high-ranking administrators, particularly in the ministry of education, were elected officials and thus were referred to as "Honorable." Professional counterparts were referred to by socially accepted forms of address to which researchers were not accustomed. Although people seemed to find being called "Mrs." or "Mr." acceptable, being conversant with the use of "Auntie," "Mama," or "Uncle" made access to the field site easier.

Establishment of a Shared Performance System

Beyond the journey, one must revisit the extent to which the teams accomplished their program evaluation mission and cohesively collaborated. No systematic metaevaluation of the project was conducted to specifically ask the researchers to appraise their performance collectively or in their mixed teams. Therefore, statements taken from all sources of information are used to infer the existence or nonexistence of a shared performance system between the two groups of researchers.

As previously described, both groups of researchers received training in field research in general and in program evaluation in particular. All researchers practiced mock interviews, teaching observations, and survey administration techniques. They also reviewed ethical guidelines in field research in general and program evaluation in particular. For 2 weeks—1 week in the United States and 1 week in the host country—researchers discussed and demonstrated at length the ethical and practical considerations of program evaluation.

This training attempted to establish a mutually agreed-upon and shared purpose for the evaluation. Once in smaller groups, the primary responsibility of team leaders was to continuously reinforce this frame of reference. Each morning before going to the schools, team leaders would speak to their team members about the nonnegotiable items of the evaluation, as well as elements that were flexible. Each evening after fieldwork, the team met again to evaluate their day's work and plan for the following day. The lead researchers set up a teleconference with the other team leaders to discuss their progress and the challenges, if any, they had faced.

Despite the preparation and the cautions, departures from the agreed-upon practices were often observed. For instance, in their reflections, several host country researchers observed that the Americans failed to connect with their interviewees and interlocutors and asked overly redundant questions just to continue with the script. Likewise, the host country researchers were often reported to oversimplify their questioning and note taking to the point that the information collected was incomplete. A host country researcher summarized this discrepancy:

> The [host country] students summarized the questions, which allowed the respondents to express themselves freely. The Americans asked all the questions, thus making the interview lengthy. But I noticed it is due to the language barrier and accents of the language in

> which the [host country researchers] had the upper hand [*sic*].

> Indeed, the language of communication was an issue. However, as it was imparted during the training, following the script was needed to ensure that all the needed information was recorded, and could be analyzed. Simplifying the questions in interviewing is acceptable practice, as long as the needed information is captured; however, oversimplification of protocols that leads to data that partially answers evaluation questions is not productive. Likewise, mechanical adherence to scripts without being attentive to the interlocutors is also unproductive.

To compensate for the linguistic limitations and intercultural shortcomings of the Americans and the disregard for the script by the host country researchers, some team leaders opted for task specialization between host country researchers and Americans. For instance, only one interviewer or one observer was selected in the team, and the other team members would alternate as transcribers and interpreters. One researcher described the arrangement:

> In my group, the duties of collecting the information were divided such that we each performed the same duties at each of the sites. The same person was assigned to stay with the children while we interviewed the teacher. The same person interviewed all of the parents, etc. In this way, we each became "experts" in performing our assignments and were able to gather the data in an expedient manner. Everyone took notes on their portion of the data collection.

> I assigned the duties hours before we were to have our first meeting. After meeting with my team, the [host country] members of my team asked me to think about the language barrier that might occur even though the [host country] teachers and parents spoke English. Therefore, in collaborating with my team, assignments were changed. One of the [host country] members was assigned to interview all of the parents. The other [host country] member who recorded the number of project

> books and materials that were being used was given time to perform that duty so that he could assist the U.S. person who was assigned to interview the teachers.
>
> Data gathering would have been extremely difficult if not impossible (especially with the parents) had there not been [host country] members of the team. There were many times when the [host country] partner needed to translate the English language in the native tongue of the interviewee or reword the sentence to make it easier to understand in interviewing the teachers.

Whether or not these arrangements responded to the aspiration of each researcher and research intern to be conversant about all aspects of the evaluation process is an assessment beyond the scope of this article. However, such arrangements made it possible for team leaders to establish consistency and thus avert dissension among team members on intercultural lines.

The issue of a shared performance system also calls for a fundamental question of intercultural researchers' hidden agenda. When asked to share what they expected from the 2 months in the host country, one American researcher commented,

> I expected to do research as it was shared with the team of our assignments with [school materials project]. I was not sure what to expect with the country, yet I was excited and had very little fear about the trip. My major challenge was culture/language barriers. I appreciated the [host country] students being there because we were able to learn from each other. The highlight of my trip were the wonderful people and all the experiences we shared together, i.e., the slave castle, the schools, shopping together, the excursions, etc.

Other American researchers almost exclusively seemed to have drawn their satisfaction from benefits of the trip other than the program evaluation itself. The camaraderie within groups, the "being there," and overcoming those first apprehensions about working with people from another culture seemed to have been the ultimate goal. Researchers made comments as they evaluated their epiphanies experienced on the project well ahead of the evaluation itself. For example:

> [I] visited [the] slave castle again. It had more of an impact because I was with American students. (Host country participant)

> [I was] eager to show American students my university. (Host country participant)

> We traveled through harsh terrain for days, but it was worth it. (U.S. participant)

> Wanting the strong bond between U.S. and [host country] to last. (Host country participant)

> [Thanks to this project], I want to work with the US Embassy or NGO (USA) on behalf of the women and children of my country. (Host country participant)

> Having and using polite manners are very important. (U.S. participant)

Navigating the Institutional Bureaucracy Maze

Conducting a cross-cultural, cross-border program evaluation is a complex undertaking in both planning and execution. In the case of the evaluation at hand, the planning process was slow; nonetheless, by the time the host country ministry of education allowed the activities to proceed, and the university's institutional review board approved the methodology, all parties involved were in agreement about the need for the evaluation and the logistics it required. However, the good intentions of the parties could not overcome some realities of governance of international projects.

First, the lead researcher observed that individuals who participated in the planning and design of the program evaluation in the host country were not the ones who joined the evaluation teams or the training sessions. During the preassessment sessions, a group of researchers were selected to review the methodology of the evaluation, including developing field research instruments, mapping field sites, and finalizing access to the field scripts. When the two groups of researchers met for the training in June 2010, there were subsequent changes. All the researchers from the host

team were replaced by other individuals who, although equally skilled researchers, nonetheless required familiarization with all the procedures from the very beginning. Even the field maps had to be redrawn. At least one key researcher who was to lead one of the field teams participated in the training but was unavailable for the rest of the activities.

Second, because of the shuffles in personnel, most teams, although they had at least one representative who understood the culture of the field sites, did not have the expertise and familiarity with the evaluation procedures that the initial planners would have brought. As a consequence, some teams resorted to drivers as guides and interpreters. Although the drivers' services were invaluable, they were nonetheless unfamiliar with the scripting of the procedures and were not included among the lists of investigators submitted to the institutional review board (IRB).

Third, to support expanding the mission of the project, students were added to the evaluation teams as research trainees. However, because not all team leaders had mentored research trainees in the past, it was not possible to maintain a consistent level of facilitation of team reflections held each evening after fieldwork. Notes from team leaders indicated that as days passed and the volume of data collected increased, some team leaders became more concerned about data storage, data transcription, and redrawing data collection maps than requiring team members to enter field observations and reflections as initially planned. Team leaders also noted that not all trainees had enough background in education to be effective in observing classes and in interviewing teachers and parents. This lack of skills made the work of the lead researcher and team leaders more demanding. Particularly during the middle days, when the excitement of working with the "other culture" had subsided, the main concern of the lead researcher and team leaders was to balance two sets of competing needs: on the one hand, mentoring team members and maintaining harmony among them; on the other, ensuring completion of work assignments and tending to trainees' development needs.

Fourth, and most important, access to the field for performing interviews and observation relied heavily on executing scripts consistently. Team leaders noted that although the scripts were clear and were approved by both the IRB and the host country's officials, the evaluation coordinator and team leaders had to exercise an unexpected amount of flexibility to seek permission to reach the schools and participants. Often, administrators who were initially contacted for field access had been replaced in their positions.

Consequently, communication with the new officials had to be transmitted through the project's in-country office staff. As is customary, all written communication had to bear an official stamp. These new replacements, as reliable as they were, did not participate in the orientation training. When the survey questionnaires and announcements of interviews and class observations reached the parents, teachers, and other participants, they may have been interpreted as administrative obligations as opposed to an invitation to voluntary participation. Furthermore, the teams had no way of ascertaining whether the language used in subsequent interoffice communications adhered to the language level required of the scripts or conveyed the purpose of the evaluation activities about which the initial group of administrators had been briefed.

Finally, team leaders noted that this grant-funded project was implemented as part of a broader national development agenda and that other nationally and internationally-funded projects with similar, supplemental, or complementary objectives were implemented at the same time. However, only officials at the national level seemed to know of the parallel initiatives. The researchers, as well as the end users of produced materials, were not fully informed of the broader policies. In the case of this evaluation, a complementary initiative funded by another agency had started distributing a set of teaching and learning materials to the same schools targeted. In some instances, the end users were not aware of the difference between the two sets. In others, the materials which were to be evaluated had not been distributed and were still stored in a container while the other set was used. In those situations, some teams of researchers were able to explain the differences; others opted to report the discrepancy only. In either case, the confusion distracted the evaluators.

Discussion

The stories and reflections reported above highlight several issues. The first challenge seems to be both with the selection of study abroad students and with the approval process for international research projects. On one hand, spending an academic period in another country, no matter how short or long, is an adventure for researchers and students, and the selection of the country or program may not always be guided by academic criteria alone. Some choose a country because relatives or former students from their majors have gone there before. Others choose a country for adventure or because of the flexibility of their academic assignments. In most of the programs to which this U.S. university sent students—

Europe, several countries in Africa, Mexico, Taiwan—participants engaged in academic and intercultural seminars combined with excursions. However, for the project at hand, a program evaluation component involving classroom observations and interviews of parents and educational professionals was added. Although the work included an academic component in the form of shadowing researchers, it turned out to be more technical and labor intensive than activities conducted in other programs, at least for researchers and students who were expecting some vacation abroad. Indeed, compared to tens of students going to other parts of the world in 2010, only six students selected this project. Because of the small pool of applicants, all six students were accepted to the program. The six students received an orientation to the program, but there was no further screening based on their research and program evaluation backgrounds or intercultural competence.

On the other hand, the approval process for international research is complex. The IRB generally will not approve research procedures until the host country has approved them. However, some host countries may not have a formal process for approving international projects. Thus, in the case of the evaluation project at hand, the final approval was obtained only 2 weeks before the group was to travel overseas. As a consequence of receiving the approval in mid-May with departure in the first week of June, the student interns barely had time to mentally prepare themselves for participating in evaluation activities. In contrast, study abroad students normally prepare for their experience through at least semester-long seminars and several weeks of in-country intercultural excursions.

Adhering to agreed-upon interviewing, observing, and data recording techniques seemed to work during the first days. The training the researchers had received throughout the orientation weeks appeared to work. All team leaders reported that their researchers were conforming to the scripts and that reflection times were very effective in correcting errors made. However, as days passed, members became more complacent. Interns were no longer writing as much in their pads, and some team members found the necessary scripts cumbersome; one member from the host country stopped following the scripts altogether. The researcher criticized the Americans for following the prescribed conventions of interviewing, such as using silence to let the interviewee elaborate, repeating what the interviewee said (i.e., "echoing"), and letting the interviewee talk. The researcher thought those techniques made the interviews too lengthy and reflected the Americans' limited

communication skills in the host culture. Unfortunately, as a result of interviewers not following the protocols, particularly prodding for responses, sometimes whole interview sessions were sketched in one-word answers that could not be used in the reports.

Similarly, American student interns sometimes failed to read the context. They would make the interviewees uncomfortable by prodding them to expand on their responses when that was not needed, or they awkwardly used silence when that was not appropriate. Such experiences may have inspired pressure from their counterparts and awareness of their foreignness, which in turn caused the American student interns to abbreviate the interviews or the notes from interviews. In the last days of the evaluation, interview transcripts from both groups became incomprehensible, which made writing the final report extremely difficult.

The 3-week training in research procedures was very helpful. However, this training alone did not enable team members to sustain a uniform level of accountability. The teams that produced quality work apparently adhered to three basic principles. First, team leaders reinforced the techniques of program evaluation, particularly those related to interviewing and observing. During debriefing sessions, leaders had members discuss how they allowed participants to speak, echoed what they heard, and transcribed what they heard and saw, as opposed to jumping to interpretations. Second, team members were professional. They accepted and respected other team members. They did not overreact to criticism, and they ensured that their demeanor, attire, and speech—both during fieldwork and after work—were professional. Of particular importance was use of proper academic language; conflicts often arose when host country researchers perceived visitors' English-language slang as uneducated mistakes. Third, team leaders who were effective were those who took the time to continuously reinforce research procedures because, as one team leader reflected, "one can only change or forego a technique if s/he fully understands it."

Teams whose members truly viewed the evaluation as a cooperative activity to enhance understanding between the American people and the citizens of the host country seemed to do well. Those team members were, first and foremost, self-aware. In their intercultural conversations, they did not delve into stereotypes. They had the courage to acknowledge that their knowledge of their own country was limited. The cultural questions they asked their counterparts were genuine.

However, as these field stories highlighted, the teams sometimes needed more support from their campuses. At times, team leaders faced logistical, technical/training, or political issues that involved resources or skills that were not available while traversing the host country. More important, there were times when, several weeks into the project, team leaders started doubting what results the work would yield for them when they returned to their campuses. Would the extra mile put into improvised mentoring have a place in their portfolios, or count toward their promotion and tenure?

Recommendations

Intercultural collaboration on the evaluation of an international, grant-funded project involves several parties of stakeholders. The U.S. university and the country where the project was implemented, as the beneficiaries of the grant, and the funding agency, as the main sponsor of the grant, had signed a cooperative agreement guiding operations. Consequently, all three parties were responsible for executing the project from design to evaluation. Both the university and the officials at the ministry of education in the host country were responsible for the evaluation of the project. With approval from the funding agency, they proposed forming a cross-cultural team representing the two parties. To add to the capacity building of the project, lead researchers were asked to mentor student interns in the activities. Based on the teams' experiences, we offer a number of suggestions for involvement in similar intercultural collaborative activities. We propose that more thorough and appropriate preparation, as outlined in the following sections, could have made the experience more reliably worthwhile for researchers and contributed more to meeting the expectations of the communities involved.

Recommendations for Collaborative Research Coordinators

Coordinators of intercultural collaborative projects involving program evaluation and other engagement activities need to realize that not everybody is a program evaluator, much less an intercultural research collaborator. It is easy to romanticize a trip to another part of the world or hosting guests from other cultures. However, when the trip or the hosting involves an activity as labor intensive and as standard guided as program evaluation, that intrinsic motivation can be short lived. One must not only be ready to embark

on the journey, but also possess the stamina and the skills to stay the course. That is why it is recommended that researchers be carefully selected for their motivation and skills. In particular, student researchers should not just go abroad or be called to work on an international project without an assessment of their character and predisposition to intercultural activity. Therefore, the authors recommend that only researchers who are self-aware, open to other cultures, and true to the "people-to-people" mission of the project should be selected to conduct an international, collaborative program evaluation. Further, researchers should be team leaders only if they know the project from the inside and are informed about the political and social context of the project.

Second, a one-semester course of orientation to study abroad cannot by itself guarantee that students will be ready to function abroad. Such courses are often too generic. For example, this project would have benefited from a more structured, deeper, and longer orientation program once in the host country. Moreover, orientation courses seem to target students only. Faculty and staff also need an orientation. Crash orientation sessions that are organized at the beginning of activities can be cumbersome, particularly if they focus on the logistics of the work, rather than the evaluation skills and awareness. That is why it is recommended that teams be balanced in technical and interpersonal skills as well as in the knowledge of the terrain. Because the evaluation procedures required the teams to crisscross the host country, some teams had more skills than others, which affected the availability of lead evaluators to mentor interns and to consistently monitor field activities. Furthermore, orientation in the evaluation methodology can never be long enough. The 3 weeks that the visiting group spent receiving the training and the 1 week of combined training of the two groups were not enough to ensure that all evaluators, particularly research interns, became interculturally competent and able to fully adhere to all evaluation standards—utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability *(Yarbrough et al., 2011)*.

Third, even a good and fun adventure can be structured. It only took 2 weeks for some groups in this project to become complacent about their mandatory morning briefing and evening debriefing sessions. Team leaders also became more lenient about completion of journal notes and reflections before bedtime, as well as evening calling-in to the research coordinator. Those activities ought to be the fabric of the collaborative experience. Only when team leaders continuously reinforce procedures and facilitate reflections will team members be able to function in a cross-cultural

collaborative program evaluation. Team members must at all times adhere to the procedures and to the highest professional standards. Doing so requires, in turn, that team leaders be well organized and knowledgeable about the whole picture. They also should ensure that negative attitudes, which often result from a combination of tolerating stereotypes, ignorance, and fatigue, do not contaminate the team spirit. For that, team leaders must set boundaries about the types of teasing, jokes, and attitudes to allow.

Fourth, a common purpose must serve both as a reminder to look beyond the immediate and a window to opportunities. Once in the field, it is easy to forget why one is there. Data collection, analysis, and logistical arrangements soon take precedence over the diplomatic and humanitarian purpose of the experience. Very soon, crisscrossing the host country and writing reports become the goal; establishing a shared performance system for the evaluation becomes neglected. It was easy for members of one group to view the significance of the project through their exclusive lenses. As days passed and routines were established, it became difficult for teams to retain a rigorous focus on their mission. Team leaders became preoccupied with ensuring that there were no omissions in the transcriptions or storage of data collected, that the logistics were coordinated within and among teams, and that there was harmony among group members. Consequently, teams devoted less time to reflecting together and writing about the meaning of their experiences. We recommend that team leaders adopt a methodology for continuously maintaining a focus on the common purpose of the evaluation, make it a priority, and never stop instilling in researchers what the evaluation means for the communities involved. In particular, before embarking on an intercultural collaborative project, research coordinators and researchers ought to receive structured training in techniques for gaining and maintaining trust of key stakeholders in the collaborative country.

Recommendations for Selecting and Training Student Researchers, Faculty, and Auxiliary Staff

As discussed above, the selection of student researchers from the U.S. university and matching them with student researchers from the host country was an activity approved and added at the last minute. The student researchers had already signed up for the summer project in the host country and were already attending an intercultural orientation course targeting the host country, but with the understanding that they would do the usual teacher aide work. Once the activity was added, the students received several sessions

of training tailored to technical and ethics issues in program evaluation and design, field access, and intercultural communication. Omitted, however, was another round of one-on-one interviews with the research team to ensure that the students were fully ready for the challenge. Such a screening would have resulted in some students being dropped from the program, replaced on the project, or given more preparation.

However, in retrospect, our experience shows that such last-minute provisions would not have been enough. Students, faculty, and staff who participate in intercultural collaborative activities need to receive preparation that reflects the realities of such work. Students need coursework in effective communication and engagement activities as well as experience in program evaluation and such areas as international and intercultural awareness. Similarly, the faculty and staff performing their first international project evaluation should not be assigned to an international, intercultural collaborative activity. Such projects are appropriate only for faculty and staff skilled and trained in ethical issues of program evaluation and experienced in program evaluation design and field access.

Auxiliary staff such as drivers and office staff need to be more effectively inducted into activities. Project coordinators ought to make drivers part of the teams from the start. Training sessions can be used for sharing drivers' knowledge of the terrain and for familiarizing the drivers with the researchers. At a minimum, the drivers ought to be consistently informed, together with the researchers, about the design of the project, ethical issues in collecting the data, and communicating with the stakeholders. The same ought to be true for office staff who interact with stakeholders and researchers. In this project, office staff were privy to conversations among researchers and drivers, whether directly or indirectly, and were responsible for communication between researchers and stakeholders. Leaving them unaware of ethical issues involved in such critical activities as contacting stakeholders, contacting interviewees, and managing project resources could jeopardize the entire evaluation.

Finally, at the conclusion of the project, a better coordination of efforts is needed for assessment of student researchers' experiences, as well as faculty and staff's experiences. Students' grades for their summer internships should be awarded based on recommendations from their team leaders. Similarly, a more consistent structure for assessing the roles of faculty, drivers, and auxiliary staff, on both the U.S. side and the host country's side, needs to be

carefully created to ensure that the efforts of these individuals are included in participating institutions' accomplishments.

Recommendation for Involving Student Researchers and Auxiliary Staff

For both hosts and visiting teams, navigating the complexities of internationally-funded grant projects can become an added learning task. As this project exemplified, cooperative agreements are sometimes fluid. Whether in response to broader national goals and changing political environments or for diplomatic reasons, projects often request funding for supplementary activities that can divert researchers' attention from their primary focus. The addition of students as research interns from the American and African sides, although a very diplomatic gesture, called for the team leaders to exercise mentorship skills that they may not have had. At the least, the addition stretched the focus and expertise of the team leaders. If this responsibility had been anticipated from the start, only research team leaders with a background of working with and mentoring research/teaching assistants would have been selected for the project. Therefore, we recommend that institutions establish within their international outreach centers (and establish such a center, if the university does not have one) a structure for training faculty in intercultural research mentoring.

Similarly, the drivers, although indispensable in their roles as interpreters and tour guides, required some added savoir-faire from researchers. This situation was exacerbated by the drivers' not having participated in the research teams' orientation sessions. Therefore, we recommend that team leaders be versed, in addition to research and intercultural competence, in cooperation rules. They must also be fully informed and prepared to work in the international context and prepared for a variety of exigencies. For example, host country researchers may unexpectedly depart collaborative activities due to the demands of their employment. Team leaders must have the training, technical skills, and networking capability to complete the collaboration with sometimes unpredictable resources.

Recommendation for Participating Institutions: Creating a Comprehensive Center for Global Outreach and Engagement Initiatives

Professionals involved in global outreach and engagement activities, such as those described in this report, may perform their

role thousands of miles away from campus. Even when hosting activities in their own countries, intercultural collaboration can take professionals out of their comfort zone. Because of the sensitive nature of international collaborative activities whose success depends on many factors and many stakeholders, ensuring that activity designs are effectively implemented requires a thought-through system of support. A higher education institution's global outreach and engagement center may give involved stakeholders enough structure and resources to not only plan ahead, but also face unexpected challenges by providing the following eight functions: academic programming; integrated intercultural competence and awareness; study abroad; international grants and research; faculty development and support; logistics, technology, and business operations; communication and dissemination; and linkages with international universities and organizations (see Figure 1).

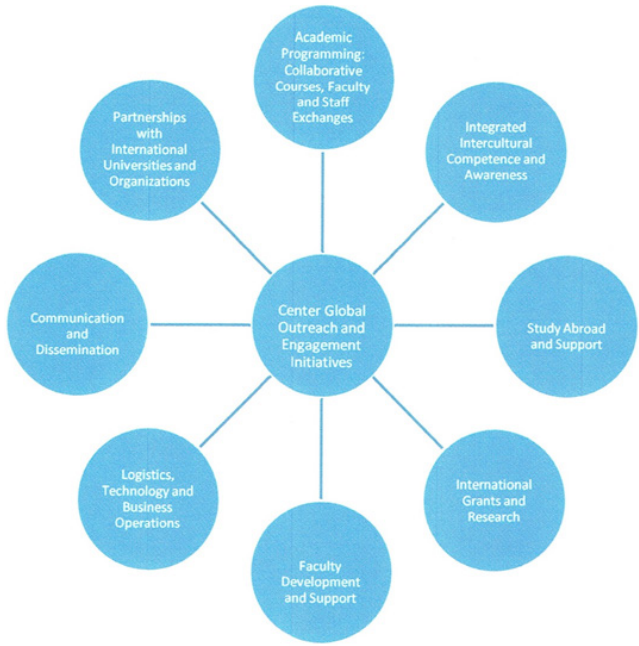

Figure 1. Functions of a comprehensive center for global outreach and engagement.

First and foremost, effective initiatives for global outreach and engagement need to rely on strong academic programming that develops collaborative courses, establishes dual degrees with international universities and institutions, and plans faculty and staff exchanges. Parallel to academic programming must be plans

to infuse integrated intercultural competence and awareness into academic and social programs. This way, students, faculty, and staff who participate in global outreach and engagement would draw from an established culture of globalization.

The study abroad and support unit would be charged with developing courses for all students conducting short- and long-term programs abroad, including summer programs and internships. The unit will also create and schedule orientation courses and screening procedures for students who go abroad, as well as mechanisms for placing students and assessing their experiences. This unit will also be responsible for coordinating with faculty and academic programs in assessing the academic and cultural experiences of students who complete study abroad programs. Adjustments to country placements, cultural experiences, logistics, and pairing of students with faculty would be proposed by this unit as well.

The international grants and research unit will be responsible for coordinating and monitoring global initiatives including assessment and support. The faculty development and support unit will provide continuous development and support to faculty involved in global initiatives. The logistics, technology, and business operations unit will ensure efficiency of center operations. Newsletters, websites, and other promotional services will be sustained through the communication and dissemination unit. This unit will also coordinate discussions among researchers about disseminating their findings and experiences through scholarly publications and presentations. Most of all, this unit will ensure that the correct protocols for disseminating grant-funded work are consistently and properly followed. Finally, the center will continue to initiate and expand partnerships with international universities and organizations. Full development of the concepts outlined here will support increasing thoroughness and professionalism of outreach and engagement initiatives.

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