

## A Case Study of Group Dynamics and Motivation in the Classroom

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It is often said that one of the teacher's primary goals should be to motivate students to learn so they can reach their potential and contribute to society. However, affective factors are very difficult to predict, so what may work for one group, may lead to a disaster in another. This is often the case with athletic teams. Case in point, the New York Yankees are trying to buy a championship this year by signing some of the best players in baseball to outrageous contracts; and for their efforts, they have the best record in baseball. While on the West Coast, the Los Angeles Dodgers are spending just as much time, money, and effort with their club and only have average results. In this paper group behavior and dynamics will be examined, the results of a motivational questionnaire given to a first year college EFL class will be given and analyzed, and conclusions will be drawn on what is needed to be a successful teacher and student.

### Part I: Group Dynamics

#### 1. Group Behavior

A group is defined as two or more beings, interacting and interconnected, who come together to achieve particular objectives. Groups can be either formal or informal. In a formal group, the behaviors that one should engage in are stipulated by and directed toward organizational goals. In order for group dynamics to be optimal, members should:

1. Feel they are safe and in a non-threatening environment.
2. Think the group is seen favorably by others.
3. Gain an increased feeling of self-worth.
4. Feel that they belong and are affiliated.
5. Gain strength through numbers.
6. Feel that they are achieving something by belonging.

(Robbins, 1997)

#### 2. Roles

Inside the group, individuals take on distinct roles or a set of expected behavioral patterns. For example, a teacher in one country may be expected to use a top down approach, while in another a bottom up approach leads to better group dynamics. The role of a group member can and will change from group to group. The leader of a large group must vary his or her roles and techniques to meet the group's needs if the group is going to be successful.

#### 3. Norms

Have you ever noticed that golfers wear the ugliest pants on a golf course? Outside the golf course they would not be caught dead in them. This is because of norms, or acceptable standards of behavior within a group. As a member of a group, you desire continued acceptance by the group.

Solomon Asch demonstrated group influence in his famous studies in which groups of seven or eight people who sat in a classroom were asked to compare two cards held by the experimenter. The first card (A) had one line, and the other card (B) had three lines of varying length. One of the lines of B was an exact match to the line on A while the other two lines on B were quite different from the line on A. The object was to say which line on B matched the line on A. Under ordinary conditions, subjects made less than one percent errors. Asch was interested in group influence, so he "fixed" the initial responses to see if the last person in the group would give an obviously wrong answer just to conform with the rest of the group. Asch found that 35 percent of the time subjects gave results they knew to be incorrect just to be consistent with the rest of the group. Therefore, in the optimal classroom, students must feel safe to express their opinions even if they differ from their classmates.

#### 4. Cohesiveness

Groups differ in their cohesiveness, that is, the degree to which members are attracted to each

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other and are motivated to stay in the group. Studies show that the more cohesive the group, the more its members will follow its goals. But cohesiveness alone will not insure success of the group. For a group to perform optimally the group must be highly cohesive and its performance-related norms must be high. If cohesiveness is high and performance-related norms are low the group will show a decrease in productivity and be worse off than a group of low cohesiveness and low performance-related norms. Therefore for an optimal classroom environment, the group should be cohesive and performance-related norms high.

## **Part II: The Role of Motivation in Language Study**

Robbins (1997) says motivation is the willingness to do something and is conditioned by this action's ability to satisfy some need for the individual. In other words, motivation is something inside a person that compels that person to act. Robbins sees the basic motivation process as a six-step process: 1. Unsatisfied need 2. Tension 3. Drives 4. Search behavior 5. Satisfied need 6. Reduction of tension.

Most studies show a high correlation between motivation and achievement. Nevertheless, as Nunan and Lamb point out (1996), it may be superior achievement that enhances motivation rather than high motivation leading to superior performance. This is paramount to learner-centered instruction since it is the student that must ultimately do the learning and therefore must be responsible to motivate him or herself.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) stipulate that there are two basic types of motivation, instrumental and integrative. The first drives the student to learn to get a better job, make more money, and to be able to exert more power over a group. Conversely, integrative motivation arises out of the desire to identify with a group and feel that you belong and are affiliated. Gardner and Lambert go one further to argue that integratively motivated learners

will outperform instrumentally motivated learners.

Motivation is generally investigated through questionnaires because these invisible mental qualities can be only examined indirectly. In the next two sections (Part III and IV), the questionnaire administered to my first year college class (I consider this class to be my best class) is provided and the data is analyzed. Note: Point values, given in parentheses, were not given on the students' questionnaires.

## **Part III: The Questionnaire Administered**

Aim: To evaluate the role of motivation in language learning.

- I. Motivational Intensity
  1. I actively think about what I have learned in my language class.
    - a. Very frequently (3)
    - b. Hardly ever (1)
    - c. Once in a while (2)
  2. If it were impossible for me to attend English class at my school, I would:
    - a. Try and pick the language up out of class (e.g., read English books and newspapers, find people to have conversations with). (2)
    - b. Not bother learning English at all. (1)
    - c. Try to get English lessons somewhere else. (3)
  3. When I have a problem understanding something we are learning in class, I:
    - a. Immediately ask the teacher for help. (3)
    - b. Only seek help just before the examination. (2)
    - c. Just forget about it. (1)
  4. When it comes to studying and doing homework out of class, I:
    - a. Put some effort into it, but not as much as I could. (2)

- b. Work very carefully, making sure I understand everything. (3)
- c. Just forget about it. (1)
5. When I think about how I study English, I can honestly say that I:
- a. Do just enough to get along. (2)
- b. Will pass my exams on the basis of luck or intelligence, not because of the amount of work that I do. (1)
- c. Really try to learn English. (3)
6. If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra assignment, I would:
- a. Definitely not volunteer. (1)
- b. Definitely volunteer. (3)
- c. Only do it if the teacher asked me directly. (2)
7. After I get my assignments back, I:
- a. Always rewrite them, correcting my mistakes. (3)
- b. Put them away and forget about them. (1)
- c. Look them over, but not bother to correct the mistakes. (2)
8. When I am in class, I:
- a. Volunteer answers as much as possible. (3)
- b. Answer only the easier questions. (2)
- c. Never say anything. (1)
9. If there are movies in English on TV or at the cinema, I:
- a. Never watch them. (1)
- b. Watch them occasionally. (2)
- c. Try to watch them as often as possible. (3)
10. When I hear a song in English, I:
- a. Listen to the music, paying attention only to the easy words. (2)
- b. Listen carefully and try to understand all the words. (3)
- c. Turn off the music. (1)
- II. Learning Preference Orientation
1. At the beginning of a lesson or unit of work, I:
- a. Immediately want to get on with language practice. (1)
- b. Like the teacher to explain what I am going to learn. (2)
2. During the lesson, I like:
- a. The teacher to tell me what to do at all times. (1)
- b. To make choices between different tasks from time to time. (2)
3. Outside of the language classroom, I:
- a. Am not interested in using the language. (1)
- b. Try to find opportunities to practice English. (2)
4. In class, I:
- a. Am not really bothered about how tasks help me learn, as long as they work. (1)
- b. Like the teacher to explain to me how the tasks help me learn. (2)
5. In class, I like to spend some time:
- a. Discovering how the rules of English work. (2)
- b. Being told how the rules of English work. (1)
6. During a course, I:
- a. Like to assess my own progress occasionally. (2)
- b. Am not interested in assessing my own progress. (1)
7. During a lesson, I prefer to:
- a. Practice using the language. (2)
- b. Listen to the teacher talking about the language. (1)
8. During a lesson, I like the opportunities to:

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 225-226; Adapted from Gardner 1985: 180-181)

- a. Listen to language that is specially produced for language classrooms. (1)
- b. Listen to native speakers using the language. (2)
9. During a lesson I:
- a. Prefer to work with the whole class. (1)
- b. Like opportunities to do pair and small group work. (2)
10. I would:
- a. Like to set my own learning goals eventually. (2)
- b. Not be interested in setting my own goals. (1)

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 225-226)

### III. Concept Differential Scale

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out your ideas and impressions about your English course. How strongly do you feel about the following aspects of our course? Circle the number that most closely represents how you feel. Examples:

If the word “meaningful” very strongly describes your feelings toward the course, mark the number one.

Meaningful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Meaningless

If the word “meaningful” somewhat describes your feelings toward the course, mark the number two.

Meaningful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Meaningless

If the word “meaningful” only slightly describes your feelings toward the course, mark the number three.

Meaningful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Meaningless

If the word at either end equally describes your feelings toward the course, mark the number four.

Meaningful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Meaningless

If the word “meaningless” only slightly describes your feelings toward the course, mark the number five.

Meaningful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Meaningless

If the word “meaningless” somewhat describes your feelings toward the course, mark the number six.

Meaningful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Meaningless

If the word “meaningless” strongly describes your feelings toward the course, mark the number seven.

Meaningful 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Meaningless

### My English Course

|              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |                |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------|
| Meaningful   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Meaningless    |
| Enjoyable    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unenjoyable    |
| Monotonous   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Absorbing      |
| Effortless   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Hard           |
| Awful        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Nice           |
| Interesting  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Boring         |
| Good         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Bad            |
| Simple       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Complicated    |
| Disagreeable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Agreeable      |
| Fascinating  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Tedious        |
| Worthless    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Valuable       |
| Necessary    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unnecessary    |
| Appealing    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unappealing    |
| Useless      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Useful         |
| Elementary   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Complex        |
| Pleasurable  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Painful        |
| Educational  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Noneducational |
| Unrewarding  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Rewarding      |
| Difficult    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Easy           |
| Satisfying   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Unsatisfying   |
| Unimportant  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Important      |
| Exciting     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Dull           |
| Clear        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Confusing      |
| Colorful     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Uncolorful     |

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 225-228; Adapted from Gardner 1985: 183-184)

**Part IV: Analysis of the Data****Class Data Summary**

Part 1: Motivational Intensity (Question number followed by the simple average of the students' responses) N= 35

| 1.   | 2.   | 3.   | 4.   | 5.   | 6.   | 7.   | 8.   | 9.   | 10.  | AVE. |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1.69 | 2.14 | 2.43 | 2.43 | 2.17 | 2.14 | 2.34 | 2.14 | 2.23 | 2.17 | 2.19 |

Part 2: Learning Preference Orientation (Question number followed by the simple average of the students' responses) N=35

| 1.   | 2.   | 3.   | 4.   | 5.   | 6.   | 7.   | 8.   | 9.   | 10.  | AVE. |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1.83 | 1.63 | 1.69 | 1.69 | 1.37 | 1.71 | 1.51 | 1.71 | 1.69 | 1.83 | 1.67 |

Part 3: Concept Differential Scale (For simplification I numbered the first of the seven blanks 1, the second 2, and so on, with the last being 7. Therefore an opinion of 4 would be neutral) N=35

|              |     |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  |                |
|--------------|-----|--|--|-----|-----|-----|--|-----|--|----------------|
| Meaningful   | 2.9 |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  | Meaningless    |
| Enjoyable    | 3.1 |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  | Unenjoyable    |
| Monotonous   |     |  |  |     |     | 4.4 |  |     |  | Absorbing      |
| Effortless   |     |  |  |     |     | 4.7 |  |     |  | Hard           |
| Awful        |     |  |  |     |     | 4.6 |  |     |  | Nice           |
| Interesting  | 3.3 |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  | Boring         |
| Good         | 3.1 |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  | Bad            |
| Simple       |     |  |  |     | 4.0 |     |  |     |  | Complicated    |
| Disagreeable |     |  |  |     | 4.3 |     |  |     |  | Agreeable      |
| Fascinating  |     |  |  | 3.7 |     |     |  |     |  | Tedious        |
| Worthless    |     |  |  |     |     |     |  | 4.9 |  | Valuable       |
| Necessary    | 2.8 |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  | Unnecessary    |
| Appealing    |     |  |  |     | 3.8 |     |  |     |  | Unappealing    |
| Useless      |     |  |  |     |     |     |  | 4.8 |  | Useful         |
| Elementary   | 3.2 |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  | Complex        |
| Pleasurable  |     |  |  | 3.7 |     |     |  |     |  | Painful        |
| Educational  | 2.8 |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  | Noneducational |
| Unrewarding  |     |  |  |     |     | 4.4 |  |     |  | Rewarding      |
| Difficult    | 3.2 |  |  |     |     |     |  |     |  | Easy           |
| Satisfying   |     |  |  | 3.6 |     |     |  |     |  | Unsatisfying   |
| Unimportant  |     |  |  |     |     |     |  | 5.1 |  | Important      |
| Exciting     |     |  |  | 3.5 |     |     |  |     |  | Dull           |
| Clear        |     |  |  |     |     | 4.0 |  |     |  | Confusing      |
| Colorful     |     |  |  | 3.4 |     |     |  |     |  | Uncolorful     |

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 225-228; Adapted from Gardner 1985: 183-184)

### Summary of the Responses of the Top Three Students in the Class (Rated by grades over the last three years)

Part 1: Motivational Intensity (Question number followed by the simple average of the students' responses) N= 3

| 1.  | 2.  | 3.  | 4.  | 5.  | 6.  | 7.  | 8.  | 9.  | 10. | AVE. |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| 2.0 | 2.7 | 3.0 | 2.3 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.3 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.0 | 2.51 |

Part 2: Learning Preference Orientation (Question number followed by the simple average of the students' responses) N=3

| 1.  | 2.  | 3.  | 4.  | 5.  | 6.  | 7.  | 8.  | 9.  | 10. | AVE. |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| 2.0 | 1.7 | 2.0 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.74 |

Part 3: Concept Differential Scale (For simplification I numbered the first of the seven blanks 1, the second 2, and so on, with the last being 7. Therefore an opinion of 4 would be neutral) N=3

|              |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |  |                |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--|----------------|
| Meaningful   | 2.0 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |  | Meaningless    |
| Enjoyable    |     |     | 3.3 |     |     |     |     |     |  | Unenjoyable    |
| Monotonous   |     |     |     |     | 4.0 |     |     |     |  | Absorbing      |
| Effortless   |     |     |     |     |     | 4.7 |     |     |  | Hard           |
| Awful        |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 5.7 |  | Nice           |
| Interesting  |     |     |     | 3.7 |     |     |     |     |  | Boring         |
| Good         |     | 3.0 |     |     |     |     |     |     |  | Bad            |
| Simple       |     |     |     | 3.7 |     |     |     |     |  | Complicated    |
| Disagreeable |     |     |     |     |     |     | 5.0 |     |  | Agreeable      |
| Fascinating  |     |     |     | 3.7 |     |     |     |     |  | Tedious        |
| Worthless    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 6.0 |  | Valuable       |
| Necessary    | 2.0 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |  | Unnecessary    |
| Appealing    |     | 3.0 |     |     |     |     |     |     |  | Unappealing    |
| Useless      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 6.0 |  | Useful         |
| Elementary   |     |     |     |     | 4.0 |     |     |     |  | Complex        |
| Pleasurable  |     |     | 3.3 |     |     |     |     |     |  | Painful        |
| Educational  | 2.0 |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |  | Noneducational |
| Unrewarding  |     |     |     |     |     | 4.7 |     |     |  | Rewarding      |
| Difficult    |     |     |     |     | 4.0 |     |     |     |  | Easy           |
| Satisfying   |     | 3.0 |     |     |     |     |     |     |  | Unsatisfying   |
| Unimportant  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | 5.3 |  | Important      |
| Exciting     |     |     |     | 3.7 |     |     |     |     |  | Dull           |
| Clear        |     | 3.0 |     |     |     |     |     |     |  | Confusing      |
| Colorful     |     |     |     | 3.7 |     |     |     |     |  | Uncolorful     |

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 225-228; Adapted from Gardner 1985: 183-184)

Summary of the Responses of the Worst Three Students in the Class  
(Rated by Grades over the last three years)

Part 1: Motivational Intensity (Question number followed by the simple average of the students' responses) N= 3

| 1.  | 2.  | 3.  | 4.  | 5.  | 6.  | 7.  | 8.  | 9.  | 10. | AVE. |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| 1.3 | 1.7 | 2.3 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 2.3 | 3.0 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 2.0 | 2.12 |

Part 2: Learning Preference Orientation (Question number followed by the simple average of the students' responses) N=3

| 1.  | 2.  | 3.  | 4.  | 5.  | 6.  | 7.  | 8.  | 9.  | 10. | AVE. |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| 2.0 | 1.3 | 1.7 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.3 | 2.0 | 1.3 | 1.56 |

Part 3: Concept Differential Scale (For simplification I numbered the first of the seven blanks 1, the second 2, and so on, with the last being 7. Therefore an opinion of 4 would be neutral) N=3

|              |     |                |
|--------------|-----|----------------|
| Meaningful   | 3.3 | Meaningless    |
| Enjoyable    | 3.3 | Unenjoyable    |
| Monotonous   | 4.3 | Absorbing      |
| Effortless   | 4.0 | Hard           |
| Awful        | 4.0 | Nice           |
| Interesting  | 4.0 | Boring         |
| Good         | 3.0 | Bad            |
| Simple       | 4.7 | Complicated    |
| Disagreeable | 3.7 | Agreeable      |
| Fascinating  | 3.7 | Tedious        |
| Worthless    | 4.7 | Valuable       |
| Necessary    | 3.7 | Unnecessary    |
| Appealing    | 3.7 | Unappealing    |
| Useless      | 3.7 | Useful         |
| Elementary   | 4.0 | Complex        |
| Pleasurable  | 3.7 | Painful        |
| Educational  | 3.3 | Noneducational |
| Unrewarding  | 3.7 | Rewarding      |
| Difficult    | 2.7 | Easy           |
| Satisfying   | 4.0 | Unsatisfying   |
| Unimportant  | 4.7 | Important      |
| Exciting     | 3.7 | Dull           |
| Clear        | 4.3 | Confusing      |
| Colorful     | 3.7 | Uncolorful     |

(Nunan and Lamb 1996: 225-228; Adapted from Gardner 1985: 183-184)

## **Part V: Summary of the Data**

### 1. Motivational Intensity:

Not surprisingly, the motivational intensity of the three best students (2.51) was much higher than the class average (2.19) and that of the three worst students (2.12). The responses to question seven was surprising in that all of the worst students (3.0) said that they always rewrite and correct their mistakes after they get their assignments back from the teacher. While I have my reservations about the accuracy of that response, it is still important to note that in their outlook, rewriting and correcting homework is important to being successful in English. At the same time, the three best students (2.3) had a slightly lower average than the class as a whole (2.34). All of the best students also immediately ask the teacher for help if they have a problem understanding something they are learning in class. At the same time, the worst students tend to ask for help just before exams. From personal experience, I also find that the worst students ask the teacher more questions when they are in small groups and tend not to be academically involved in large groups. It appears that some of the worst students are not comfortable with the group dynamics of a large group. The responses to question five suggest that effort may be one of the main keys to success in a language class. The three best students really try to learn English, while the three worst students do just enough to get by.

From the data, it appears that the best students actively think about their studies a great deal more than the average student, are considerably more motivated to study English, and put forth a superior overall effort.

### 2. Learning Preference Orientation:

There appears to be little difference in how the worst students (1.56), the average

student (1.67), and the best students (1.74) prefer to learn. They all want the teacher to explain beforehand what they are going to learn. They all want opportunities to do pair and small group work. They all want to practice using the language. The major difference occurs in choice. The better students want to choose what they learn, while the worst students want the teacher to choose what they learn and set their goals for them. The main reason for this discrepancy is most likely a lack of confidence in their ability to use and understand English. If a learner-centered approach is going to be viable in large classes of individuals, students must be given sufficient time to acquire their confidence and must truly feel that they are contributing members of the group. As set in Part I, for group dynamics to be optimal the six factors stated must be present. It appears that for the worst students, and probably for many average students that all six of these factors are not present in my classroom. Therefore, the successful English teacher must strive to ensure that group dynamics are optimal in the classroom.

### 3. Concept Differential Scale:

The data from this section supports the theory that good students see a need for English. Good students see English as meaningful, educational, important, valuable, necessary, and useful. At the same time, the worst students tend to see everything as middle of the road. It is interesting that the worst students see English as neither hard nor effortless to do but see it as slightly confusing to understand. At the same time, the best students think English is slightly hard to do but is slightly clear to understand. This is most certainly due to the effort that each party puts forth and the confidence that they have obtained in using English. Therefore from this data I conclude that: a successful English teacher must get his or her students more involved in tasks that will show them the need for English in the real world and



help install the confidence that is needed to succeed.

### **Part VI: Conclusion**

According to Good and Brophy (1987: 310-311), four essential preconditions are necessary before it is possible to motivate students. The four conditions are: a supportive environment; materials that are the appropriate level of difficulty; meaningful learning objectives; and moderation and variation in strategy use.

In a large mixed ability class the meeting of the four stipulations stated above are nearly impossible to obtain using the same materials for every student. Therefore, teachings must be individualized to meet the needs of each individual student.

By doing this survey it allowed me to look at motivation through the eyes of my students. I now realize that some of my students are still not comfortable with the group dynamics of their classroom yet. I must further investigate what I have to do to inspire my students to reach out and discover the joys of learning. This survey was a great start, but now I have to talk to the students individually to see what I can do to make their learning environment better and reduce both their and my debilitating anxiety.

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