

Understanding the role and impact of trust in the development of effective music teaching faculties

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- Why is trust such an important theme within some educational research?
- Do the elements that build trust operate the same way in all schools?
- Why would music teachers be any different in terms of the way they build trusting, collegial environments?
- Are teams of music teachers typically less or more likely to develop good levels of trust within their departments?
- Are there some themes that we can identify as concomitant with high trust environments?

As vague (and perhaps unmeasurable) as these questions might seem, they have been the driving forces behind my research. I - probably like many other music teachers - have worked in both unhealthy, distrustful environments; I have also worked in healthy, creative and trusting situations. Why do some groups of teachers seem to 'click', allowing themselves to work in an open and supportive environment, permitting each teacher to be creative and highly productive? Why are other teams locked into bitter, angst-ridden spirals, where the development of new curriculum would seem to be the last thing on anyone's mind? Realising that teachers in these negative situations were neither doing themselves nor their students any favours, I began to wonder whether there were commonalities within our workplaces that could be linked to the creation of a more positive environment. For some of us, the more pressing question would be "how do I improve the unhealthy, distrustful atmosphere that I currently work in?"

There are, of course, many approaches to these questions, but one path that seemed to provide a framework in which I could understand the interpersonal dynamics of music teaching teams was to focus on the notion of 'trust'. There has been some excellent research on the notion of trust in educational environments, but almost no research on whether a generalized concept such as trust might operate differently depending on the subject area.

In the first section of this paper I will define the concept of 'trust' and briefly review the literature on trust in an educational context. This will include a discussion on why trust operates differently between primary and secondary school structures.

The notion that individuals might behave differently depending on their area of specialisation is a complex question itself, but a logical one to ask, if my research were to indicate different levels of trust between a general, control group and music teachers. One of the reasons why individuals might behave differently within a certain subject area could be to identify sources of stress that are particular subject. There is a body of research that outlines several sources of stress that are specific to Music teachers, and these will be explained after the initial discussion on trust. I will be suggesting that these difficulties, although not linked to the levels of trust within teaching team, can certainly be exacerbated if that team has lower levels of trust.

In order to conduct this research, an online questionnaire was created and distributed in three geographical areas: the United States, Europe International schools, and Australia (state and private schools). The collation of data from this questionnaire is an ongoing task, and the results are not final. However, there are sufficient results to make some general observations. Several of the respondents have also been interviewed, and this qualitative data has been invaluable in creating a better picture of whether we can identify common experiences or approaches that are concomitant with high trust environments.

In order to discover whether the levels of trust in music teaching teams were higher or lower than the general population of teachers, the questionnaire was also designed to mirror questions asked in a biennial survey of teachers conducted either Chicago Consortium of Schools Research. The enormous quantity of data held by the CCSR was used as a control against my own results.

Let us commence by defining the concept of 'trust' and briefly review the literature on trust in an educational context.

Trust and education

The existing research literature on trust can be thought of as a series of concentric fields: within a broad range of theories and methodologies of trust within sociology, much has been written about trust in the workplace, more narrowly within schools, and within teaching faculties (see Figure 1 below):

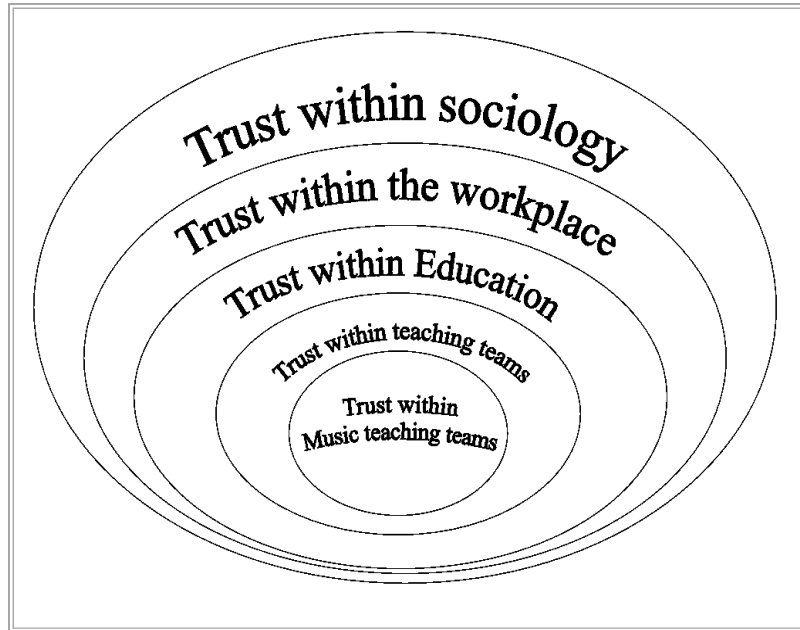


Figure 1. Author's conception of how his research is related to the existing literature.

For the purposes of time today, let us take one basic definition of trust as a starting point. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, to researchers in education, define trust as “one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p.7).

Trust in education is, according to researchers Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, a “topic that has been neglected for far too long” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, p.350). Yet there is general agreement within the existing literature that “no matter how innovative a school reform may be, it is unlikely to succeed unless the people on the front lines of schooling are working well together to implement it” (Kochanek, 2005, p.79) and that “[without trust] collaboration deteriorates. Teachers may go through the motions of ... departmental meetings, but there is little real joint decision making or collaboration” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p132).

The focus from the mid-1980s on trust in education has generally been the result of the work of two groups of researchers, each linked with a common author: Hoy and colleagues¹, and Bryk, Kochanek & Schneider². Both groups worked within the Consortium of Chicago Schools Research, and their data is the data that I am using as a control.

Typically these studies examine how trust is created and sustained within a faculty team and whether school Principals impact upon the dynamics of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Wolfe, 2007). The latter question remains unresolved, but much of the research (Herriott & Firestone, 1984; Hoy, et al., 1992; Tarter, et al., 1989; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998) suggests that trust in the principal and trust between faculty members are linked in primary schools:

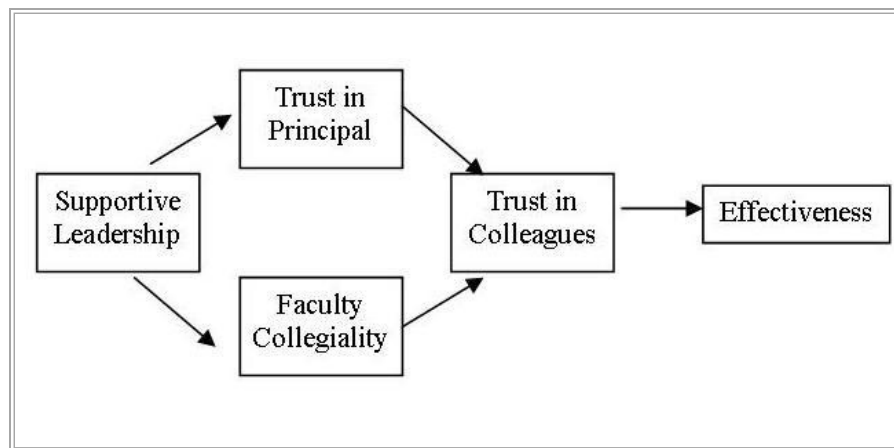


Figure 2a. Model for systems for trust in primary schools (Tarter, Sabo & Hoy, 1995, p. 43)

Whereas it is not co-dependent in middle and secondary schooling:

¹ See Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Hoy, Gage, & Tarter, 2006; Hoy, Hoffman, Sabo, & Bliss, 1996; Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; Hoy & Tarter, 2004; Hoy, Tarter, & Wikoskie, 1992; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; W. K. Hoy & M. Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Tarter, Bliss, & Hoy, 1989; Tarter, Sabo, & Hoy, 1995; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, & Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000.

² See Bryk & Schneider, 1996; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Kochanek, 1999, & Kochanek, 2005.

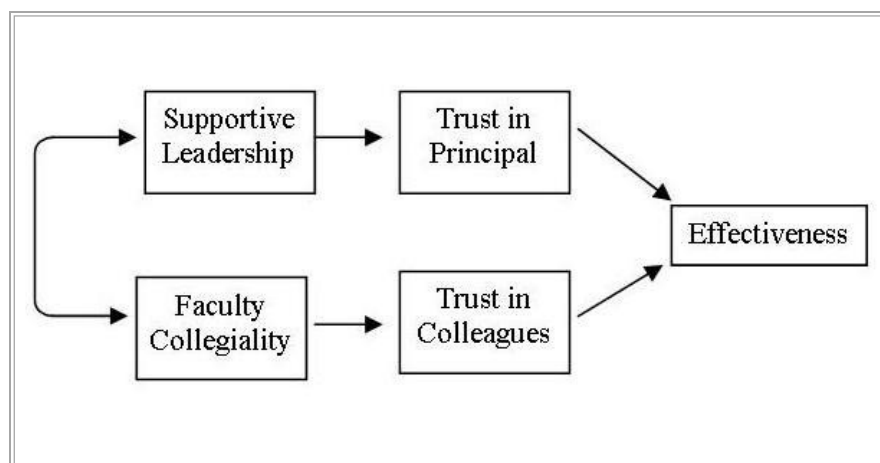


Figure 2b. Model for systems for trust in middle and secondary schools (Tarter, Sabo & Hoy, 1995, p. 43)

There are some debates about the second model (see Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985; W.K. Hoy & M. Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Kochanek, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, 2004; Wolfe, 2007), but all the literature mentioned earlier confirms the primary school model. As this current research is focused within teams, rather on administration, only middle and secondary school faculties have been included in the research data so as to avoid a challenge from those promoting the model in Figure 2b.

Many authors have noted that there is a correlation between teacher collaboration and positive developments in curriculum design and assimilation (Cohen 1981, cited in Little, 1987; da Costa, 1995; Lesnik, 1987; Sgan & Milford, 1986). Whilst schools have seen a move to more horizontal, collaborative forms of management (Henkin, Dee, & Singleton, 2000; Henkin & Dee, 2001), Ferguson (1999) reminds us that this shift not been without problems:

Historically, teachers were prepared for ‘individual practice’ rather than ‘group practice’. Teachers were expected to take their students, close their doors, and do their jobs. Working together demanded little more than the polite acknowledgement and exchange that could be accomplished over lunch in the staff room. (Ferguson, 1999, p. 2)

Issues affecting trust specific to music teachers

Much earlier, we raised the question why would music teachers be any different in terms of the way they build trusting, collegial environments?

One of the first notions we need to accept in answering this question is whether there are different issues and stresses that effect one area of specialisation but not another. Key to this discussion for music teachers is the work of Hodge, Jupp & Taylor (Hodge, Jupp, & Taylor, 1994)

who demonstrated back in 1994 that the emotional stresses in teaching and the consequential possibility of burnout was more higher in music teachers than in mathematics teachers. It made a difference that there was often less collegial support, a lack of widely adopted curricular resources, noisy teaching environments, a lack of community appreciation and a lower sense of importance given to the subject. This was balanced out when music teachers worked in larger departments, and also because music teachers recorded a greater sense of personal accomplishment than their maths colleagues (Hodge, et al., 1994, pp.71-73).

Some stresses are, of course, similar across all subjects — assessment of both students and in some countries teachers, equality, ICT (Philpott & Plummeridge, 2001) — but there are some challenges that appear to be specific to music teaching. Six issues specific to music teachers stand out as creating tensions and stumbling blocks to the development of a high trust atmosphere: musical identity, genre, theoretical system, literacy, role stress and isolation. I shall briefly outline these six issues below. In addition, my own interviews suggested that a lack of value and understanding given to the subject by administration caused tensions.

Musical identity refers to the tension between an individual's notion of themselves as a musician and as a teacher (Ballantyne, 2002; Mark, 1998; Roberts, 2004).

Musical genre refers to the type of music the individual is schooled in — classical, jazz, ethnic, pop/rock — and has direct impact on the drive, practice and listening habits of that individual (Creech et al., 2008).

Theoretical system acknowledges that many music teachers were educated in quite different music theory systems (e.g. traditional Anglo-Saxon western theory, Suzuki, Jazz/Rock, Solfège, Orff Schulwerk, Kodály, and Dalcroze) and will, to a certain extent, seek to replicate their own background with their students. Indeed, Jorgensen has commented that most music teachers find it hard to move outside their musical beliefs and practices (Jorgensen, 1997, p.77).

Musical literacy refers to the importance that a teacher may place on written notation over memorized or improvised performance. Brown, for example, suggests "some say that Western European music, with its tradition of written notation, requires students to know more than musics with aural tradition do" (Brown, 2009, p.24).

Role stress is an acknowledgement that, unlike other teaching subjects, music appears to demand a number of conflicting and contradicting demands on a teachers' time. Pressures resulting from differing expectations, ambiguity and overload in the music teacher's role, added to an underutilization of the musical abilities of the teacher (see discussion on musical identity above) create stress factors specific to music teaching (Kelly, 1999; Scheib, 2003).

Despite all the above, isolation stills appears to be a major concern for Arts teachers in general, as Wilson points out: "one of the most obvious challenges to collaboration in the fine arts

teams is that most arts educators operate in isolation from one another” (Wilson 2000, as cited in Fisher & Brown, 1988). This often holds true even when the teachers share the same subject specialisation.

Discovering the role of trust

Now we turn to the online questionnaire, a data gathering instrument that you can still contribute to until the end of 2012. Please see me at the end of this session you would like to participate. The questionnaire can be accessed via my website or at http://uneprofessions.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6RU4GijiSCzAdV2

This trust questionnaire was developed by the researcher using relevant research and existing trust measures for school environments, e.g. Hoy & Kupersmith’s “Trust Scales” (Hoy & Kupersmith, 1985), Hoy & Tschannen-Moran’s “Omnibus T-Scale” (W.K. Hoy & M. Tschannen-Moran, 2003), Kochanek’s “Relational Trust measures” (Kochanek, 2005) and the “High School Teacher Surveys” (CCS, 2003; CCS, 2005; CCS, 2007) and “Teacher-Teacher Trust” measures (CCS, 2007) from the Consortium of Chicago Schools Research website. Questions have been adapted to include specific reference to music teaching faculties.

Questionnaire results - Quantitative data

Currently my sample data is limited to 35 respondents; although it is hoped more will be added after this conference. Some of the demographics of this data set seem somewhat biased: the average teacher in my data has taught for 19.72 years and a majority work in independent schools; nearly half of the respondents are leading their departments. I suggest that these factors result in a more stable and trusting population than is the norm for music teachers. The result did, however, mirror reasonably closely the CCSR data, as we shall see.

The four statements that could be directly correlated between my questionnaire and the CCSR data are presented below:

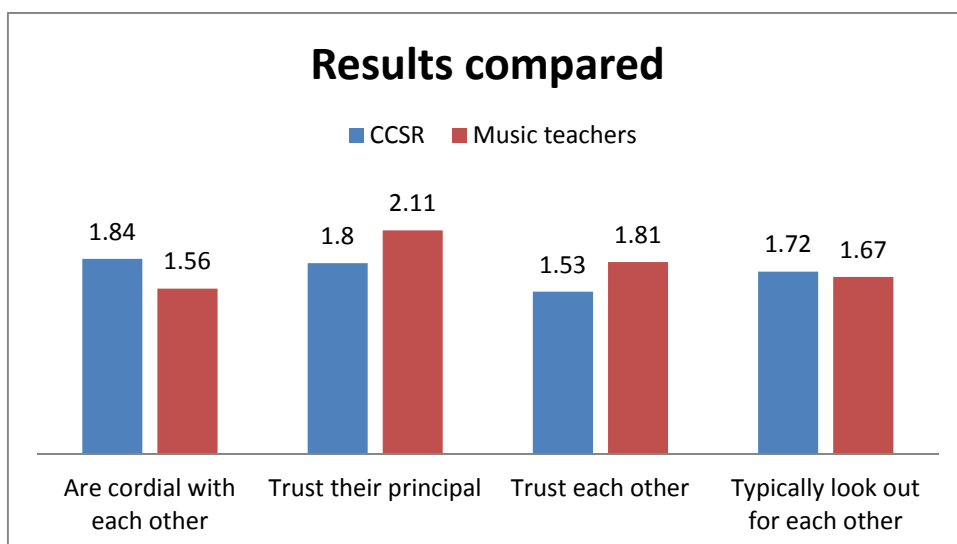
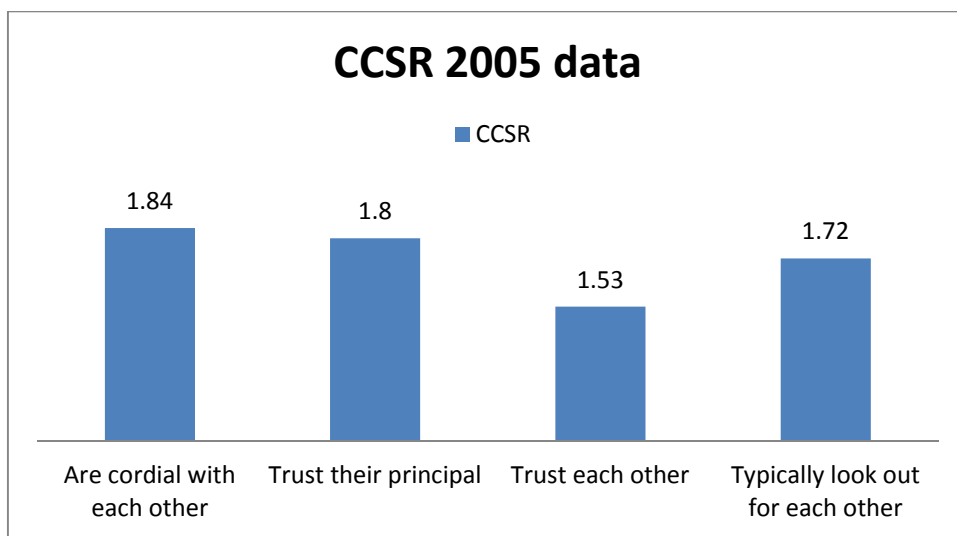
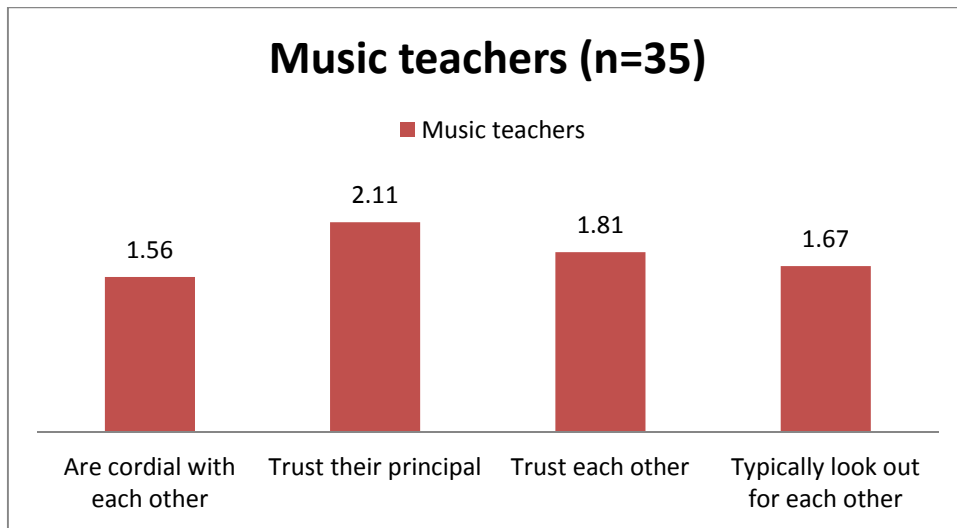


Figure 3. Comparison of mirrored question between my questionnaire and results from the CCSR 2005 data.

Although the key statements “Music teachers in this school trust each other” and “Music teachers in this school trust their principal” seem to be clearly less positive in my sample than the control group, the other two answers do not seem to follow. Music teachers, according to this comparison, are less cordial with their colleagues and will typically look out more for each other. This seems somewhat contradictory.

Qualitative data

Following the interviews, each transcription was carefully coded following two patterns of coding: the first used an existing definition of trust as a starting point, and sought to identify the five facets of trust as defined by Tschannen-Moran (2004). That is, transcripts were initially coded using the concepts vulnerability, benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competence.

There were examples of all six concepts in the interview data, although openness was by far the most commonly mentioned or alluded to; competence, vulnerability and benevolence seemed more prominent than honesty and reliability.

The second method of coding used a line by line analysis in order to try and break away from my own reactions and biases after the initial interviews. Although some of the coding was similar, importantly there were also new themes that arose from this method:

- The contradiction between Ego and Expertise
- The importance of respect & acknowledgement
- The strength of diversity
- The centrality of “acting with the best interests of the students”

The contradiction between Ego and Expertise refers to a dilemma faced by many music departments. In order to lead specialist ensembles and give quality advice, music teachers need to be suitably qualified, and many bring substantial expertise to their teaching and/or leading of ensembles. This very expertise can also become insular and paranoid, and a number of stories were recounted of distrust arising from perceived threats to a teacher’s stature as a specialist or leader. One respondent related how difficult it had been to work with a fellow teacher because he had *“a fear of someone else taking away something that he’s decided is his, that is his possession, or perhaps almost his identity”*. (Kate)

Yet recognition of the expertise that music teachers bring to the classroom and to the rehearsal space is an important factor in building trust. Jill, a head teacher within music department, works hard to demonstrate her appreciation of the expertise amongst her staff: *“I try*

to show people that I respect their abilities, and particularly their interests; I encourage them in whatever I see them flourish in.” (Jill)

The importance of respect ties in with the comments already made about expertise, but also extends to the courtesies all expect in recognition of that expertise. When an opinion or judgement is sought from a specialist within the Department, and that view - which may be based on years of experience - is not only ignored but deliberately contradicted, feelings of betrayal and distrust soon follow. Brenda, who became quite angry in the course of our interview because she was reliving such events, exclaimed at one point how angry she was, because her colleagues demonstrated *“a lack of respect, a lack of professional respect. You know, that’s my area of expertise”* (Brenda).

Many of the positive examples given about developing trust had something to do with acknowledging teachers’ efforts - either verbally, via e-mail or handwritten letter. The success of acknowledging efforts is surely linked with feelings of being valued, and this brings us back again to professionals being given due respect.

The role that diversity appears to play in the developing the groundwork for trust in music teaching teams was a surprise from my original hypotheses, because I had assumed that diversity and educational backgrounds all musical genres would lead to misunderstandings, tensions and even distrust. Nothing in the research, either quantitative or qualitative, suggested that this was the case. Rather, the existence of diverse backgrounds seemed to act as an incentive to cooperation, and almost like a buffer to competitive behaviours: *“no, we’re from the very, very different and diverse backgrounds: geographically, culturally, educationally and experience-wise as well. I think that’s one of the things that makes us tick”*. (Cecilia)

The axiom *“acting with the best interests of the students”* was clearly a prominent theme for many of the teachers I interviewed, and this is supported by a range of other writers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, Kochanek, 2005, Tschannen-Moran, 2004). I mention this as a new theme, because although most writers on trust in education express this phrase as a golden rule, they rarely indicated that he was actually proof of trust. My feeling from all the interviews was that trust was only possible if a teacher was acting with the best interests of the students: *“when you can see that in a person, you can see that that is their number one driver rather than “me, me, me” and ego, and all of that, the trust comes.”* (Jill)

Conclusion

As has been mentioned earlier, this research is still being collated and therefore some of the results may change. However, early indications appear to support the hypothesis that music teaching teams tend to have lower levels of interpersonal trust compared to a general secondary school sample. Furthermore, several new broad themes are emerging which help to create a better understanding of what builds trust, and what can create distrust, in music teaching teams.

This research will continue to gather and add data over the new few months, and will seek to verify the new broad themes.

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