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## The challenge of an empty space. Group factors as a part of drama education vol. 2

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### Abstract

**Problem Statement:** 1) How do structural factors of a group appear in drama teaching? 2) How do structural factors of a group influence the progression and functionality of a drama lesson? **Purpose of Study:** The aim of the developed analyzing model is to help prospective teachers to increase their theoretical knowledge of the structural factors; norms, roles, statuses and communication that influence drama teaching. **Research Methods:** The research material contained six videotaped drama lessons held by class teacher trainees at the Helsinki University Teacher Training School in Finland. **Findings:** This study confirms the findings from the first study that consideration of the pupil's group roles has an impact on the success of the lesson. **Conclusions:** Becoming a teacher using drama in education requires knowledge of group dynamics (pedagogical skills) and drama (substance management) in order to anticipate problems in drama teaching situations.

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**Keywords:** Drama education; classroom drama; group factors; teacher education; trainee teacher; Finnish teacher education

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### 1. Introduction

This article seeks to present some qualitative criteria for classroom drama teaching. Its purpose of the analytic model presented in this study is to increase theoretical knowledge of the structural factors that influence drama teaching, and it is hoped that the model will also be useful in all other teaching. The analytic model for the group structural factors was created by Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki (2011). The selected structural factors; *norms*, *roles*, *statuses* and *communication* in the group were chosen as the target of the theoretical study due to the social nature of drama teaching. A skilful teacher needs to manage two levels of the teaching-studying-learning process, the didactic and the pedagogic (Kansanen 1999; 2009). The didactic level is the teacher's relationship with the subject, and the pedagogical level is the teacher's relationship to the pupils (Figure 1). The meaningfulness and enjoyment of education is based on mastery of both levels.

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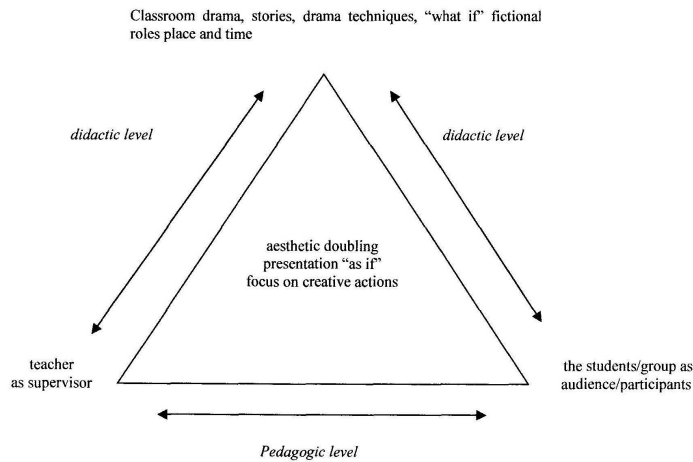


Fig. 1. The triangle model of drama education (Toivanen 2010; Toivanen 2012)

The triangle model of drama education (Figure 1) is based on a holistic idea of education that supports students' social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive development. Teaching includes both the didactical and pedagogical levels of education. The didactic level of education is connected to teachers' decision making in the teaching-studying-learning process. The didactic level includes pre-interaction (planning learning objectives, selecting teaching content and methods), interaction (making pedagogical decisions in action, managing time, space, aids etc.) and post-interaction (reflection). For the pedagogical level teachers need to be able to manage groups of students in the social dimension of education (Tirri, 2012). Drama education (classroom drama) is defined both as an art subject and teaching method. Classroom drama uses elements of the theatre art form adapted for educational purposes for students of all ages. It incorporates elements of theatre to facilitate the student's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and learning. It is a multisensory mode of teaching and learning (Neelands 1984; 1997; Bolton 1998, 198–200; Toivanen, 2012).

The potential complexity and diversity of creative processes and use of double reality in drama education make it challenging, because novice teachers operate relying more on guidelines and operating principles (see Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki 2011, Howell & Heap, 2010, Toivanen, Rantala & Ruismäki, 2009; Wales, 2009; Stinson 2009; Sawyer 2004, 2006). In classroom drama (Figure 1) teacher is combining the learning power of fictional situations (what if) that enable students (as participators) to operate as characters (presentation) in fictional situations "as if" they were real. Using drama techniques and fictional roles turn the "what if" situations into a living "as if" experience for pupils (Bolton, 1998, 262–265, 277; Cooper, 2010, 17–18). The possibility to pretend to be someone else, the aesthetic doubling, is the power of drama (Østern & Heikkinen 2001). Drama offers an active and creative dimension for learning. Because there is no external audience, drama lets pupils safely play and share out issues and past or future experiences that are disturbing or exciting to them in real life, rehearsing and resolving them with the group (as participators).

## 2. The developmental and the structural factors of the group

Group development has been described by different theories. The most used sequential-stage theory is Bruce W. Tuckman's theory of group development (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, 28). Group development in the previous theory has been divided into five developmental stages in which the group focuses on different issues. The stages are: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Group development proceeds as a process, but sometimes development can also cease or regress if a developmental stage is not mastered properly (Tuckman, 1965, 386–387; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977, 427). The structural factors of a group are elements that affect group development. The structural factors of a group are the phenomena that occur in the interactions between the group

members and that affect those interactions. The following structural factors will be examined here: norms, roles and statuses and communication in the group (Johnston & Johnston, 2009, 14–27; Pennington, Gillen & Hill, 1999, 358).

The class teachers defined all the classes in this study as being at the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of group development. At the third stage (norming) of group development cohesiveness and group feeling develop in the group. The groups' standards of activity begin to form. Harmony between group members is important at this stage therefore conflicts are avoided. Also new group-generated norms and roles evolve in the group in order to insure the group's existence and harmony in the group (Tuckman, 1965, 386–387). In one of the cases (6) the class teacher had from the beginning of the school year regularly done activities with the group to help the grouping process.

### 3. Study Design

#### 3.1. Purpose of the study

In Finnish teacher education, the teacher students form their perception of subjects and teaching in supervised training at different stages of their studies. The aim of supervised teacher training is to support the development of students' pedagogical thinking and their growth as teachers. The teacher training combines teacher education's theoretical studies with practice. The mentoring in teacher training includes discussions related to the planning and realisation of the training lessons. The target of the mentoring is to discuss teaching and give trainee teachers advice that is based on educational theories (Jyrhämä & Maaranen 2012; Jyrhämä & Syrjälä, 2009).

The aim of this study is to further develop the analysis model of the structural factors that influence the drama work, which is presented in *Procedia, Social and Behavioral Sciences* 29 (Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki 2011). The purpose for the developed model is to improve teacher training and help beginning teachers using classroom drama to increase their theoretical knowledge of interactions with groups.

The study is a part of an extensive research project that is being focused on the classroom drama teaching (Toivanen, Rantala & Ruismäki, 2009; Toivanen, Komulainen & Ruismäki, 2011; Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki, 2011; Pyykkö, Toivanen & Ruismäki 2012). The research project attempts to uncover some educational measures that can prevent interference with or the failure of drama lesson. The aim of this study is to answer the following research questions using video analysis:

- 1) How do the structural factors of a group appear in drama teaching?
- 2) How do the structural factors of a group influence the progression and functionality of a drama lesson?

#### 3.2. Methods

This study can be characterised as a qualitative case study in which video analysis is used to examine the elements of the group structure in drama education. The design of the on-going study reflects the researchers' values and views concerning the empirical research field: Classroom drama teaching is a complex social phenomenon. From this perspective, it is necessary to study and discuss the drama teaching merely as a result of teachers and students' social interactions. As all systems for video analysis are more or less impregnated with assumptions and theories, it is necessary to account for the theoretical background that has led to the methodological decisions resulting in an open-ended software solution for data handling and analysis (Rostvall and West, 2005; Derry etc., 2010, Silverman, 2010, 58–61, 243–250).

#### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the research material consisted of six-videotaped drama lessons taught by a pair of class teacher teaching trainees in the University's teacher training school. Two of the lessons (Case 1 and 2) were also involved in a preliminary study (Toivanen, Pyykkö & Ruismäki, 2011). The participants were university class teacher students from the University of Helsinki class teacher education programme. The pupils were from the teacher training school's lower level comprehensive classes. The set of data used in this study was collected from March 2011 to April 2011 and April 2012. Each of these six drama lessons was recorded with the permission of the student teachers and the pupils' parents. The video camera was placed at the rear of the classroom. The camera position, shooting

from the back with the learners and teachers in the foreground, was consistent with this study's focus on lecturer-to-student interaction (Erickson, 2006).

Research material collected by video is often suitable for the examination of a teaching event and the systematic analysis of the people and environment acting in the teaching event especially when examining the whole system of interaction (Heath, 1997; Erickson, 2006). The many-sidedness of the classroom interaction is usually studied with the help of systematic transcriptions. The fact that the transcription follows the relation of time and operation is especially important for investigating how the teachers' and pupils' functions follow each other and become significant to the participants from moment to moment in the proceeding interaction context (Heat & Hindmarsh, 2002). The transcription of the video material concentrated on 1) the chronological alternation of educational interaction 2) how the pupils orientated themselves to the drama actions, 3) what kind of interaction methods the trainee teachers used in the creation of the pedagogical interaction and order in the class (verbal and nonverbal methods). Both researchers evaluated the videos independently in order to increase the reliability of the study. The evaluations by the researchers were in parallel with each other.

#### 4. Results

In five cases the teacher trainees were specializing in drama education, and they had completed 25 study points, the equivalent of a minor course in drama education. In one case (4) the trainee teachers had completed only the basic course of drama education (4 study points). All the trainee teachers were familiar to the pupils, because they had been doing their teaching practice in their classes for a few weeks prior to the experiment. The five lessons included a drama process that was based on the children's book. In the 2nd grade lesson (2), pupils created and characterised their own fairy tale figures with plays, physical work and drama techniques. Only in Case 1 did the trainee teacher work alone in all the other lessons the trainee teachers worked in pairs. The drama lessons included plays and drama techniques with physical work or discussion. The primary grades were chosen for this research because the main interest was to examine challenges of classroom drama teaching for beginning pupils and teachers. In one of the cases (case 6) the class teacher has regularly from the beginning of the school year done activities with the group to help the grouping process, which can be seen in the results.

##### 4.1. Group Roles and fictional roles

As the pupils in the classroom acquire experiences of themselves and others as part of the group, new expectations for actions or roles began to emerge. These expectations were either in relation to the teacher, other group members or an individual's own position in the group. A network of group roles built up the group structure. The built up network is relatively stable and the roles remain in the network. The key to the pupils' well being is whether their roles include or exclude them from the group (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, 24–27; Junttila, 2010, 33–34; Barret, Sonderegger & Sonderegger, 2001). Based on the findings from the video analysis, the teacher's actions to correct infractions in student group roles have an impact on the success of the drama lesson.

***Cases 1, 3, 4 and 5.** In Case 1 the pupils were guided to sit in a circle on the floor and cases 3, 4 and 5 on a half circle in chairs in certain places. The places were marked on the floor with tape (case 1.) or pupils sat in their own chairs (Cases 3, 4, and 5). The trainee teachers arranged and labelled the seating in advance. By doing this the trainee teachers noticed the group roles and genders were mixed in the circle or half circle. This appeared as a calm start to the lesson. The trainee teachers had arranged the action to start almost instantaneously.*

***Case 2.** The pupils could sit wherever they wanted in the circle. The teachers did not try to guide the pupils so that the familiar group roles would in fractionate. The pupils went to sit next to familiar pupils and the normal group roles strengthened. Girls and boys sat in a circle in their own groups. It took a few minutes to get the pupils to sit in the circle.*

***Case 6.** The pupils could sit wherever they wanted in the circle. The teachers did not try to guide where the pupils sat. Pupils broke the familiar group roles. Girls and boys sat in a circle side by side.*

The four cases (1, 3, 4 and 5) show that it is useful for teachers to consciously vary and turnover group roles at the beginning of teaching classroom drama. The trainee teachers tried to dismantle and prevent the distribution of group roles into inner and outer roles by breaking the normal social network. It helped the pupils commit to drama work and work more actively. The pupils were given the opportunity to have different group roles in different

educational situations. The use of flexible roles increases the sense of safety in drama work (Toivanen, 2002, 95–101; Kopakkala, 2008, 108–109).

Having the pupils work in multifaceted group roles and play different kinds of fictional roles is a central part of classroom drama (Balwin 2008, 2 – 3; Toivanen, 2010, 12). The possibility to work in a fictional world and roles was also at the focus of these six examined drama lessons. In Table 1 it should be noted that in cases (4) and (6) the pupils were whole drama lesson in a fictional world. Pupils worked partly in roles and partly as themselves.

Table 1. The structure of examined drama lessons

Grade	Goal of drama education	Lesson duration	Instructions and waiting time	Active drama working time	Pupils work in fictional roles
(Case 1)	two warm-up games, hot-seating, small group drama	~ 43 min (42 min 57sec)	~15 min (35%)	~28 min	~ 25 min (90%)
(Case 2)	warm-up game, two characterising exercises	~ 40 min (39min 54sec)	~23 min (57%)	~17 min	~ 25 min (90%)
(Case 3)	warm-up game, telling and acting, group sculptures	~ 32 min (32min 25sec)	~18 min (55%)	~26 min	~26 min (100%)
(Case 4)	warm-up games, teacher in the role and group sculptures	~ 40 min (40min 15sec)	~14 min (35%)	~ 40 min	~5 min (12%)
(Case 5)	warm-up game, teacher in the role and still images	~ 43 min (43min 10sec)	~13 min (30%)	~29 min	~6 min (12%)
(Case 6)	warm-up game, teacher in the role, telling and acting, moving group sculptures, meeting	~ 44 min (44min 15sec)	~14 min (32%)	~ 40 min	~25 min (67%)

Understanding one’s own choices as well as those of other people increases flexibility in social interactions. (Bolton, 1998, 251–254, 270, Gallaher 2001, Toivanen 2002).

#### 4.2. *Statuses*

Status is generally connected to the pupil’s value in the group, how much power a pupil has to make group work successful (Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro & Chatman, 2006). The teacher, and the trainee teacher, as leader of the class have normally a high-status and are likely to be valued by the group and treated with respect. The expectations that define group roles and status include both rights and obligations. Within a group, expectations for the obligations of a role can conflict. The kinds of actions a pupil might expect from a teacher, for example in drama lessons, may be contradictory. Contradictory expectations can create one type of role or status conflict (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, 15–18). The table below shows the number of status conflicts between pupils and trainee teachers in the examined drama lessons.

Table 2. Status conflicts in the examined drama lessons

	Pupil challenges Teacher’s status	Teacher reacts in the situation	The situation is solved
(Case 1)	15	14	14
(Case 2)	24	12	12
(Case 3)	21	12	17
(Case 4)	12	8	10
(Case 5)	14	10	10
(Case 6)	15	14	15

In case (2) the pupils challenge the teacher's status 24 times. Only in half of the situations did the pupils return to lower status and the situation was solved. The trainee teacher does not seek to strengthen her higher status (authority) by reacting to the pupil's challenges. Once a trainee teacher has accepted lowered her status it might stay lowered because a given status tends to persist; after a person receives a certain status, that person's behaviour as a group member no longer plays an important role (Salmivalli, 2005, 127, 25–26).

In all the other cases (1,3,4,5 and 6) nearly all the situations where the pupils challenged the trainee teacher's status are solved. The trainee teachers also react more actively either by commanding or by making physical contact to a child than in case (2). The trainee teachers reinforce their higher status by reacting to the situations and the pupils returned to a lower status.

#### 4.3. Norms

Norms are the shared expectations or attitudes for appropriate behaviour and actions in the classroom. Acting according to the norms is a reward, i.e., the norms of a group influence acceptance and rejection in a group (Johnston & Johnston, 2009, 17–18; Schmuck & Schmuck, 2001, 193; Salmivalli, 2005, 130). In school, some educational situations require strict adherence to rules but others, like classroom drama, permit a wide range of behaviours that are regarded as acceptable. That is why drama work usually starts with making a drama contract, which is based on an idea of trying to achieve a balance between freedom and responsibility, mindfulness and playfulness (Neelands, 2009, 13).

*Cases 1, 3, 5 and 6. The drama contract has already been made during the previous drama lesson. The trainee teachers only tells the pupils when the drama work can begin. Working starts immediately.*

*Case 4. The trainee teachers briefly recall the drama contract with the pupils (1min 17 sec) and then work started.*

*Case 2. The lesson starts with making the drama contract. The problem making the drama contract was that the centralized communication mechanisms were not working; not all of the pupils were listening to the teacher reading the contract. The agreement was also too abstract. The content of the contract should have been negotiated carefully (All this took 5 minutes).*

The negotiation of a drama contract is thought to create a positive working environment. The drama contract is an agreement in which the pupils and the teacher agree to work together in an empty space. The drama contracts include the ground rules with pupils to ensure they use the space safely and feel safe to fully engage in drama (see Toivanen, 2010, 41–45; Neelands, 2009, 13; Dickinson & Neelands, 2006, 38–41).

The consideration of the drama contract and group roles seems to show a direct connection with the pupils' commitment to the drama work in this study. Pupils' active participation in the drama work is a significant percentage higher in cases (1), (4), and (5). The exceptions are the cases (3) and (6) which included a lot of storytelling by the teacher in role – drama technique. The students followed the teacher's story telling calmly and with great interest, but were not active themselves. In case (2), where the group roles were not taken into account in advance, the students' commitment to drama work was weaker. The teachers' instructions for what would happen next, and waiting for the pupils to be ready to continue took more time than was used in active drama working. A common drama contract enabled the teacher to discontinue activities or to reflect on the experiences and actions at the end of the exercise. The teacher or the teacher and the group together could evaluate how everyone had complied with the drama contract. In case (2) the pupils did not receive feedback on their work at end of the lessons, although the trainee teachers were not satisfied with the pupils' activities and participation in the drama work. Pupils missed the opportunity to learn how to extend or improve their work the next time. In cases (4) and (5) pupils briefly self-evaluated their drama work and in cases (1) and (3) they receive a few minutes of feedback from the trainee teacher.

The drama contract and the consideration of group roles were also connected to teachers' remedial actions during the drama lessons.



Table 3. Trainee teachers’ remedial actions during the drama lessons

	Uses commands	Requests	Moves or stands up	Speaks to individual children	Makes physical contact to a child	Calls a child by name
(Case 1)	10	-	4	4	5	7
(Case 2)	14	2	10	14	16	12
(Case 3)	12	-	8	3	9	1
(Case 4)	14	-	9	8	11	8
(Case 5)	16	-	9	7	21	3
(Case 6)	24	-	1	4	8	2
	Waits	Claps hands	Pauses the music	Action	Persuades children	Seeks eye contact
(Case 1)	2	-	-	9	-	1
(Case 2)	18	9	7	20	6	15
(Case 3)	4	-	-	6	-	3
(Case 4)	1	-	-	-	-	-
(Case 5)	4	-	-	2	-	-
(Case 6)	5	4	-	3	-	-

In five cases (1, 3, 4, 5 and 6) the trainee teacher used significantly less remedial actions as a whole in the drama class. The amount of remedial actions used by the trainee teachers in cases (1,3,4,5 and 6) ranges from 42 to 62. In all these lessons the group roles had been mixed at the beginning of the lesson and the drama contract defined the norms for the group. Whereas in case (2) the trainee teachers had to use twelve different remedial actions 143 times altogether. In case two the group roles had not been dismantled and the pupils were not committed to the drama contract.

#### 4.4. Communication in the Group

The models of classroom communication have been examined and sorted according to how centralized or scattered was their structures. A communication network is described as scattered if all group members communicate with each other. In the centralized model the teacher usually manages the communication. According to Helkama, Myllyniemi & Liebkind (2005, 266–267) and Johnson & Johnson (2009, 155), the group members enjoy themselves most when communication is scattered. In drama, scattered communication is supported by the various pair and group working methods to which the students become accustomed while they learn to communicate more openly with each other in constantly changing combinations (cf. Erbay et al., 2010; Toivanen, 2010, 36–41; Hui, 2006). In the preliminary study we noticed that it is challenging to alternate from scattered communication to centralized communication in drama lessons. Approaches between these two communications models seem to be difficult in all the drama lessons studied (see Table 3). The time used for instructions and waiting for pupils to be ready for instructions or drama work ranged from 30% (case 5) up to 57% (case 2) of the lesson’s duration.

The time used for teacher’s instructions or pupils to be ready to start working in these six drama lessons seems also to be related the group roles. Especially in case (2), the trainee teachers seem to have a lack of leadership and authority. According to Johnson & Johnson (2009, 199), to provide leadership, you must have the flexibility to engage in a wide variety of actions to get your pupils’ attention. The teacher’s leadership in classroom drama is much more than just giving verbal instructions. It also includes nonverbal communication, expressions, gestures, movement and placement in relation to the group. Novice teachers do not yet have the diagnostic skills to be sufficiently flexible to provide the diverse types of actions needed for different situations. In order to develop those diagnostic skills, a trainee teacher’s needs knowledge and experiences of teaching and group behaviour in similar situations (see Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2012).

## 5. Conclusions

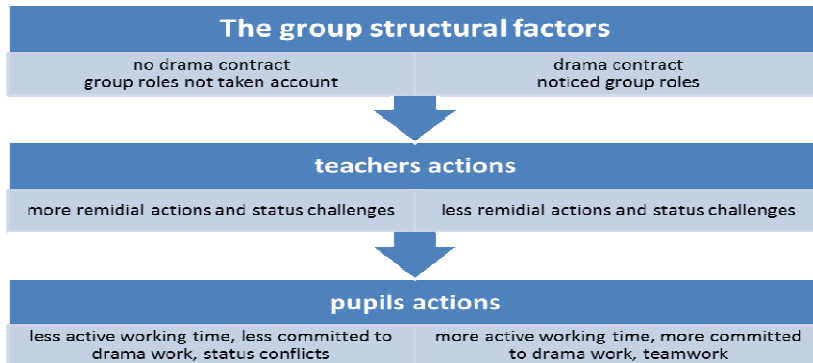


Fig. 2. The group structural factors affect to the success of a drama lesson

Figure 2 describes the factors affecting the success of a drama lesson according to our findings. This case study gives some indication of the importance of noticing the group structural factors especially when a novice starts classroom drama teaching. Based on the findings from the video analysis, teacher actions to influence the pupils' group roles when classroom drama is first used seems to have an impact on the success of the drama lesson. The consideration of group roles had a direct connection to pupils' abilities to follow the norms (drama contract) and communication (teacher's instructions, approaches between centralized or scattered communication). It also affected the amount of the trainee teacher's remedial actions and status conflicts in the classroom. A high number of remedial actions and status conflicts between students and the trainee teacher were aligned. When we speak about quality of drama education, we could apply many different educational and aesthetic criteria. In this study, the quality of the lesson was defined to mean pupils' commitment and active participation in drama work.

Furthermore, the success of drama education depends on the teacher's skills, the engagement and the level of trust in creating the group. The teacher must try to break the established group roles. By doing so, the teacher shows the pupils that group roles can be characterised by variability and turnover. Pupils may have different roles in different educational situations. Empty space is especially challenging for communication because there has to be recognition and facilitation at the same time. The drama contract helps teacher and pupils to achieve a balance between mindfulness and playfulness in drama work.

This study suggests that becoming a teacher using drama in education requires knowledge and skills in both drama (substance management) and group dynamics (pedagogical skills). The teacher needs courage and leadership competence to teach in an empty space. When we review the results, we must be critical; this is a case study. Background factors relating to these classes' social histories were not observed in this study and the contents of drama lessons were different. The lessons analysed in this article are part of a broader research project, in which we will try to verify the results of this case study. Subsequent studies will be focused on one group structural element at a time. Thus, different perspectives on the complexity of drama education can be better evaluated. Success in drama education is not a simple matter, but it can be achieved. We hope the implications and outcomes of our studies will reinforce novice teachers' awareness in complex drama teaching situations.

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