

2008–2009

# Creating a Curriculum for Excellence

## Part 2: Effective Learning and Teaching



**PERTH &  
KINROSS  
COUNCIL**

Education &  
Children's Services

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## Introduction

This paper is the second in a series of 5 papers which, when taken together, outline Education & Children's Services framework and guidance for the development and implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* in Perth and Kinross.

It outlines the Perth and Kinross strategy for improving learning and teaching in our schools, complementing the *3-18 Curriculum Framework* and the guidance on *Enterprise and Vocational Education and Assessment is for Learning*. Taken together, the suite of guidelines supports the implementation of the Perth and Kinross *Standard for Learning: Realising Potential*. They establish the framework for creating a curriculum for excellence in our schools through effective pedagogy.

These guidelines focus on the art and craft of effective learning and teaching. They are underpinned by the belief that enabling all pupils to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens will not be achieved by focusing only on what learners learn. Rather, we believe that the ways in which teachers teach and pupils learn need to be transformed to ensure that the learning environment enables all learners to achieve their full potential. Perth and Kinross is committed to supporting teachers to develop innovative approaches to learning and teaching. In the early years, and beyond, we will continue to build on the very successful work undertaken on developing approaches to active learning through the play and learning programme. Across early years, primary and secondary we will support staff development in co-operative learning techniques.

## What is the Perth and Kinross *Standard for Learning: Realising Potential*?

Our vision across Education & Children's Services in Perth and Kinross is for all learners to achieve to their fullest potential. This requires the delivery of the highest quality experiences for all children and young people. We believe that we can achieve our vision by setting the standard to which we expect all to aspire. We can only achieve this if we set high expectations and clearly explain them. The Perth and Kinross *Standard for Learning: Realising Potential* launched in 2007 defines the standard required for the consistent delivery of high quality learning and teaching.

The standard has been mapped to the key features of very good practice set out in the revised version of *How Good is Our School?*. As such, it is fundamental to the approaches to school improvement through effective self-evaluation adopted in Perth and Kinross.

## What is teaching for effective learning?

Teaching for effective learning is about establishing a positive climate for learning. It is about ensuring that learners have access to a range of experiences that promote active learning by making learners think. Teaching for effective learning requires a varied and considered range of skilful and well-paced teaching approaches. This includes making well-judged and appropriate use of information and communications

technology (ICT) to enrich teaching and to support and motivate learners. Through purposeful interaction and positive relationships, teachers and learners will ensure that learning is motivating and well matched to learners' needs.

To achieve our vision, teaching approaches will:

- be appropriately varied and of a consistently high standard;*
- be well matched to learners' needs;*
- take full account of learners' prior learning and attainment;*
- ensure lessons are well structured and planned with clear outcomes;*
- ensure that the purpose of lessons is shared with learners;*
- use praise effectively;*
- ensure explanations, expositions and instructions are clear;*
- engage learners through discussion, dialogue and interaction;*
- encourage learners to express their views and ask questions;*
- include skilled use of questioning to stimulate learners' interest and check and develop pupils' understanding;*
- motivate learners and develop their independent learning skills;*
- encourage and value learners' contributions, promote learning and build confidence;*
- involve learners in evaluating teaching approaches;*
- make regular and effective use of ICT to support and extend learning.*

## What is effective learning?

Learning is effective when learners are motivated and eager participants in their learning. Learners are aware of their progress and strengths. They make appropriate progress from their prior levels of attainment and wider achievements. They are responsible and contribute actively to the life of the school and the wider community. They are actively involved in their own learning and development and demonstrate increasing skills. At all times, learners are treated with equality, fairness and respect.

To achieve our vision, pupils' learning experiences will:

- be of a consistently high standard;*
- be relevant, stimulating, challenging, exciting and motivating;*
- take account of learners' previous experiences;*
- provide continuity and progression in learning;*
- provide opportunities for learners to take responsibility, become more independent and think more independently;*

- ❑ *engage learners in thinking about, and being active in, their learning;*
- ❑ *enable learners to develop their critical thinking skills and creativity;*
- ❑ *enable learners to use their imaginations and develop a strong sense of self-worth and confidence;*
- ❑ *provide learners with a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve;*
- ❑ *be well paced and provide appropriate support and challenge to all;*
- ❑ *enable all learners to make progress in their coursework;*
- ❑ *actively involve learners in their own learning and development;*
- ❑ *provide opportunities for learners to work independently and with others in groups to make decisions, explain their ideas, solve problems and provide solutions;*
- ❑ *make regular and appropriate use of ICT to support and extend learning.*

## How will we achieve our vision?

We will ensure that there is a focus on improving learning and teaching in our schools and that teachers are encouraged to use a range of approaches in the classroom. This includes ensuring learners are engaged on a regular basis in working co-operatively in a range of contexts. This strategy is not suggesting that all learning should be collaborative. There will always be a place for lessons where the teacher explains and coaches and where learners engage in independent learning activities. However, to support the development of effective co-operative learning across Perth and Kinross, we will create opportunities for teachers to engage in appropriate training. We will continue to build on the very successful work undertaken to embed active learning approaches through the play and learning programme.

## What is play and learning in pre-school and early years education?

*“Play and learning are not separate, play is part of learning and learning is part of play.”*

***The Children’s Play Council***

*“At its most productive, play is dynamic and is characterised by deep concentration, high energy and total involvement.”*

***Fabian 2002***

Research tells us that learning through play has a positive and lasting impact on children’s learning in pre-school and the early years of primary school. At these stages, play and other forms of active learning are essential components of learning and teaching. This involves children learning actively through contexts which are

meaningful and allow them to build on previous skills, knowledge and understanding. In creating a curriculum for excellence, we have an opportunity to develop our practice to ensure that we plan active learning opportunities that truly engage learners and challenge their thinking.

Effective learning through play requires enthusiastic, motivated adults who:

- ❑ *genuinely see themselves as learners and enjoy learning and discovering alongside children;*
- ❑ *value the importance of high quality interactions to support and extend learning;*
- ❑ *are skilled in recognising and developing the learning opportunities which are present in all play situations;*
- ❑ *use observation to identify next steps and strategies for individual children;*
- ❑ *make effective and imaginative use of available resources including outdoor spaces.*

Learning through play should ultimately be fun, enjoyable, motivating, challenging, satisfying and rewarding for all children and adults who are involved in learning throughout Perth and Kinross.

## Why do we support co-operative learning approaches?

Co-operative Learning is one of the most highly researched educational innovations and has proven to be an effective learning strategy. The research shows that co-operative learning techniques:

- ❑ *promote learning and achievement;*
- ❑ *increase learners' retention of information;*
- ❑ *enhance learners' satisfaction with their learning experience;*
- ❑ *help learners develop skills in oral communication;*
- ❑ *develop learners' social skills;*
- ❑ *improve learners' self-esteem;*
- ❑ *promote positive relationships.*

Research<sup>1</sup> also shows that, in schools where large numbers of teachers have been trained, pupils and teachers are enthusiastic about how much more enjoyable learning has become, and both attainment and whole-school ethos have improved. HMIE have commented positively on the benefits of co-operative learning in school reports. The techniques also dovetail well with our commitment in Perth and Kinross to develop

<sup>1</sup> North Lanarkshire Co-operative Learning Project Evaluation Report - [www.flatprojects.org.uk/evaluations/evaluationreports/northlankcoop.asp](http://www.flatprojects.org.uk/evaluations/evaluationreports/northlankcoop.asp)

more enterprising learning in support of our strategy for enterprise and vocational learning.

The rationale for promoting more co-operative learning is based on our growing understanding that learning is fundamentally a social activity. We often learn best by building our knowledge, understanding and skills through working with other people. We need to ensure that our young people are able to learn and work with other people both in the world of work and in social contexts. Co-operative learning helps young people develop the interpersonal skills and attitudes required in a world that is rapidly changing.

## What is co-operative learning?

*“Co-operative learning is the use of small groups through which students work together to accomplish shared goals and to maximise their own and others’ potential.”*

**Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (ASCD 1994)**

Co-operative learning is a highly structured yet flexible approach to learning and teaching. It is a teaching strategy in which groups use a variety of learning activities to improve and develop their understanding. Each member of a group is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping other members of the group to learn. This creates an ethos of achievement within the group. Learners work through an assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it. It involves problem-solving, learning through talk, positive interdependence, individual accountability and emphasis on both social and academic skills. Learners work in small groups to complete a task, reflecting on the learning process, communicating ideas, building self-confidence and promoting a community atmosphere. The strategy seeks to prepare learners for the interdependent nature of the world of work by allowing them the opportunity to develop the social skills and work ethic needed for the future.

In co-operative learning, the focus is on the learner’s exploration of their understanding, not simply on the teacher’s presentation of it. The teacher’s role is to create an environment where learners are willing and able to work collaboratively, where there are plenty of opportunities and stimulating contexts for learners to work with others, and where they feel safe to share their emerging ideas and understandings.

Usually, learners work in groups of two or more, searching mutually for understanding, solutions, meanings, or creating a product. Collaborative learning programmes place great emphasis on assessing the contribution of individuals within the group and of the performance of the team. In collaborative learning situations, pupils are not simply taking in new information or ideas - they are creating something new.

## What are the challenges?

Most of the activities and the learning undertaken in schools are individual experiences, even where learners are sitting together in pairs or in groups. Genuinely co-operative learning requires a fundamental review of the roles and responsibilities of both teachers and learners. It requires both groups to learn new skills. Placing students in pairs or groups and telling them to work together does not in itself result in co-operation. Structuring lessons so that students genuinely collaborate requires an understanding of the strategies and techniques that make co-operative work effective. This involves taking existing lessons and courses and restructuring them. It means designing collaborative lessons so they meet the needs of the curriculum, the subject, the learners and the time available. It means assessing difficulties some learners may have in working together and intervening where necessary to increase the effectiveness of groups. Co-operative learning is not a soft option. It is demanding for both teachers and learners. It requires teachers to be less controlling and learners to take more responsibility for their learning. Research shows that co-operative learning can reap great rewards, both academically and in young people's ability to operate effectively in the world beyond school.

## What are the implications for teachers?

In co-operative learning the role of the teacher changes. The teacher's role is to set and plan the direction for learning and establish the classroom ethos that will enable pupils to work and learn together effectively. Helping young people to work and learn well together becomes an important aim in itself. The overarching goals in the classroom have to be:

- ❑ *to create a learning community*
- ❑ *to improve knowledge together*
- ❑ *to help each other learn*
- ❑ *to learn how to learn together*

The social skills for effective collaborative working have to be taught to learners. These skills include leadership, decision-making, communication, building trust, and conflict management. Moving from a classroom culture where the learners are dependent on the teacher and work individually to one where there is an emphasis on collaboration is challenging.

The changing role of the teacher requires them to use a range of techniques, skills and strategies. It involves:

- ❑ *doing more planning and design work in advance;*
- ❑ *forming different kinds of groups for different purposes;*
- ❑ *using different methods to compose and recompose groups;*

- ❑ *working out ground rules with learners to help them move from debate and discussion to dialogue;*
- ❑ *training peers to teach peers;*
- ❑ *using a range of techniques to promote collaborative working;*
- ❑ *taking time to give feedback on the process of learning as well as the product of learning and on how well learners work together.*

## What are the implications for learners?

Co-operative learning places demands on learners. It requires the group or class to become a community of learners that takes more responsibility for learning, motivation and behaviour. In co-operative learning, pupils are active in their learning. They:

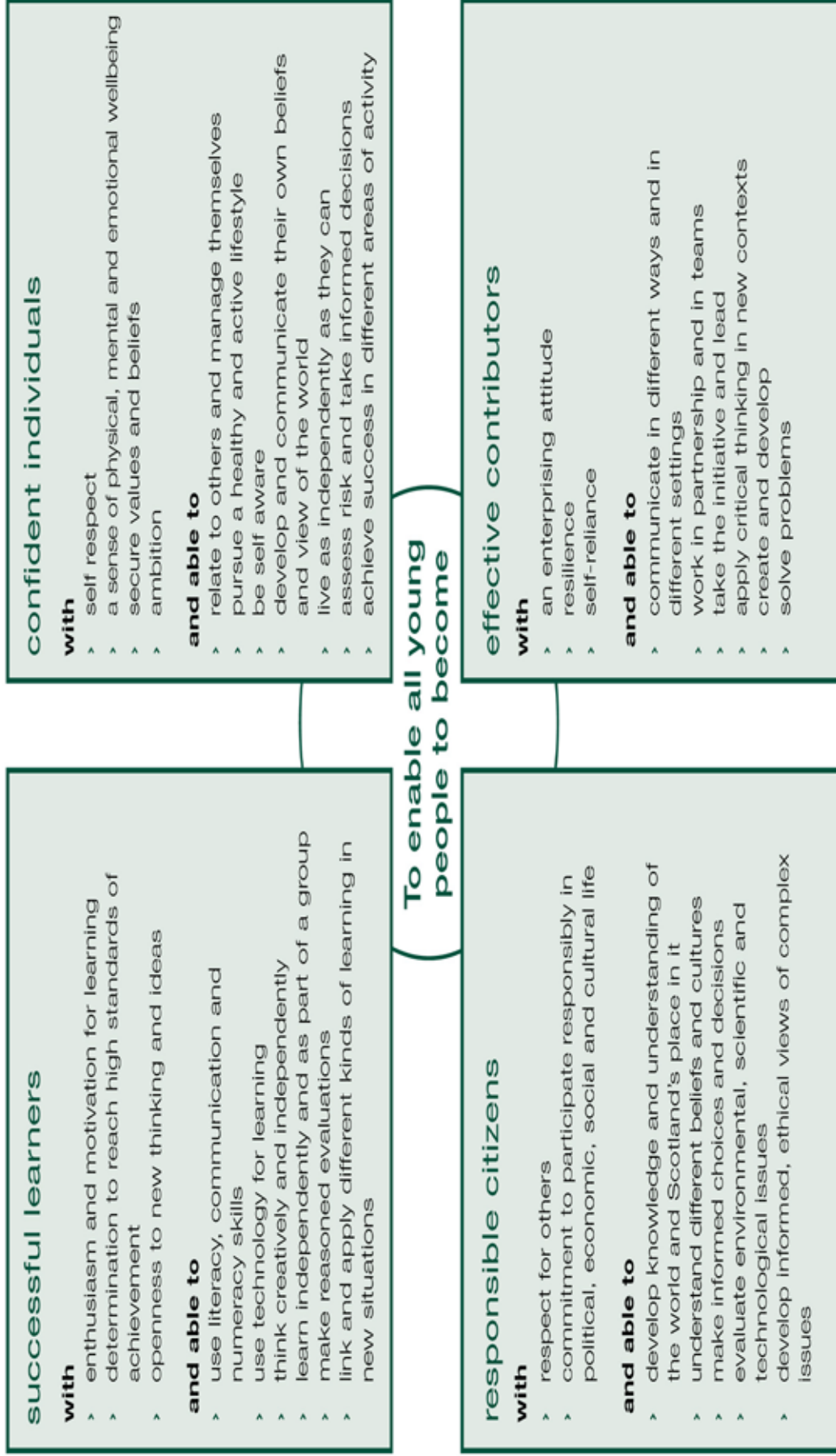
- ❑ *frequently work as a team;*
- ❑ *actively solve meaningful problems;*
- ❑ *demonstrate their learning;*
- ❑ *reflect on what they are learning and doing;*
- ❑ *apply quality criteria to their work;*
- ❑ *take responsibility for and ownership of their learning.*

There is significant evidence to suggest that where collaborative learning is done well, learners become self-motivated and much less reliant on the teacher. They have greater autonomy for their own learning and also understand how to work as part of a team.

## What will we do next?

The Early Years team will work with all early years and primary schools to embed the principles and methodologies of active learning through the planned roll-out of the play and learning programme.

We are committed to running a series of co-operative learning academies across Perth and Kinross schools over the period 2008-2011. The academies will run for three days and there will be 4 academies per year. Costs for the course will be covered centrally with schools paying the supply and travel and subsistence costs. A programme of the academies will be provided separately.





# A Curriculum for Excellence – Our Journey

## Curriculum

### The curriculum will:

- have a clear rationale
- be designed to ensure educational gain for all pupils
- offer breadth, depth and sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of individual pupils
- take full account of local circumstances, and local and national advice
- be well planned within and across schools
- be developed, designed and regularly reviewed in full consultation with staff, parents and learners
- be adapted to meet the needs of all learners
- set clear outcomes for all that are monitored and evaluated
- enable all learners to become successful, confident and responsible, and make effective contributions to society
- provide stimulating, challenging and enjoyable experiences for all learners
- involve innovative multi and inter-disciplinary work
- ensure continuity, progression and coherence in pupils' learning, particularly at stages of transition
- provide well-planned and coherent curriculum pathways across the stages, including opportunities for vocational study and training

## Teaching

### Teaching approaches will:

- be appropriately varied and of a consistently high standard
- be well matched to learners' needs
- take full account of learners' prior learning and attainment
- ensure lessons are well structured and planned with clear outcomes
- ensure that the purpose of lessons is shared with learners
- use praise effectively
- ensure explanations, expositions and instructions are clear
- engage learners through discussion, dialogue and interaction
- encourage learners to express their views and ask questions
- include skilled use of questioning to stimulate learners' interest and check and develop pupils' understanding
- motivate learners and develop their independent learning skills
- encourage and value learners' contributions, promote learning and build confidence
- involve learners in evaluating teaching approaches
- make regular and effective use of ICT to support and extend learning

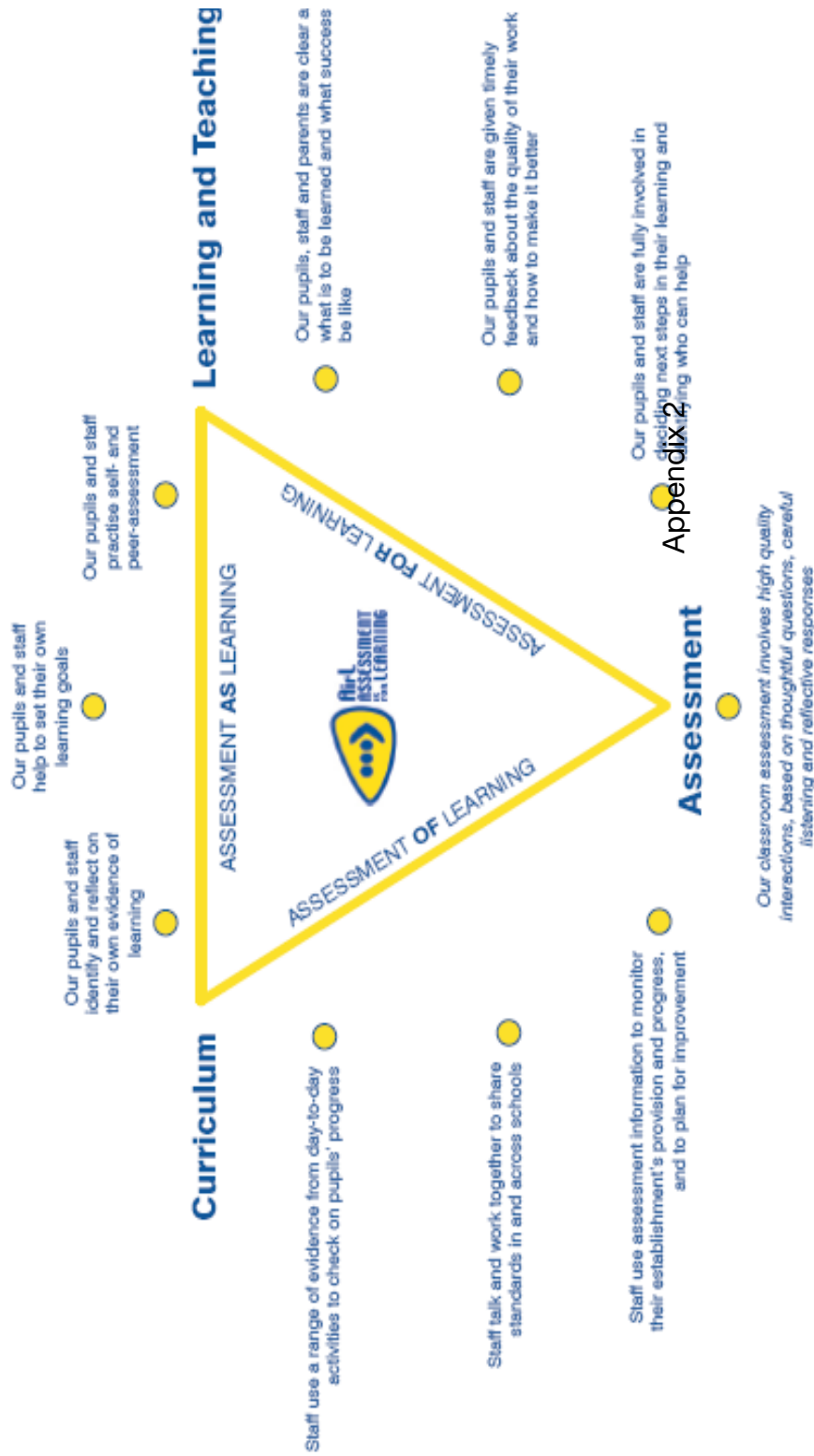
## Learning

### Pupils' learning will:

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- enable learners to develop their critical thinking skills and creativity
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- provide learners with a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve
- be well paced and provide appropriate support and challenge to all
- enable all learners to make progress in their coursework
- actively involve learners in their own learning and development
- provide opportunities for learners to work independently and with others in group to make decisions, explain their ideas, solve problems and provide solutions
- make regular and appropriate use of ICT

# What is an AifL School?

A Place Where Everyone is Learning Together



## Further Information

For further information or to comment on this policy statement, please contact:

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