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Teachers' Moral Authenticity

Searching for Balance between Role and Person

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Abstract

Teachers' morally authentic action is an essential professional competence, but challenging to perform in real classroom situations. Although teachers are often aware of their external task demands and have also internalized their professional role requirements, it is often difficult for them to deal authentically in challenging moral situations in classrooms. Authenticity can be seen as a disposition to act on reasons and exercising in making decisions and constant deliberation. When practicing authenticity, teachers balance their thoughts and actions both with situational appropriate professional demands and personal preferences. This study explores ways teachers define and apply their *moral authenticities* during teaching. The study is based on qualitative data from student teachers' practicum portfolios where they reported pedagogical dilemmas from their teaching practice. The analysis of qualitative case data (N=110) revealed three different moral authenticities that were constructed from student teachers' action reports: *authenticity in moral appearance*, *authenticity in moral effect*, and *authenticity in moral commitment*. The results emphasize the need to provide teachers with such competencies that help them to manage successfully and authentically in challenging moral situations. Implications for pre-service and in-service teacher education are also discussed

Keywords

Teacher authenticity – Moral qualities – Teacher education

Introduction

During the last decades, authenticity has been increasingly discussed in many fields in society (Potter, 2010). In general, authenticity relates to the quality of something to be experienced as real and true. For example, Heidegger (2001) made a distinction between a conventional, false, and inauthentic surface level and a true and authentic depth level of being. While this kind of deep level of authenticity is demanding to use in research, the concept of ethics of authenticity (Taylor, 1991) provides more possibilities to observe human beings and their actions. According to Taylor (1991), authenticity is the freedom to decide for oneself rather than being shaped by external influences. However, authenticity also means acting in accordance with ethical values and esteemed cultural norms in dialogue with others, and it is not equal with freedom to pursue solely personal preferences (p. 66.)

In education, teachers have been encouraged to be authentic that is believed to be integral to their professional success and satisfaction. Teacher authenticity is assumed to promote good and effective teaching. As Bialystok (2017) notes, “if teachers are not sincere or not accurate, we have good reason to worry about the quality of the education being imparted to students. But as authenticity is a self-relation, it is thought that teachers must be “true to themselves” in order to uphold a truthful relation with those they teach” (p. 13). Thus, authenticity has been emphasized for positive teacher–student relationships and as an essential support for good learning (De Bruyckere & Kirschner, 2016; Kreber, et al., 2007). The concept and practice of *authenticity* constitutes a crucial link between teaching and the achievement of students’ learning and development outcomes at school level (Iverson et al., 2008). As Kreber (2010a) notes, the question of interest is not only whether teachers can create a unique identity as teacher from within themselves, but whether “there might be a way of being a teacher that is uniquely their own (i.e., their person) while at the same time linked, and committed, to something significant that lies beyond themselves (i.e., their professional roles).

Teacher education programs have been explored through authenticity (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Iverson et al., 2008; Tellez, 1996), and its use as a tool to support teacher learning both in pre- and in-service teacher education (Kreber, 2010a, 2010b; Walton & Rusznyak,

2016). Many teacher educators tend to agree that increased authenticity of teaching activities will improve teacher candidates' learning experiences. Often, teacher candidates are advised to "just be yourself." However, as De Bruyckere and Kirschner (2016) remind us, "just being yourself" can be a too demanding task for inexperienced student teachers. Thus, before increasing the number of authentic experiences in teacher education, we have to determine more exactly what actually characterizes authentic learning tasks (Cranton, 2006; Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Kreber *et al.*, 2007; Serrano *et al.*, 2018).

Teaching as an authentic endeavor comes close to teaching as a moral enterprise (Cook-Sather & Barker-Doyle, 2017). Sanger (2017) views teaching as a "morally significant endeavor" but notes that teachers usually do not develop a sophisticated professional knowledge or concepts related to the moral work of teaching during teacher education. Both pre-service and in-service teachers report i) believing that morality varies and is subjective to some degree; ii) being conflicted about how to address differences between school values and those students bring from their home; and iii) having a high sense of self-efficacy for serving as good role models for their students (Sanger, 2017, p. 348).

The pervasive moral qualities of teaching become understandable for student teachers when they are considered through the tasks of education and schooling in their institutional and curricular contexts (Dewey, 1927; Dzur, 2008), and through the quality of everyday interactions between teachers and students (Husu & Tirri, 2007). Teachers are in a central position of responsibility in these pedagogical relationships (van Manen, 2000) to promote student learning, cultivate their capabilities, and build a favorable and hopeful atmosphere for learning. While students cannot be forced to participate in these asymmetric pedagogical interactions (Kansanen *et al.*, 2000), they should be guided with care and thoughtful use of pedagogical expertise (Noddings, 1998). All these institutional and individual factors contribute to a good ethos of education (Husu & Tirri, 2007), and the moral work of teaching becomes realized through these complexities of everyday schooling and education.

This study explores the moral authenticities in teaching in their various orientations student teachers employ. Our aim is to clarify the role *authenticity* plays in student teachers' professional learning, and the pedagogies they adopt during teacher education. The specific research task of this study can be addressed as follows: How do student teachers present their moral authenticities in their pedagogical case descriptions?

Characteristics and Contexts of Moral Authenticity

Teacher Authenticity

Laursen (2005) notes that the personal quality of a teacher is often experienced as a unified whole by students, and the concept of authenticity denotes this quality. It reveals linkages between teachers' role and personal prescriptions, moral characteristics, pedagogies and their various authenticities (Buchmann, 1986; Floden & Buchmann, 1993; Jackson 1986; Kreber 2010a; Marinell, 2008; Taylor 1991). The authenticity stance implies that teaching activities are experienced and justified by larger, organized contexts that enable activities to go beyond mere personal particulars (Wiggins, 1993).

When teachers practice the virtue of authenticity (Sockett, 2009), they balance their thinking and actions both with situationally appropriate role demands and their personal preferences (Buchmann, 1986). Thus, authenticity can be seen as a disposition to act on different reasons, and it is exercised in making decisions and built up in constant deliberation: much in a same way as skills – both intellectual and practical – in teaching situations. This is because authenticity consists of pedagogical actions that i) are routinely performed by teachers; ii) involve working with students; iii) promote knowledge of practice of teaching; iv) prompt teachers' self-reflection, and v) serve formative purposes in teaching (Iverson et al., 2008).

Role Perspectives in Teacher Authenticity: Determining Guiding Norms

Role theory (Biddle & Thomas, 1966) concerns important features of social and professional life, characteristic behavior patterns, and offers a valuable perspective for considering teacher authenticity as well. It explains roles by presuming that persons are members of social and professional positions and hold expectations for their own behaviors and those of others. Its vocabulary and concerns are popular among social scientists and practitioners, and role concepts have generated a lot of research (see e.g., Beck, 2008; Brophy, 1982; Buchmann 1986; Bullough *et al.*, 1984; Floden & Buchmann, 1993; Hansen, 1993; Holt-Reynolds 2000; Su et al., 2017; Turner, 1978; Wilson, 1962).

According to the authenticity stance, it is crucial to understand teaching as a role word. Roles embody high aspirations, and in school context provide certain mechanisms for guiding action in their light. The roles are parts that teachers play in our schools, they do not describe individuals and they apply regardless of teachers' personal opinions. In

order to fulfil their mandate correctly, teachers cannot operate in an informal, ad hoc manner, even from the viewpoint of authenticity (Buchmann, 1986; Lortie, 1975). As Hansen (2001) notes, “the question of what it means to be a person in the role of teacher is best answered ... from a context of tradition and practice (p. 19). An individual person becomes a teacher through embracing the responsibilities of the work and through engaging in the social world of the school and classroom.

Professionally, this involves critically questioning the world outside of teachers themselves. Teachers should be aware of the characteristics and preferences of learners and others including how they are the same and different from their own (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Moral action for the good of others and larger community requires the capacity for mutuality and interdependence in pedagogical relationships (Edwards, 2017). It requires understanding of and commitment to one’s own interests in interaction with understanding and commitment to the interests of others. Here, to act ethically, requires the ability to use multiple understandings, and to be able to engage in relationships with others grounded in appreciation of their differences (Cranton, 2006; Baxter Magolda, 2009).

***Personal Characteristics in Authenticity: Individual Qualities
Defining Teacher’s Work***

As noted, teachers are expected to act within the limits of their role. In addition to their role-oriented skills, teachers have to find ways for their subjectivity and personal adaptations in teaching. In practice, they have to discover their own strengths and their own ways to teach (Männikkö & Husu, 2019). Here, the challenges are real because everyone likes to be told that “being oneself” or “the firm following of the rules or code ethics” is all right, even laudable. But what are these own strengths and own ways to teach? Teacher autonomy and self-realization are indisputably teacher’s personal goods. However, as Buchmann (1986) emphasizes, schools are for children, and children’s autonomy and self-realization depend in part what they learn in schools. Thus, “self-realization in teaching is not a good in itself, but only insofar as pursuing self-realization leads to appropriate student learning (p. 538). Teachers are persons, but being one’s self in teaching is not enough. Person must be paired with teachers’ role obligations.

Similar to moral qualities, authenticity in teaching is founded on continuing development of a teachers’ sense of self. Becoming authentic is, in many ways, individuation. However, it is not only being genuine, but also understanding what genuine means in specific contexts (Toom

& Husu, 2018). Therefore, instead of “honesty”, authenticity can usefully be thought of as coherence (Hunt, 2006). This coherence needs to be both internal (Does what teachers are doing match what they believe?) and external (To what extent is what teachers are doing consistent with the standards, structures, and constraints of their work?). As Kornelsen (2006) notes, this calls for teachers “to bring qualities of mind, character, and practice transcending skillful application of technique[s of teaching]” (p. 80).

Becoming an authentic teacher is a developmental process that builds on experience, responsibility, and reflection in particular contexts (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Authenticity does not mean conditions where individuals make judgments for themselves alone and without external obligations: authenticity always occurs in its social and institutional contexts (Taylor, 1991). Thus, it is important note that besides teachers’ role expectations and personal characteristics, contextual factors and local structures contribute much to teacher’s possibilities to work and regulate their professional actions. Figure 1 describes the institutional and individual fundamentals and their respective role and personal elements (external expectations and internal dispositions/needs) characterizing teachers’ moral authenticities.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

FIGURE 1 The role and personal characteristics of teachers’ moral authenticity

As the figure 1 shows, we define moral authenticity as a subjective experience between a teacher's individual characters and institutional expectations. By internal experiences, we refer to a teacher's dispositions consisting of thoughts, feelings, values, and behavioural preferences; by external expectations we mean demands that come from a school context where a teacher is working along with his/her general and particular professional role requirements. This view of authenticity adopts a phenomenological stance that privileges a teacher's experience of authenticity. We assume that teachers are capable of reflecting on and assessing the correspondence between their internal personal experiences and external role demands. Also, we view moral authenticity as a continuum rather than an individual trait or institutional weight. We do not differentiate between authentic and inauthentic teachers but instead aim to examine the spectrum of their experiences at a particular moment of their career, and to consider the generative potential of increasing authenticity in teaching profession.

The Study

This study is a part of our wider research project, where the aim is to analyze the moral dimensions of teacher's knowing in reflecting on caring pedagogical principles and actions (see e.g., Husu & Toom, 2008; Tirri et al., 2013; Toom & Husu, 2018; Toom et al., 2015).

Data Sources

The data were collected from 110 primary school student teachers as part of their advanced educational major studies during teacher education at the University of Helsinki, Finland. The general aim of the course was to focus on the dimensions of teacher's pedagogical knowing, construction of personal practical theory of teaching as well as enhance competencies for teaching. Student teachers got deeper insights into teacher's work, how to understand the instructional process in its wholeness, and supported their learning of one's own thinking and action through integrating theory and practice.

The data were collected as part of student teachers' course tasks by using the case report procedure (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2003). The student teachers wrote a reflective case description of a real-life pedagogical dilemma they had experienced during their teaching practice period and provided professional, personal and situational interpretations to their

cases (Blomberg et al., 2014; Lampert & Ball, 1998; Shulman, 1992; Strike, 1993).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

We used holistic units of analysis (Miles et al., 2014) to allow the researchers to create an overall picture of the data. To identify the student teachers' moral authenticities, we handled each case description ($f = 110$) as a single unit of analysis. The coding was conducted using abductive content analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This means that theory-driven coding categories were adopted, but the categories were modified to fit the data.

In the coding of the student teachers' case descriptions, we modified and applied Kreber's (2007, 2010a, 2010b) theorizations on teacher's authenticity: pedagogical practices, quality and goal of interaction, and Fuller and Bown's (1975) three-stage model of teacher development from self-centered approaches towards task- and impact-oriented ways to interpret professional actions (cf. Conway & Clark, 2003; Hagger et al., 2008). With the help of these theory-driven interpretations, we analyzed what kind of moral authenticities were emphasized in each case description. With the help of these theories, we came to employ the following three categories:

- 1) *Authenticity in moral appearance* refers to teacher's active efforts to map out the information related to teaching experience and its associations. The category consisted of e.g., the following features: care for students; care for the subject and interest in engaging students with the subject ideas that matter; making educational decisions and acting in ways that are in the interest of students; practicing a constructive developmental pedagogy; consistency between values and actions.
- 2) *Authenticity in moral effect* is related to teacher's considerations about the influence that their work as teachers has on students' learning and on educational matters as whole. The category consisted of e.g., the following features: promoting the authenticity of others; reflecting on purposes in education and teaching; critically reflecting on how certain norms and practices have come about.
- 3) *Authenticity in moral commitment* includes comments on teacher's personal characteristics, self-confidence and integrity in teaching, caring relationships with pupils, continuous dialogue

with larger professional context as well as passion to teaching profession.

Our holistic units of analysis (Miles et al., 2014) allowed us to create an overall picture of the data. After careful reading, the first phase in the data analysis was the division of the whole case data into analysis units, which ranged in length from some short sentences to longer pieces of text. Secondly, the content of the unit was then read analytically, in order to find out how it represented student teachers' authenticities in *moral appearance*, *moral effect*, and *moral commitment* in candidates' professional actions. Thirdly, the statements were identified with one of the three forms of authenticity. The transition between the forms of authenticity were not clear-cut in nature, rather the categories employed were elusive and included connections to various contents of authenticities. The identification was made according to the most emphasized content of authenticity in each data unit.

To assure the validity and reliability of the results the whole analysis was done by two researchers. Throughout the data analysis, the coded classifications were systematically re-read, and the categories were cross-checked. The two researchers also continuously identified, discussed, and checked all the coding units and categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, the theoretical coherence of the category system was considered (Morse, 2018).

Findings

Authenticity in Moral Appearance

Within the goals of this category, the student teachers highlighted the importance of professional task of teaching in its full meaning. They cared about the subject of teaching and presented reasons why it mattered from the viewpoint of pupils' learning, which was a priority for them. The data excerpts below present the quality of this authenticity:

I started the lesson and gave instructions for pupils. One girl raised her hand and suggested an alternative way of action. The girl did not care about the instructions, but rather wanted the lesson to proceed in an alternative way. Many pupils started to complain the girl. I was a little bit confused, but still, was able to make a decision and say that I appreciate your suggestion, but I just told you the instructions and I have chosen the way of action to the topic we have today. The girl did not accept this, but tried to persuade me. I

didn't know her beforehand, but I felt that it is wise to be strict now. The lesson proceeded as I had instructed. [PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES, S8, female]

After few days or even hours, the same situation happened again. The girl suggested changes to the lessons that were not so bad all the time. The only difference was that other pupils did not accompany her. I also realized that the girl tried to control other's actions even during the breaks. I had acted in a reasonable way. During these lessons, I reflected on various teaching methods, their usefulness for pupils. From time to time, I started to ask pupils' suggestions to certain subject areas. I tried to take into account that the suggestions came from different pupils. [QUALITY OF INTERACTION, S8, female]

It is good that teacher is able to follow her justified plans. Still, the teacher has to keep in mind that when changing, the plans are even more versatile. Student participation has a strong motivational power and it has influence on their work satisfaction. [GOAL, S8, female]

As the excerpts from this category show, student teachers were truly interested in the questions pupils asked and aimed at engaging in dialogue with them. Also, their reflections evidenced concern for pupil learning. The student teachers seemed to possess knowledge of how the classroom context and their ways of teaching influenced on pupils' learning activities. In their case reports, student teachers described their professional actions through various teaching methods by which they aimed to promote emotionally safe learning environment, pupils' independent thinking, and understanding of different perspectives of topics in question. Student teachers' investments to teaching and pupil learning were obvious, and they were willing to improve their pedagogy continuously. Essential in this moral authenticity, as student teachers mentioned, was to bring always one's own true self and interest of subject into teaching.

The data consisted of manifold task-oriented authenticities: different teaching contents from various disciplines or subject areas, the physical classroom including the size of the class and the room arrangement, the psychological environment within the learning group, the school norms and the general school culture, and the roles the particular school expected teachers to maintain. The student teachers reported all these

task-related characteristics, but their emphasis was more often on content and context issues than critically reflecting the pedagogical norms and expectations related to their larger psychosocial contexts.

In line with the data, this group of student teachers seemed to have a sort of process response/reflection to the requirements of teaching and learning situations. They reflected how conscientiously they had been identifying their particular goals, and how effective they had been in supporting pupil learning? The sources of knowledge used in reflection were often experience-based but they also justified their actions with research-based views and arguments. Approximately, one third of the student teachers case descriptions (n=43/110) represented this orientation.

Authenticity in Moral Effect

This second category revealed that authenticity is not an on-off phenomenon, that a teacher possesses it or not, but rather that it is an ongoing developmental process of becoming more authentic. With authenticity in moral effect, a small number of student teachers (n=11/110) succeeded to develop this sort of capacity for their pupils, in close pedagogical encounters with them. It is through this authentic capacity that they could recognize the same kind of legitimacy also in pupils with whom they worked. In order to be authentic in this sense, teachers were able to give space for their pupils to act and flourish.

Within this category, student teachers considered their goals both through the impact of their being as a teacher and their practical actions to pupils' learning and growth as well as authenticity in them. The quality of this sort of authenticity is described in the following excerpts:

I act in a way that pupils have a possibility to participate to the collective project and feel their contribution meaningful and important. Everyone has to participate and strive towards the aims of the project collaboratively with others. Still, there was always tricky action from some pupils' side. I had to be able to construct an alternative lesson plan very quickly. I had to trust others, school assistant and pupils quite a lot. Many things had to function, so that we all were able to manage the situation and even learn collaboration skills, feel joy and creativity, which all are mentioned in the curriculum. [PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES, S19, male]

I realized that I will not manage with my original lesson plan, so I have to make a new plan and change my teaching method. I have

to trust to pupils' way of acting as independent groups, who all choose their leader and divide the tasks between the members of the group. Actually, through this kind of working, the groups felt that they were doing their own work and were willing to complete the task. [QUALITY OF INTERACTION, S19, male]

My original boring plan that everyone does the same thing became impossible when there were more pupils than I had expected and I was forced to trust in groups' work. I think that trust was the key to activate pupils and intensive contribution from all group members. Even pupils themselves valued their collaboration and active participation. Everyone was willing to contribute, although they did totally different tasks. Participation happened differently than I had planned. Courage to change the plan and understand the resources outside yourself were encouraging, and this was a hopeful experience. [GOAL, S19, male]

A precondition for this kind of authenticity was that student teachers felt to be defined by themselves, not by other people's expectations. However, this did not mean complete self-disclosure, but rather a developing self-efficacy as a teacher. Student teachers explained their moral authenticities by describing their interactions and relationships with pupils: their ways of inspiring and stimulating enthusiasm towards learning, and especially encouraging authenticity in their pupils. Based on their preferences, this group of student teachers seemed to possess a sort of premise response/reflection to the requirements of their teaching and learning situations. They reflected how and why their pedagogical actions were helpful or failed to help their pupils to engage in meaningful and productive learning experiences and results. What possible alternatives there were? How and why it mattered that they provided choices, support, and collaboration to their pupils?

Within this category of authenticity in moral effects, student teachers reflected on their personal reasons and premises of professional pedagogical work as teachers, but also more general purposes of teaching and education. Furthermore, they also presented critical notions on the prevailing pedagogies and ideologies of education.

Authenticity in Moral Commitment

Within authenticity in moral commitment, student teachers described their goals through themselves as candid and dedicated teachers. They emphasized their sincerity and openness in interactive teaching

situations – being true to their personality and character. They saw it important not to hide anything or not faking to ensure the real interaction with pupils. Student teachers liked to gain such self-confidence that they would be able to define their own ways of being a teacher rather than to conform to expectations of others. The following data excerpts present the quality of this authenticity in moral commitment:

There were two disrupting pupils at the arts lesson. Their disruption (talking loud, own show, etc.) started immediately after the pupils entered the classroom. I relied on the way of action that had been successful before; I acted in a “strict manner”. I asked for silence with a very resounding and tight voice, so that we would be able to start working. My actions caused only much more racket on girls’ side. [PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES, S5, female]

Tension still existed in the classroom, but both pupils and I seemed to avoid provoking each other. I tried to speak more friendly than usual, and the girls talked in a less aggressive manner and with silent voice. Still, the girls did not work, but only were hanging around in the classroom and observed the situation. [QUALITY OF INTERACTION, S5, female]

I became sad, because the girls didn’t know me and didn’t know that I work as a teacher because I truly care about kids and young people. Just because of that I have the courage to be who I am and set requirements at the classroom. The other thing was that I had not been in such situations never before. Previous disruptive pupils and classes had accepted my demanding and decorous way of action. These pupils have also noticed that when things are going well, also they can influence and also I am more relaxed. [GOAL, S5, female]

In their professional actions, they emphasized themselves as truly being in the teacher role, and strived to build caring and trustworthy relationships with their pupils. In addition to personal characteristics, student teachers pondered their personal enthusiasm towards subjects they were teaching. They had understood the importance of a committed teacher professionalism towards which they were willing to proceed.

Within this interpretative category, student teachers showed explicit self-awareness and they eagerly articulated their values to clarify their views and actions in classrooms. They felt strong congruence between their own (and in most cases also professional) values and actions. In their case reports, they articulated their 'own teaching stories' where they brought themselves in the middle of their classrooms to guide their actions, but also their students' learning activities. They often reported genuine passion for teaching and related caringly to their pupils' learning and development. They wanted to find best ways to teach their pupils and sought to fit to the requirements of each case. Based on their preferences, they seemed to have a sort of habitual response/reflection to the requirements of teaching and learning situations. Authenticity in moral commitment was most often presented in student teachers' case descriptions (n= 56/110).

Discussion

As we have shown, teaching can be structured from the viewpoints of authenticities in *moral appearance*, *moral effect*, and *moral commitment* and pedagogies related to them. While the adaptation of role standards is an integral part of teaching profession, also teachers' personal characteristics and virtuous authenticities are important traits of a competent professional. An interesting question is what would happen if one of these three elements would be missing from teachers' actions? What kind of pedagogical practice would result? In line with these questions, De Bruyckere and Kirschner (2016) give one answer as they prompt that "authentic teacher needs to break out of the harness of the curriculum to give students and learners a unique and relevant experience ... [by] taking the lead to put the student in the centre" (p. 12).

Student teachers' moral authenticities play a key role in determining whether and how they are able to mobilize their intellectual resources and professional commitments in impacting their students' learning in the future. From the viewpoint of teacher education, pedagogical authenticities set high demands. Teacher candidates come to teacher education with their experiences and personal orientations. As they learn to teach, they need help in mediating their personal orientations in relation to professional contexts and practices. It is also important to remember that authenticities can be mediated for student teachers to some extent. The virtuous pedagogical authenticities are professional

states or ways of being towards which student teachers should, and can be guided. But ultimately – it is up to their deliberation as to the kind of orientation to their work they will follow.

In this chapter, we have explored the conditions of teachers' moral authenticities in order to make teachers' work more visible and give them more control over what they are doing (Husu & Clandinin, 2017). However, our purpose has not been to present the "foreground", that is the results of "what works", but instead to highlight the "background" of professional action. We have tried out a constructive synthesis of various positions that often appear separate and disconnected or even in conflict. However, we do not intend to propose a final static or inflexible state of affairs. What we have tried to do is to present a temporary condition in which dialogue between different positions can encourage further discussion and hopefully lead to better understandings of teachers' professional actions.

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