

THE USE OF SUPERHEROES AS ETHICAL CONTENT THROUGH THE  
IMPLEMENTATION OF VIRTUAL CARTOONS AS A TOOL TO ENGAGE STUDENTS OF  
A PUBLIC SCHOOL IN CARTAGO IN READING COMPREHENSION

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PEREIRA

2020

**SUPERHEROES AS ETHIC CONTENT THROUGH VIRTUAL CARTOONS**

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Trabajo de grado presentado como requisito parcial para obtener el título de: Licenciado en Bilingüismo

con énfasis en inglés

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**1. Resumen**

El siguiente documento es un Proyecto de aula cuyos objetivos son observar y crear material visual acompañado de un componente ético desde una segunda lengua (Ingles) y de esa forma analizar el impacto que éste genera en los estudiantes y su comprensión de lectura. Este proyecto fue realizado en un colegio público en la ciudad de Cartago valle, con una duración de 8 sesiones de una hora de implementación con 15 estudiantes como participantes de cada actividad y 3 estudiantes del programa de bilingüismo de la Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.

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**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPERHEROES AS ETHIC CONTENT THROUGH  
VIRTUAL CARTOONS AS A TOOL TO PROMOTE AND ENGAGE STUDENTS IN  
READING COMPREHENSION**

**3. OBJECTIVES**

**3.1 Teaching objective General objective**

To explore the effectiveness of lessons in which readings about superheroes are used to present ethical concepts as a content-based strategy for teaching ESL reading to 5<sup>th</sup> grade children in a public school.

**3.2 Specific objective**

To determine whether content-based lessons in which readings about superheroes are used to present ethical concepts can positively impact the ESL reading comprehension of a group of 5<sup>th</sup> grade children in a public school.

**3.3 Learning General objective**

To improve reading comprehension by means of readings of English texts about superheroes and discussion about ethical concepts related to these.

### 4. JUSTIFICATION

Colombian educators have complained about the unsatisfactory results obtained by Colombian students in various international reading tests. According to *Ministerio de Educación Nacional* (MEN) the students reading comprehension level in Spanish is low; according to the OCDE (*Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económico*) (2018) students who presented PISA test in 2018 decreased their results in reading from 425 to 412 points in contrast with 2015 results. Cummins (1980) in his Common Underlying proficiency theory explained the positive or negative implications that the first language (L1) have towards the second (L2). This shows that education in Colombia need improvements in both the L1 and L2 teaching. It is evident too in the lack of pedagogical strategies that primary teachers implement in their classes. Linares (2011) stated that although Colombia implements bilingual plans, many of the schools teach English just as a subject. Also, she argued that some primary teachers are not well prepared in terms of teaching a second language because they do not know English. As *El programa de Educación del Diálogo* (2017) stated “mediante el reporte de Education First donde los profesores de América latina fueron evaluados en su dominio del inglés; Colombia ocupó el último lugar mostrando el nivel más bajo”. Additionally, the methodologies employed by many teachers in Colombia are outdated and they are not effective in motivating students. As an example, from our own experience in various public schools, the in service teachers teach English using old methodologies as grammar translating or just repetition where the students do not feel engage to the class. For example, one activity that it is common is show some images and the students have to repeat the word and in some cases the teacher pronunciation is not correct.

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That is why, comics and cartoons as strategy can be a tool where students can improve their reading and teachers can link their knowledge with new strategies. Superheroes can become a motivational tool as Tiemensma (2009) stated that the benefit of image - based storytelling is that it maintains learner's attention for longer time periods than books. This supports the idea of implementing virtual cartoons as a reading comprehension strategy that can engage students and gave them diverse benefits such as interaction, understand the message and visual aims.

As reading comprehension needs the implementation of other skills, we took advantage of comics as supporting material to help children to understand the situations that the comic presented. This idea is supported by Mcvicker (2007) who said that comics help learners to understand meaning more easily since they can make connections between images and the general idea of the text and at the same time it helps to develop reading strategies This project tried to use ethics as content in which values play an important role since children have to develop them in order to create their own identities; besides, it could include superheroes as a referent since they can exemplify values in an implicit way. As the students are surrounded by different violent aspects that can affect their identities, it is necessary to create a comfortable environment where they can explore their role in the society.

## **5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, new strategies have been introduced into Colombian classrooms due to the availability of new technological tools such as computers, tablets, video beam and TVs. These tools help to implement multiple strategies to increase student's motivation towards their learning process. One of those strategies that we wanted to explore was virtual cartoons as a tool to improve reading comprehension. Also the use of Ethics plays an important role because it creates a connection between the topic which we selected "superheroes" and the development of the linguistic aspect. It is important too since they could present the content through visual stimulation that facilitates the students understand at the same time they learn the linguistic component through the deductive reasoning where they see the sentences or content and they unconsciously catch the rules.

#### **5.1 Teaching reading**

Although schools implement reading strategies, some of them do not take into account students proficiency level. This represents a problem in view of the fact that some of the students can not complete the activities proposed. However, according to Cummins (2000) the conceptual knowledge that develops in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible. This is to say that if someone has a good level in the L1 they could be benefit while learning a second language, since they develop a set of skills that help to this goal. That



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is why in our project we combine comics with ethics since children already knew the values in Spanish and it would be easier for them to learn the values in the L2.

### **5.2 Virtual cartoons**

The methodology of Virtual cartoons is the use of technological tools virtual cartoons is the use of drawings sequences to show situations and provide students with interesting content. As Krashen (1985) stated in the Communicative Language Teaching approach, students need comprehensible input that can provide them the chance to acquire more language more easily. Content Based Instruction promotes the learning of content information and is an aspect of CLT. Bulbul and Cuhadar (2011) affirm that the use of cartoons could serve to lend variety to teaching process; it can create new opportunities to explore teaching methods such as storytelling, round tables and multiple intelligences. This variety offers the opportunity to implement strategies that can promote language acquisition.

Motivation is one of the most important aspect which virtual cartoons provide since it influences students' capacity to learn new things. Richards and Schmidt (2002) defined motivation as the combination of learners' attitudes and willingness to expend effort in order to learn a second language; student's motivation can be influenced by selecting interesting content. One effective way to achieve this could be by means of Virtual Cartoons. The implementation of virtual cartoon helps create an engaging environment for students, and in this way can serve to lower what Steven Krashen refers to as the affective filter (Krashen, 1985).

### **5.3 Ethics**

Ethics has become an important aspect of education because it is a fundamental process of human life. According to Frankena (1973) ethics is defined as a set of moral principles directed at enhancing societal wellbeing. In addition, Ethics is implemented since the primary grades through teaching values and rules; one of the aims of ethics is to create knowledge in children to be global citizens and shared responsibilities to the environment and humanity. Also, Ethics education suggests a moral knowledge extended to educators and students based on own values, sensibility and behaviors. Ethics includes different stages as understanding, reflection, consideration, and appreciation. Sue (2011) stated that ethics classes are designed to achieve a high critical thinking about ethical issues.

### **5.4 Ethics in cartoons**

Using cartoons as a teaching tool with children is a strategy that could be implemented in the classroom to engage students to learn about ethics. Green (2017) stated that comics are increasingly used in schools as a tool for students to reflect on their own experience, improve their empathy, and their communication skills. In this way, understand a short text with images create a comfortable environment to students to perform the activities proposed. On the other hand, the impact of teaching Ethics and cartoons show the student's decision to believed what is right or wrong from different moral points. Finally, the use of cartoons can capture students' imagination and provide to teachers the opportunity to combine content with real situations where students think about some issues that occur in the context. Even students who are not cartoon fans may be interested in the colorful pictures and dialogues among the characters.

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According to Yang (2003) using cartoons in ethics classes as a teaching tool has benefits to students that like as well as those who dislike cartoons.

### **6. METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this classroom project is to show how the use of virtual cartoons as a strategy for reading comprehension helps students from a public school in Cartago, Valle del Cauca.

#### **Context**

The classroom project was implemented in a public school in Cartago, Valle del Cauca named “Ramon Martinez Benites”. The school was founded on October 6th in 1980, with a total of 10 teachers only focused on elementary grades, 5 teachers work in the morning and the rest of them work in the afternoon. The school has modern rooms with access to internet, interactive board, and also a computer room. Currently, this school has a total of 55 teachers divided into primary and secondary. The school implemented a “*plan de aula*” which is a planning instrument where the teacher creates, organizes, and evaluates the lesson plans according to the topics that correspond to each grade and subject. The curriculum of this school is based on the *decreto número 1850 de 2002*, and the “*Plan de Area*” is oriented by *Ministerio Nacional de Educación* in Colombia.

#### **Setting**

This classroom project was carried out in a public school whose stratum is between one and two and it is located in Cartago, Valle del Cauca. The implementation was implemented in 5th grade since children at this age start to learn reading comprehension, and also, these populations still interested in cartoons. The implementation of this classroom project was

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executed one hour per week, due to the fact that children would forget what was seen in the last class. There were 10 hours of implementation because we needed to obtain information in order to have the results. The academic schedule at school starts from 07:30 am to 12:00 pm, in the afternoon from 12:30 pm to 05:00 pm, the implementation of the practitioners was done since 11:00 am to 12:00 m. The rooms of the school are spacious, with good ventilation and lighting. The rooms were completely remodeled in 2017. On the other hand, the materials used with the children were technological devices such as televisions, computers, and sometimes photocopies.

### **Participants.**

The participants involved in this classroom project were 25 students of the fifth grade of the Ramon Martinez Benites' school, and 3 practitioners of the *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con énfasis en Inglés* at the *Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira*. A detailed description of the characteristics of these two types of participants is provided in the section below. This classroom project had three practitioners who were in charge of implementing the sessions and to obtain the information of each session in order to get the final results of the project and 35 students to whom the classes were directed.

### **Students.**

The Project was carried out with fifth graders in a classroom of 25 students, whose ages range between 10 and 11 years old. Each session had 25 children per week. Students' socioeconomic stratum is between one and two with an expected A1 English level. According to Piaget (1954), children at this age are in The Concrete Operational Stage. In this stage, children begin to think logically about concrete events; their thinking becomes more logical and

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organized, and they begin using inductive logic, or reasoning from specific to a general information. This stage is useful to the practitioners to obtain results from the kids at the moment to read some texts. This will help us to know if the implementation of this classroom project is having an impact on children reasoning and comprehension of texts.

### **Practitioners.**

The practitioners who directed this classroom project were three students from the “*Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira*” from 9<sup>th</sup> semester who shared responsibilities and roles in the implementation. The practitioners changed their roles in classes to look for dynamism and the participation of the practitioners in several moments.

### **Instructional design**

#### **6.6.1 Purpose.**

The primary grades in this school do not have too much contact with the L2, so we wanted to make it easier for the students by focusing all of the classes on superheroes that they may be familiar with., so they can understand better and comprehend the ideas presented in the text. This course allowed students to share their thoughts about any character that we presented in the classes. Children at the end of the lesson were expected to know the values that we covered in each session. We expected that they can relate the character with the value and use it in a real context. Also, they were expected to understand the text. When we noticed this, we asked the final questions. Finally, we expected children to enjoy the classes and to learn was presented in each lesson since that helped us with the collection of the data and analysis of results.

### **6.7.1. Planning the lesson**

We used Harmer's methodology to divide our lessons and can identify the students' performance in each step that we implemented. We implemented different activities in the presentation in order to introduce the topic, the same case was for the practice step where students had to complete some activities and finally we assessed them in the production step through some questions related with the reading. It was necessary to look information about superheroes since they would be the main topic.

### **6.7.2. Preparation of the lesson.**

The classes were planned keeping in mind Ethics as the main teaching focus: English was a means to try to help students in their second language acquisition process and at the same time improve their reading comprehension skill. This guided us towards a work direction inclined to human values. Superheroes have been representing main values during a long time ago, we decided to use them as models to combine English and ethics as a tool to enhance reading comprehension. This taught us that each person could project and maximize the qualities they have. These values became the vocabulary that we would be used to present the comic readings for the students.

### **6.7.3. Presentation.**

Presenting the content and vocabulary was one of the most participative part since students participated giving their opinions and what they infer about the topic and showed the students commitment towards the class. In this part (Presentation) the teachers asked to some

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students about their superheroes general knowledge in order to create rapport, this activity was conducted in English. After this, students had to answer giving the information which they already knew they had the chance to answer in Spanish or English if they were comfortable. In the activity, they shared facts and background information related with the topic. Some of them knew or recognized the superheroes just by looking at the picture in the cartoon, but others had wrong or incomplete information about them. It was a starting point we used to introduce the pre – reading activities.

### **6.7.4. Practice.**

When the students finished the first activities, we wanted to make a connection between their knowledge and the one that we presented through the comic. We selected some students to answer specific questions about the heroes, we asked them to check information that the comic included. To achieve this goal, it was necessary for us to make our questions very clear, showing images and making quick questions about their understanding about the topic. Also, it was necessary to explain some words to help students understand the reading. To design the comics, we used images to connect the fiction life of each hero used in the readings where students could see some actions and aspects that they can use in the real life. Using this information, the reading was related to the values that would be covered during the class and the vocabulary was introduced, so the students had a better opportunity to understand the reading. Consequently, students took some notes in Spanish that could help them to recognize the superheroes and relate the words to the content that we had been presented.

### 6.7.5. Production.

In order to assess students' reading comprehension, we asked some questions related to the topic that we presented during the classes. We wanted to include how these superheroes can impact society and how students can analyze their roles. Some of the questions were about the role of the heroes within society and its responsibilities; others asked about the values and qualities that they promote, and finally others seek that the students make an analysis where they evaluated their functions in society. Although all of these activities looked to create a conscious process in front of those aspects which society needs, the second language was assessed too since the students had to complete specific activities during the whole process of the class. We gave the instructions in English, but in some cases we needed to explain some questions in Spanish to make sure that everything was clear during the activities.

### 6.7 Materials

The creation or adaptation of material involves characteristics which can benefit or affect the teacher depending on the approach and implementation. For this reason, the project seeks to improve students' reading comprehension focused on the ethical component, which shows in the students a sense of values regarding life in society. Given these ethical characteristics, it was necessary to look for a source of path that would help to fuse the educational theme with the interests of the students. When analyzing these two aspects, it was found that a current and popular topic was the superheroes, which inculcated values of commitment, respect, love, hope, responsibility among others. This look at that world of heroes gave us the guidance to lead the classes towards that goal. (*See Appendix A*)



### 6.7.1 Comics

To create an entertaining and stimulating environment for the students, we considered creating a type of comic that had images that facilitated the understanding of the text and presenting some heroes and their relationships with others. Upon seeing a new proposal, the students feel attracted and motivated since they talked about the movies they watched about those heroes they liked. these comics in the execution of this classroom project, virtual cartoons were used in all the activities. The materials were projected in a digital classroom at school in Cartago. Television was used as a tool where students watched and read each cartoon. On the other hand, the creation of each cartoon was created for students; this type of cartoon was articulated in a fifth grade subject, as in this way, it was easier for students to understand better each of the activities that was taught in school.

At the beginning of the class, the first part of the cartoon was shown to students, and questions were asked in order to determine if the students know the main character of the cartoon; then, students read together with the teacher the cartoons; finally, the students wrote and answered questions related to the material.

In order to know if the students were understanding the purpose of the activity, we asked them some simple oral questions about the cartoons; initially, those questions were in English, but in view that students do not understand English very well; we decided to use Spanish to clarify the questions. However, some questions were based directly on the text and other in the inferences which could made from it, student were supposed to write the questions in their notebooks in English, but their answers could be in either Spanish or English as they preferred. The teachers called some children to share each of the answers, in this way the other children

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heard these responses and approved or disapproved, with the aim that the whole classroom could resolve any uncertainties.

### **7. RESULTS**

During the implementation of the project, we identified some challenges and strengths in terms of student's responses, material design, and classroom management that will be described in terms of professional growth.

#### **7.1 CHALLENGES**

##### **7.1.1 Student's responses**

One challenge that we found during the implementation was related to the student's learning outcomes. Since they were not able to answer in English, they used Spanish to answer the questions presented by us. For example, in one of the sections when we asked them about Captain America, we tried to check if the students had some information about him; for this reason, we showed them a picture to verify this point. Then we wrote the following question, *what do you know about him? (see appendix B)* We selected one student to answer the question but he refused to answer because he said - *No me siento seguro de hablar en inglés porque se burlan de mi* - After that, some of the students answered immediately with knowledge that they already had, and gave information about the superhero in Spanish. It showed that most of them had a little knowledge about the topic. According to Krashen (1983) in the natural order hypothesis, children use their mother tongue as a normal process in the early L2 acquisition process. Eventually, the use of the mother tongue is a tool for students in order to connect their ideas and express them effectively. As an example, several students said the name of the superhero in English. We assumed that they

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knew the names since they were exposed to that information through movies, animated content and commercials.

### **7.1.2 Classroom Management**

#### **7.1.2.1 Time and instructions**

The final challenges that we faced were the limited time which was given by the school and giving instructions. To begin with, we had one hour to implement the lesson, something that was difficult since the content and the activities needed more time to be developed. Consequently, we had to adapt the lesson with less student's participation and modified the content in order to fulfill the class with the time. To do this, during the activities we chose two participants in order to save time. They answer the questions that we made while the other students took notes or paid attention to what their classmates said.

Giving instructions represented a challenge because the students did not understand commands in English. For example, we began to explain the aim of the class in English and some of the students immediately requested us to used Spanish - *profe en Español, yo no entiendo en inglés*- According to Garcia (2017) the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool offers ways to give instructions, planning decisions and other classroom practices that will help the progress of the class. As a communicative strategy, we decided to use translanguange to give clear instructions and to emphasize on what they had to do. Also, while we were giving the instructions, we used body movements to reinforce what we said.

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### **7.1.2.2 External issues**

Another challenge that was evident was physical space since the room was not large enough to work with the complete number of students. For that reason, we had to take a decision to work just with 15 students. The classroom provided a T.V in which we projected the comics; it became in an essential tool to implement the class. The issue was we had to change our plans three times since there were some interruptions like other teachers from the school were using the room in our session time. To find a quick solution, we talked with those teachers and commented that the classroom was assigned to us to implement our project; on other occasion we were implementing the activities when two students arrived in the classroom and said that their teacher had to give his class in that place. In view of this, we decided to talk with the teacher and ask him to teach his class after we finished ours. Despite of this circumstances, we could teach all the sessions.

## **7.2 STRENGTHS**

### **7.1.2 Student's responses**

#### **7.1.2.1 Motivation**

One of our main objectives in the project was to explore the motivational impact that comics about superheroes can have on children. We use these because they have become a trending topic from a time ago thanks to the several movies and cartoons that had been shown in the last decade. We took advantage of the popularity of movies and cartoons about superheroes to motivate students to read in English, and they responded enthusiastically. For example, one student said - *¡A mí me gustan las películas de Marvel! ¡Thanos!* - it showed a genuine interest in the topic. Another example was when we asked to draw something characteristic of wonder woman

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and we noticed that one of the most common drawing was the rope because the image was in the reading. This showed the high motivation that students had with respect to this topic. This is an example of extrinsic motivation, which is presented by Kong (2009) as something that it exists when individuals are faced with external conditions that are necessary for achieving a goal. This idea points to one of our objectives which is to use the emotional impact of comics to improve reading comprehension since students are more attentive and motivated to read this type of text (comics).

One common behavior that we observed in the classroom was students' active participation during the implementation of each session. The content aim for each class was to introduce a superhero who would represent a value, the students were engaging and tried to participate at the beginning of the class giving randomly information about the character such as - *¡Ella es la mujer maravilla!* - (Wonder Woman), - *¡Ella tiene un lazo!* *¡Yo me vi la película!*, *¡Ella vive en una isla!*. We decided to permit some of them to participate and we gave them some information. Then, we introduced the vocabulary that they would find in the text (comic) that could help them to understand the general idea of the text. When we presented the comic, the students calmed down, and they were quiet and attentive to the topic. Some of them regularly tried to interrupt adding information that they believed could be important. Chickering and Gamson (1987) said that it is helpful for children to discuss about engaging activities where they can be involved and in this way, they can increase their high order thinking tasks such as analysis and evaluation. This was reflected when we asked them in English who was their favorite superhero and what was/were the power(s) that he/she had; the reaction was that all of the children raised their hand and spoke at the same time in Spanish because they wanted to participate. In linguistic terms, we tried to teach

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them implicitly Wh questions, asking them about the superheroes such as what is Robin's biggest fear? - Where does Batman live? we expected that the students deductively recognize the question structure (*see Appendix C*). This linguistic aspect in the comic was not as effective as the values aspect since we considered some circumstances such as students 'English level was lower than we planned, the vocabulary and grammar we used in the comic seemed to be beyond their proficiency level. Although we introduced the vocabulary which were the values - Captain America is **brave** -Batman is **selfish**- where the bold words were the target vocabulary some of the students presented some problems to understand the partial or complete idea of the text, they expressed - *se ve que el capitán américa está peleando con los malos*- it showed a serious problem since we expected that they could understand the comic reading too not just watching the pictures. So, they just based their answers in the words that we gave during the class (the vocabulary) when we asked them Why Robin helped Batman? and they just answered - Selfish, él es selfish- it was evident that they did not understand. It was a repetitive behavior in the next activities. Every time that we asked for information about other character such us Who is Bucky? they answered - ¿Quién es ese? ¿Quién es él?- but when we showed the picture they said - Aaah ese es el amigo del Capitán América.

### **8. CONCLUSIONS**

Taking into account the poor results achieved by students of this country in tests of reading comprehension, we choose virtual cartoons about superheroes as ethical content as a tool to engage students in reading comprehension. In a public school in Cartago in fifth grade with 15 children in ages from 9 to 11 it was found that the motivation towards the second language (English) was low. We believed that the reason for this was that the methodologies used in that school were outdated. Once we proposed this project to the school, the students wanted to participate but as there were too many students and the room provided by the school was small we had to work with 15 students. As we focused the project based on the suggested curriculum where it shows the English level of each grade, we expected that these children had a A2 level; so we gave the first classes in English, however we found that the students did not have the level required in 5th grade according to Guia 22. Our solution was use translanguaging as a strategy to help students to understand better the instructions and the content designed for each session. Also, the creation of the material used in each class was complex since we had to include aspects that they used in their daily life (values) and help them to improve their linguistic outcome.

We faced some problems that prevented us from achieving all of the objectives proposed. To begin with, when we proposed the project to the school they told us that we had only a short period of time to implement it because they could not allow us too much time in the school. Also, the room that they provided to us was small and we could not work with all 5th graders; and the English level of students was not A2 as we expected. However, we found positive aspects such as student's motivation since they were exposed to a different methodology to learn a new language;

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we noticed in the final sessions that although they could not improve their reading comprehension, they learnt new vocabulary in L2 thanks to the comics that we used in the classes.

We consider that it is necessary to invest more time if someone can implement this type of strategy used in this project since it is evident that the students are interested and motivated in learning through different methodologies. Also, it is necessary to take into account those possible factors that can interfere in the development of the project or the classes.



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