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Psychodrama as a Personal Growth Experience : A programme for Teacher Trainees

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Churchlands College was established in 1972 and was drawing up its first course submission when legislation separating teacher training institutions from the State Government Education Department was passed. With autonomy from the outset, staff were able to plan courses consistent with their own values and expertise. The College as a whole adopted a three-pronged approach to teacher preparation with programmes in curriculum and instruction methods, education and educational psychology and in personal and professional growth and development. Each department considered its possible contribution to these streams.

In considering its contribution to the personal growth programme for trainees the Psychology Department was in sympathy with recent trends in teacher education which focussed on the facilitative skills of the teacher and particularly on his ability to interrelate with his classroom group. Hamachek (1969) in reviewing the literature on characteristics of good teachers had stated 'what seems to make a difference is the teacher's personal style in communicating what he knows' and 'effective teachers appear to be human in the fullest sense of the word, empathic, democratic, able to relate easily and naturally to students'. Kelley (1965) added further support to the importance of the affective domain when he concluded that 'it has now become clear from both research and reason that how a person feels controls behaviour when what one knows does not'.

In our experience the assumption that recruits to the teaching profession are by background and education fairly sophisticated is not the reality of the situation. Many are extremely shy and uncertain of their own adequacy; have spoken little with primary school age children; have little experience of life beyond the world of high school; are often experiencing difficulty in finding their independence and identity and are groping in the area of human relationships. True, the real world of teaching will *in time* facilitate maturity but meanwhile there is often discomfort and despair which militate against the type of learning atmosphere we know is facilitative. How can natural growth processes be pre-empted to avoid these casualties?

The most promising growth-producing procedures in the psychological literature appear to be experiences variously described as T labs, Sensitivity Training Groups (Burke and Bennis, 1961; Gassner, 1962; Schultz and Allen, 1962; Bradford, 1968) or Encounter Groups (Stroller, 1968; Rogers, 1959). Enthusiastic claims for the efficiency of these procedures have been made; e.g. Corey (1973, p. 374) writes that as a result of encounter group experience

. . . teachers become less afraid of their students, less fearful of experimenting with a freer more student centred class, less frightened of losing their professional dignity and much more open, warm, trusting and direct. Teachers become less compulsive about covering required ground and more concerned about creating a climate where the teacher and students can have real exchanges of ideas and feelings.

Research into the effect of such groups on teacher effectiveness (Joyce *et al.* .1969; Webb, 1971; Heck, 1971; Waggener, 1971; Calliotte, 1971; Bailey, 1973, Williams, 1974; Helgesen, 1971; Childers, 1973; Falany, 1973) is promising but the procedures are ill-defined and personal to group facilitators so that direct comparison is difficult. Also measures of change appear to be too coarse-grained to enable the gains from the experience to be clearly defined and specified. Despite the problems of common terms and the differences in programme, we decided there is sufficient evidence to support a general conclusion that training in a personal growth programme does bring about greater self-awareness and enhances the student teacher's ability to promote positive interpersonal relationships with his pupils.

Pilot Study

Before offering Personal Growth Groups as a contribution to the personal development programme of the College, a pilot group was set up in the first term of 1974. The group leader was a visiting clinical psychologist with considerable group experience. Ten students volunteered for the experience. The group met over twelve weeks for two hours a week. The method was 'unstructured' and 'non-directive'. A college lecturer took part as a group member.

Evaluation

A before-and-after measure (Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory) suggested as being the self report instrument most sensitive to the type of change claimed for such groups (Culbert, 1968; Foulds, 1969-1970) was used. No significant shift occurred for any member.

Subjective evaluation used adjectives such as 'interesting', 'positive', but ignored those suggesting deeper effects of the experience. The staff member believed the gains were not sufficient to warrant the widespread use of this type of group work.

At this time one of the writers came across a paper written by Heather McLean, a young occupational therapist, working in a Geelong hospital who had visited the Moreno Institute at Beacon in 1965 and had become acquainted with a method of psychotherapy known as Psychodrama. Carl Rogers (1961, p. 281) once stated that 'to the extent then that educators are interested in learnings which are functional — which make a difference — which pervade the person and his actions then they might well look to the field of psychotherapy for leads and ideas'.

Heather McLean stated that 'after personal involvement in sessions, I was certain that this was the most genuine and real therapeutic process I had ever encountered', and 'through psychodrama my understanding of myself was more complete and full in much shorter time than it could otherwise have been' (1969, p. 27). Was this what we were looking for?

Psychodrama

Psychodrama as a method was developed by J.L. Moreno over many years from his first discovery, when working with children in the streets of Vienna, in the 1920's, that spontaneous drama was therapeutic.

As he extended his work with adults, he came to believe that a person is a constellation of 'roles' which are created and maintained throughout life by the counter roles he meets in the 'significant others' in his environment. Moreno believes that 'the individual craves to embody more roles that he is ordinarily permitted to act out in life and within the same roles, more varieties of them'. His viewpoint is optimistic for personality change. He sees a person's role repertoire as open-ended — given the right milieu new roles can emerge.

To facilitate this therapeutic outcome he created a Psychodrama stage, the Psychodrama group and the Psychodrama method. Once the climate of the group becomes 'right', a member can set up on the stage a microcosm of his world, using the members to play the roles of significant people and objects from his real environment. As he warms up, in interaction, his current roles in response to these others emerge. Interpersonal blocks, conflicts, impasses appear just as they do in his real life. In a supportive atmosphere, with his behaviour patterns condensed, and in a heightened emotional state, often his spontaneity is increased so he is able to find new ways of 'being'. The emergence of new roles in himself brings about changes in the counter roles of others. Insight into this truth is gained. Moreno has a notation for role analysis so that later these role systems can be drawn up for the protagonist.

The expansion of roles is one outcome of Psychodrama. In addition, the playing of auxiliary roles engenders empathy, increases awareness of others' emotional states through body language, and increases spontaneity. The sharing which takes place afterwards increases awareness of one's own emotionality and facilitates the ability to verbalize or express this in some non-verbal way.

Moreno attached great importance to the development and maintenance of spontaneity in an increasingly automated world. He believes that 'a type of universe which is open, that is a universe in which some degree of novelty is continuously possible, is a favourable condition for the spontaneity factor to emerge and develop'.

The Psychodrama itself provides such a condition. There can be no agenda, no pre-programming, no preparation. The drama arises out of the warm-up of the group members and is quite unpredictable.

If the Psychodrama could do what Moreno claimed for it, it seemed to us we could use it to achieve the objectives we were interested in:

1. To develop increased self-awareness and awareness of the 'being' of others.

2. To enhance the spontaneity that we are all heir to.

3. To develop the ability to adopt a greater variety of appropriate roles for life situations.

The Program

Pilot Psychodrama Group

The Psychodrama Department built an elective in Psychodrama into its existing programme on a trial basis in 1974, semester 2. Those students electing to take this unit received credit for it as part of their general psychology course.

Once again an outside Psychodrama Director-in-Training acted as group leader and the same lecturer participated as a member.

Evaluation

No formal measures of change were made. The lecturer reacted in much the same way as had Heather McLean to the experience. Students used statements such as 'the best educative experience I have had', 'very growth producing', 'very exciting'.

THE PROGRAM PROPER

The Psychology Department offered a Personal Growth Course in the General Studies stream of the College programme in 1975.

Two psychology lecturers had commenced full Psychodrama training outside their College time and were able to take groups under supervision in the latter part of 1975, so that group experiences could be offered to students of each year.

During 1975 and 1976, about 20 groups had been held involving over 200 students. This represented about 16 percent of the teacher trainees in the College over these years.

EVALUATION

Reports on each group session for some groups were available as students were trained to monitor group process throughout the course. These reports listed specific areas of concern for students.

It was decided at the end of 1976 to:

1. Analyse these records so that the group concerns of students could become clearer.

2. Send out evaluation questionnaires to the 210 students who had participated in the groups from the very first pilot Psychodrama group.

RESULTS

Group Concerns

Records of 7 groups were analysed across 12 weeks as follows:

Issue	No. Times Occurred

A — Family Relationships

(1) Feelings of alienation from family.	6
(2) Inability to communicate beyond superficialities with father.	5
(3) As above, with mother.	2
(4) Need to separate off emotionally from mother/father.	4
(5) Regret at lack of physical show of affection in the home.	5
(6) Feelings of guilt over students' neglect of parents.	5
(7) Inability to handle aggression expressed in the home.	4
(8) Feeling unloved or rejected.	7
(9) Inability to handle parent domination verbally.	7

By mature-age women:

(10) How to handle teenage children.	1
(11) Expression of love to children.	4
	50

B — College and Teaching

(1) Fear of future failure in the profession and doubts over choice of career.	5
(2) Frustrations encountered on the campus — courses, procedures, lecturers.	8
(3) Need to take time off.	3
	16

C — Peer Relationships

(1) Frustration with flatmates and living conditions.	2
(2) Feeling of loneliness and being out of tune with peer groups.	5
(3) Coping with broken relationships.	8
(4) How to achieve good communication with guy/child/spouse.	6
(5) Is this girl/guy right for me?	3
(6) Guilt over hurting guy/girl.	3
(7) Guilt or confusion over premarital sex or dissatisfaction with it.	5
(8) How to maintain one's own identity in a relationship or marriage.	3
	35

D — Internal Conflicts

(1) Handling jealousy, guilt, anxiety or aggression.	10
(2) Alienation — despair.	3
(3) Handling authority figures.	3
(4) Confusion over "real self".	3
(5) Blocks to energy/drive.	4
(6) How to give nurturance.	2
(7) How to ask for nurturance and other needs.	4
	29

E — Group Sessions

(1) Fear of the expression of aggression.	3
(2) Embarrassment at the expression of deep feeling.	2
(3) Inability to share deeply.	3
(4) Fear at being pressured to do this.	5
(5) Anger that others don't share.	5
(6) Fear of being hurt or exposed or rejected by group.	2
	20

It can be seen that 150 issues emerged. Not all were dealt with psychodramatically. In all, 88 protagonist-centred dramas were directed. At other times, the issue was merely discussed or dealt with sociodramatically, using all members in their real-life roles. Of the 150 issues, 33.3 per cent involved the students' immediate family. Peer group issues accounted for 23 per cent of the time, and intra-personal conflicts for 20 per cent. It was interesting that matters of professional training and career occupied the group only 9 per cent of the time.

This analysis confirmed our observation that students had not solved their own basic conflicts by the time they entered their teacher training and a large part of their energy and attention was still invested in these aspects of living.

Student Evaluation of their individual gains from the programme, at least pertaining to our goals 1 and 2

Questionnaires were sent to 210 students; 81 per cent (171) were returned. Replies were anonymous. The information sought was as follows:

(i)   Did the course unit draw its participants from any particular college sub-group?
(ii) How did this course unit compare with other college course units that the participants have chosen to do?
(iii) What personal changes did the course promote in the participants?
(iv) How did it affect their dealings with other people?
(v) Did it have any influence on their professional life?
(vi) How did the Directors present themselves?
(vii) How could the course be improved?

TABLE 1

Age of Participants

Age Group	Percentage of		
	Total Sample	Males	Females
(i) 16 − 20 years	68	15	53
(ii) 21 − 25 years	18	7	11
(iii) 26 − 30 years	7	−	7
(iv) 31 − 40 years	4	−	4
(v) 40 plus years	3	1	2
	100	23	77

TABLE 2

Proportion of Male/Female (N=171)

Sex	Percentage of			
	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Male	23	2	10	11
Female	77	14	38	25
	100	16	48	36

Comparison with other courses

The first section of the evaluation asked students to compare the Psychodrama Group Experience with other College courses for enjoyment, interest, and usefulness on a 9-point scale, where 1 equalled 'most' of all courses and 9 equalled 'least'. The evaluations are shown in Figures 3−6.

The survey shows that this course unit compared very favourably with other course units taken by these students in their teacher preparation programme. While all areas were high, interest was particularly so. Of special significance was *Usefulness for Profession*. The aim was not towards vocational preparation, yet 64 per cent of the students found it moderately, more-than-average or above in this respect when compared to other courses they had done; 86 per cent found it average or above.
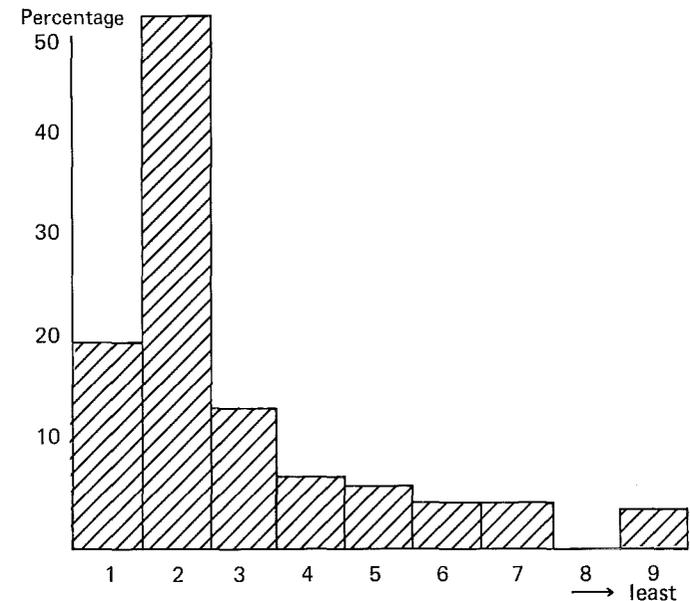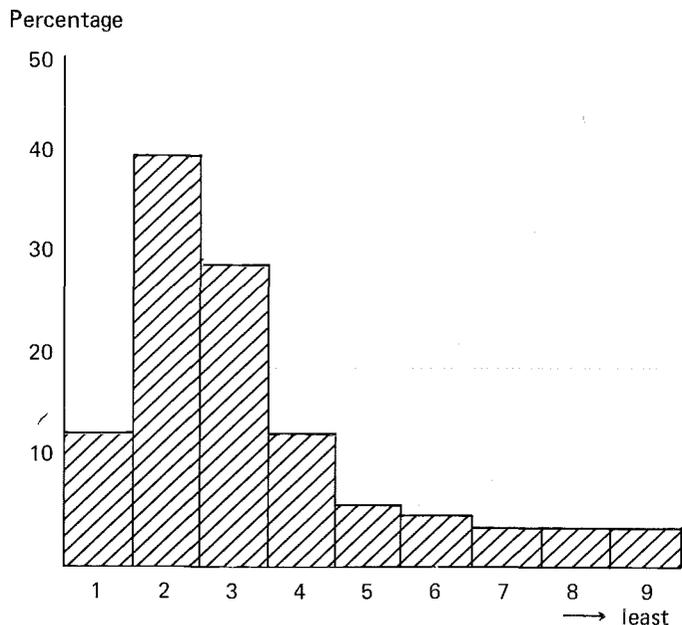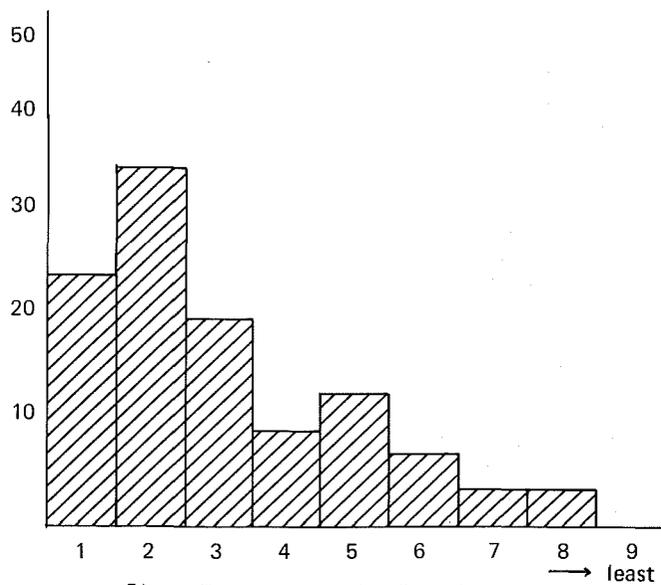

Figure 3: INTEREST

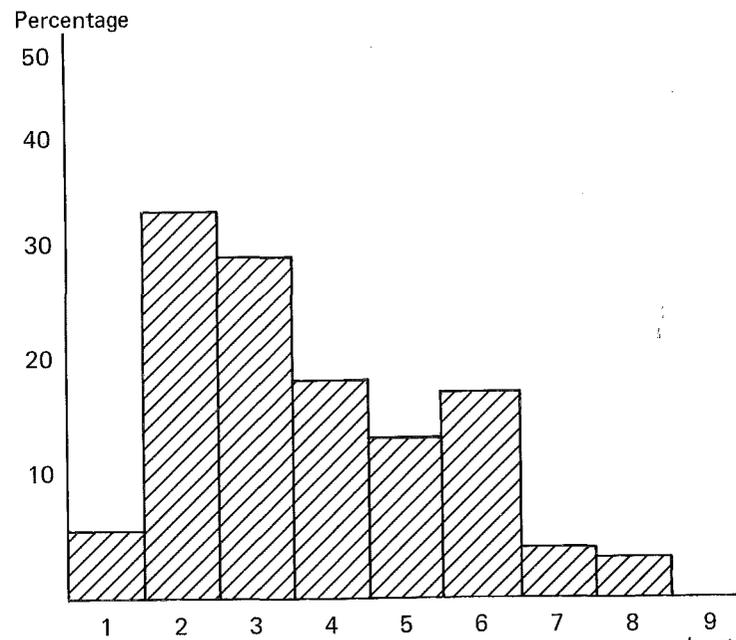Figure 4: ENJOYMENT

Figure 5: USEFULNESS FOR LIVING

Figure 6: USEFULLNESS FOR PROFESSION

Personal changes resulting from the course

Students were asked to rate on a 7-point scale from 1 (marked increase) to 7 (marked decrease) changes in their functioning in the following areas: awareness of own feelings, expression of own feelings, sense of identity, self-acceptance, self-confidence, awareness of feelings of others and spontaneity.

Figures 7—14 show the response in these areas. From these figures it can be seen that participants have felt that important changes have occurred in all areas of personal development. This would indicate that the major aims of the course have been realised quite successfully to date. There exists some negative result but not much; obviously it would be better to eliminate this. Also to be investigated is the reason why those participants who report no change have not been moved in any direction.

If one of the aims of the group experience has been to have the participants more sensitive to other people, then this result is a central requirement. From Figure 11 it can be seen that such a change has taken place, and has taken place signigicantly for the group. With only 3 per cent reporting no change and 78 per cent reporting a marked to moderate increase, it is obviously one of the most successful outcomes of the course unit.

38

39

Figure 12 shows student estimate of change in their ability to express their own feelings. This aspect was considered important for authentic communication. It also reinforces the idea that the individual's feelings are valuable and need not be blanketed into conformity. It also moves a person towards self-identity in that it goes beyond the recognition of personal feelings to the public statement of them, thus presenting the real individual to those with whom he interacts.
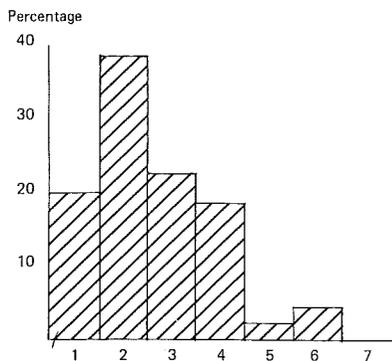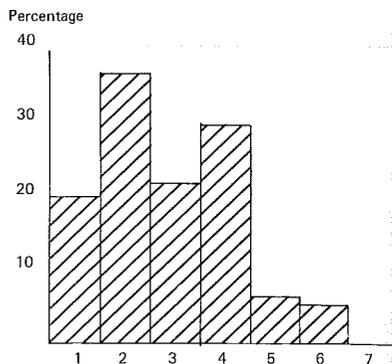
Finally, students were asked for their opinion of the inclusion of Personal Growth Courses in the Teacher Preparation Programme. Figure 14 shows their response and the five categories used.

This item bought a nearly unanimous positive response with 75 per cent wanting it encouraged, and, surprisingly, 23 per cent wanting the course to be compulsory. Despite a small percentage of participants who recorded negative effects from the course, no one seemed to want to have it discouraged or stopped. This was a highly significant response.

Figure 7: SENSE OF IDENTITY

Figure 8: SELF ACCEPTANCE

Figure 11: AWARENESS OF THE FEELINGS OF OTHERS
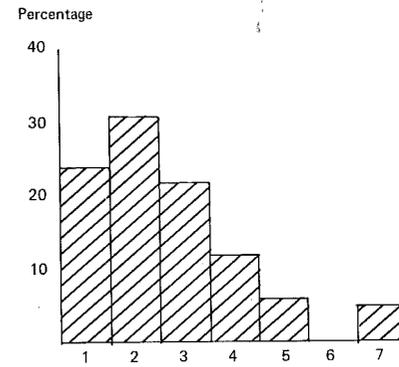
Figure 12: EXPRESSION OF OWN FEELINGS
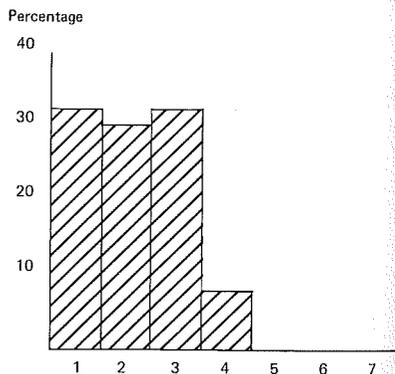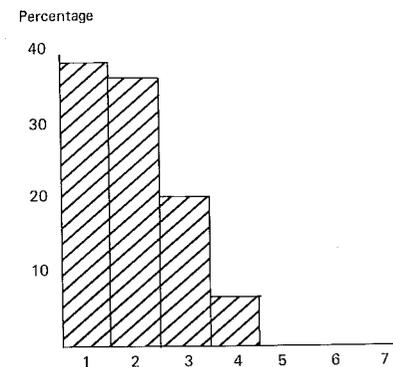
Figure 9: SELF CONFIDENCE

Figure 10: AWARENESS OF OWN FEELINGS

Figure 13: GROWTH OF SPONTANEITY

Categories
(i) Should be compulsory
(ii) Should be encouraged
(iii) Has little or no impact
(iv) Should be discouraged
(v) Should not be included at all.
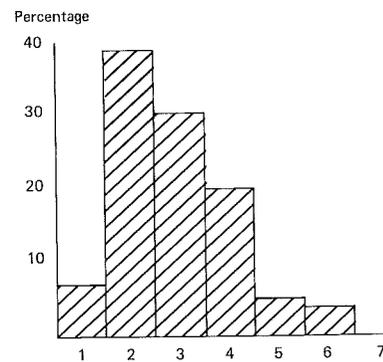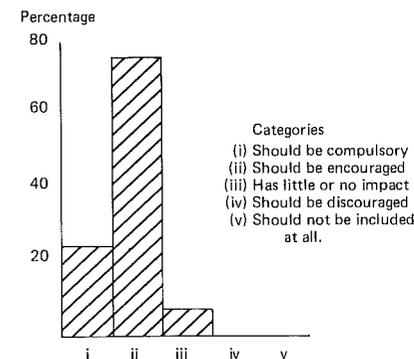
Figure 14: INCLUSION OF THE ITEM IN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMME

Conclusions

The information sought in this survey was modest in scope. For the two directors primarily engaged it was an exercise to check on their facilitation and to see if the basic aims of the course unit were being achieved. To do this it asked participants to evaluate their own experience in an attempt to gauge whether they had seen personal growth in themselves. There was no attempt to study personal or professional gains in any scientific manner nor to evaluate changes according to some preferred model. It was an attempt to see if the experiment was on a productive course and to evaluate the use of the psychodramatic method in this setting.

The most significant comment made by respondents was to the item on the inclusion of such a course in teacher preparation programmes; 99% supported its inclusion. In their personal comments, participants valued the sense of trust, belonging, authenticity, and self-worth that the group experience had given them.

For the rest, as detailed in the discussion of the items, the majority of participants experienced gains in the personal growth criteria that the questionnaire placed before them. Although the questionnaire did not specifically enquire into any new role development (in the Moreno sense of role), it did indicate that increased self-awareness and spontaneity had resulted for most, and that general conditions for role development were introduced and/or reinforced.

The conclusion may therefore be drawn that the course has achieved its broad aims and has been very worth while as a segment of the teacher preparation programme. It should continue to develop and in its second phase an attempt should be made to more scientifically examine its affect on the personal and professional development of teachers. It should also be experimented with as an inservice experience for teachers currently practising their profession.

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