Quality of Life: a central theme of the Israeli special education curriculum guidelines for teachers called "Towards adulthood"

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It all started with this article, written by Robert Schalock and published both in Hebrew and in English in 1988 in the newly created journal *Issues in Special Education & Rehabilitation*:

During the past three decades, the concept of quality of life (QOL) and its application has attracted considerable interest and attention in the fields of intellectual disabilities, mental and behavioral health, and aging. However, its application in educational environments has received less attention to date due to two primary reasons. First, the goal of schooling is regarded throughout much of the world as primarily to transmit past heritage to the new generation and be a transition period on the way to adult life. Second, the focus of recent education reforms has concentrated more on structural and organizational factors in schools than on pupils’ experiences (Schalock & Verdugo, 2002).

Recently, however, the application of the QOL concept to the educational environment, and more generally educational reform. As pointed out by Schalock, 1996b, a number of aspects of the QOL concept make it an attractive model and unifying theme in educational reform. One is its flexibility which permits the development of curricula approaches that are linked functionally to skills and competencies related to community life, interdependency, productivity, and personal well-being.

A second aspect refers to best practice guidelines that include (Schalock, 2005):

(a) quality of life is multidimensional and influenced by personal and environmental factors, and their interaction;

(b) quality of life has the same components for all people – which means that the ultimate goal of self actualization is true for every human being irrespective of gender, ethnic and/or social status, type of disability;

(c) quality of life has both objective and subjective components;

(d) quality of life is enhanced by self-determination, the efficient use of personal and outside resources, a sense of purpose in life, and a sense of belonging;

and (e) quality of life is a holistic concept – the person is seen as a unique human being, more and above the sum total of his/her qualities, it is composed of the interplay between emotions, cognition and behavior and the individual’s milieu.
The purpose of my presentation is to describe how we applied in Israel the concept of quality of life – QOL, in schools' curriculum in order to enhance the autonomy and competencies of students with special needs to lead a **LIFE OF QUALITY**.

My presentation is divided into two sections.

**Section I** describes briefly the **history of special education in Israel** and events that led to the development of a new national curriculum based on key QOL principles.

**Section II** describes the **new curriculum (based on the Cycle of Internalized Learning; CIL)** in more detail including its content, implementation, and how it fits into Israeli culture.

**Special Education in Israel – latest developments**

Special education in Israel, whether provided in special schools or in special programs in regular education, is currently undergoing a major change in orientation and in scope. The changes are due, in part, to the implementation of the Law on Special Education which was enacted in July 1988 extending the age of free education to students with special needs to 21, and amended in 2004 to specify that inclusion in mainstream education is the first and most preferred option when considering all students with disabilities, and that no student should be deprived of special services.

As changes began to occur following the 1988 Law’s passage, a new challenge confronted special education: to **better prepare their students towards inclusion** in regular school while they are still at school age, and as adults who have graduated from special education schools, in the community.

Thus, with the implementation of the Law on Special Education a new demand rose: to prepare students between the ages of 16 to 21 for inclusion in the community where hitherto they would have left school at the age of 16 and gone to live in an institution.

With this new demand, the **Ministry of Education, the Departments of Special Education and Curriculum Planning** asked me to write conceptual guidelines and advise a special team of experts in curriculum planning on the publication of new materials for special education teachers working with adolescents and young adults with special needs (Reiter, 2000). **Education in Israel is centralized**,
all schools, special and regular, follow similar curriculum guides.

The Introduction of the Concept of Quality of Life

Israel, like many other Western countries, was exposed, during the seventies to the ideology of normalization and its implications for services for people with disabilities. The most positive contribution of this ideology was the call for 'No more Institutions'!

However the concept was interpreted in its naive and rather superficial sense as preparing students with special needs for integration in the community, 'making them independent' and 'placing' them in jobs. The principle of normalization was interpreted as teaching students with disabilities daily living skills, work habits, and normative behavior for social adjustment. The term used was teaching for successful integration.

After approximately 25 years of experience in trying to prepare students with special needs for integration, difficulties and frustrations have gradually become pronounced. Graduates of special education did not implement whatever skills they learnt in school, for independent living in the community. Not being able to use the competencies and skills they learnt in school for meaningful inclusion in the community, loneliness became a major issue.

This situation led people in the field, including persons with disabilities, experts, academics, and parents, to slowly shift their focus from teaching independent living skills to a more holistic view of the individual student taking into account his/her emotional, behavioral and cognitive reactions as well as his/her family and social milieu. Moreover, the concept of quality of life which emphasizes meaningful life according to one's judgment of what is important and choosing the style of life most satisfying for the individual gradually 'took over' the concept of normalization.

Indeed the concept of quality of life is defined as the level of fit between the individual person’s competencies, needs and abilities and his/her living
conditions, as experienced and evaluated by the individual according to his/her system of values, beliefs, ideas, attitudes, expectations, and conception of ‘how the world works.’

Based on the introduction of the quality of life construct into Israel in 1988 (Schalock, 1988) a number of QOL studies were conducted (e.g. Reiter & Bendov, 1996; Almosni & Reiter, 1996; Reiter & Goodman, 1999; Goldman, 2000; Reiter, 2001; Almosni, 2002). These studies resulted in the following core ideas that became the main principles underlying the new national curriculum for special education:

It was decided to base the new curriculum on the concept of quality of life emphasizing personal awareness of one's identity, dreams and expectations as well as limitations.

Consequently special attention will be given to variables such as: the sense of control one has over one's life; the ability to make choices; having meaningful interpersonal relationships, social networks and supports; being creative and productive; reaching self-fulfillment and actualization and expressing personal satisfaction.

We further assumed that quality of life can be achieved only when the person is autonomous, meaning that he/she is able to make choices according to a clear set of values and priorities worked out by the individual himself. This set of values is also the criteria on the basis of which the person can evaluate his/her life situations as being good or bad, worthy or not worthy. Furthermore, autonomy means that the person is conscious of the process by which he/she worked out their own criteria for choosing among alternatives.

A further principle was that teaching will be done in groups. It was felt that in order to develop social and interpersonal relationships and in order to develop the capacity to be involved in meaningful interpersonal relationships it is
important to conduct most school activities not in applying individual instruction only but rather - in groups.

It was decided to shift the emphasis of program evaluation from scores given on achievements on a long list of independent living skills, to an evaluation of several major outcomes. Outcomes were chosen and defined according to the competencies and personality variables that underlying autonomy and social relations, such as: self awareness, self-direction, self actualization and inter-dependency based on mutual respect between the person and others.

Finally, from the point of view of school work, it was decided that though the general content areas of instruction will be the formal curriculum for schools, the starting point of any program will be the students, their needs and aspirations. For example, in teaching citizenship or geography or even math and science, the trigger for instruction will be the actual interests and issues raised by the students according to age and disability. Teaching should be authentic, functional and personally meaningful for the students.

Development of the National Model

According to these core ideas and principles, a new model of instruction was devised and termed the Cycle of Internalized Learning (CIL). It was to become a nationwide curriculum guide for adolescents between the ages of 16 - 21 in special education programs.

The CIL model was constructed based on qualitative research findings of a follow along study of a project called “Me and the Community ” which was initiated and operated by AHVA, the association of the physically disabled of Haifa and the North (Goldman, 2000; Reiter & Goldman, 1999; Reiter, 2000). The purpose of the project was to prepare a group of young people with physical disabilities to leave home and live in the community. The group activity emphasized the development of individual characteristics, such as initiative, self-direction and determination, motivation to be involved in the community, and a sense of responsibility for one’s life.

The CIL model is based on the internalization of values, and a cyclical processing of issues related to experiences of daily living. That is why the model was termed the Cycle of Internalized Learning – CIL for the enhancement of autonomy among young adults with disabilities. It represents a shift from a medical paradigm of disability to a social paradigm with an emphasis on quality of life as both the means and the end of all programs.
The Cycle of Internalized Learning is based on the humanistic philosophy (Reiter, 2008; Reiter, 1997). The basic assumption is that all human being possesses cognitive and rational abilities and are thus capable of an understanding of the environment in which they live in and an awareness of themselves as human beings. As human beings we are thus endowed with the ability to control our behavior, set goals, plan for their execution, and take action towards achieving them.

At the same time, the humanistic perception emphasizes the person's inherent need to lead a meaningful life beyond that of daily existence. The meaning of "beyond" here refers to that aspect of our lives that includes values, beliefs, approaches, and attitudes. All these constitute the basis for creating the parameters according to which we determine priorities in our lives and choose between alternatives. We also judge and evaluate our quality of life according to these same parameters.

Towards the beginning of 2000, upon the request to design national guidelines and curriculum for special education, the CIL Model was adopted and further developed by a team of experts in curriculum design. It was followed by an active interdisciplinary steering committee appointed by the Ministry of Education, Departments of Special Education and Curriculum Planning with delegates from the Ministry of welfare, the academia, a parent.

What is the Cycle of Internalized Learning - CIL?

The CIL calls for a paradigm shift in the conception of special education and in the teaching methodology applied with students with special needs.

**Aims and Basic Principles**

Based on the definition of quality of life, the overall aim of the Cycle of Internalized Learning - CIL is:

To enhance students' personal development and their readiness and ability to pursue a life of quality.

The secondary aims of the program are: -

To enhance self-awareness as a prerequisite for autonomy

To enhance the capacity and readiness to be involved in meaningful interpersonal relationships.

To enhance an appreciation that self-determination is both a right and a duty; it includes the following: free choice, the setting of goals, actions for fulfilling the
goals, and evaluation of outcomes

To enhance motivation for continual leaning and involvement in social and vocational life after leaving school

To enhance independent living skills as an important ingredient of autonomy though not identical with it

To enhance 'work personality' - the wish and capacity to be engaged in productive and creative life

In accordance with these aims it was agreed that students' families and the community at large will be an integral part of the curriculum. Every student and his or her family will be active participants, with rights and duties, in the operation of the educational and training programs.

The concept of inclusion will be the one applied in the program, emphasizing frequent outings in the community in order to make learning relevant to the real life circumstances of students and in order to enhance ongoing and mutual interactions both between people with disabilities and people without disabilities in the community.

Instructional Methodology

In consequence of the changes in the general conceptual framework, as outlined above, the methodology of instruction used within special education schools had to be changed from the traditional IEP based teaching to group work.

The two major new emphases of the CIL are (1) holistic orientation toward the student that builds on abilities rather than disabilities and (2) the peer group as the basic unit of instruction.

Individual objectives are not forsaken and are specified for each student in two areas: personality development and the acquisition of specific skills (social, vocational and academic). However, from an emphasis on individual instruction a shift had to occur towards a group experience where the individual student can develop meaningful and lasting interpersonal relationships and develop the ability to create new ones on leaving school.

Group experience is seen as crucial for the development of self-identity, a feeling of self-worth, attachment based on mutuality and on inter dependency, self-awareness, a coherent set of personally chosen priorities - these and other personality attributes that make up autonomy.

The group should not be just a laboratory for interpersonal competencies, it
should be a real place where friendship patterns can develop. The group is also an educational entity, teaching and learning are done in the group, teachers encourage students to conduct discussions, learn new concepts, find solutions to issues as they arise in a democratic way, being active in the learning process. The attention is on processes and outcomes.

The CIL starting point are the authentic life experiences of our students as related to the general subject matter under instruction. Problem solving is not an exercise in and out of itself, rather it is an integral part of any content area under discussion and it is an important outcome of all CIL programs.

The CIL focus on students’ expression of their feelings, worries, frustrations, wishes, hopes and interests as well as their personal modes of reaction to stressful situations. This is followed by an analysis of their subjective associations, personal conceptions, and personal experiences as they relate to new materials taught, new ideas, new data, new concepts and generalizations. This is done in three domains: skills - technical teaching, norms - social and acceptable ways of behavior and values - cultural and interpersonal (Reiter & Bryen, 1991, Reiter, 2003).

Though the concept of internalization is usually applied in relation to norms and values only we suggest applying it in relation to teaching any subject matter, be it a skill or an idea which the student has worked out by himself and for himself. In order to achieve internalization there should be a process by which students examine the relevance to themselves of whatever is being taught.

While the teacher is the initiator of new learning experiences, students are expected to take an active part in the process of learning from its very beginning, even in the choice of what should be taught and learned in any subject matter. This is done by encouraging them to relate their personal experiences to the subject under study.

Next, the teacher 'translates' students experiences into abstract concepts and generalizations, enriching students language and knowledge in the subject matter. Now students are encouraged to use the newly learned concepts and generalization and share with the group their ideas and reactions to events as they occur in real life situations in relation to the subject discussed. They learn to listen to each other and give each other feedback to things said and ideas expressed.

At this point they are asked to suggest new solutions for problems that arise in the
area under discussion, try out some of the new solutions and finally, discuss what they learnt and analyze what are the new aspects they discovered about themselves, about others and about the community (Reiter & Goldman, 1999; Reiter, 2008). The CIL involves several clearly defined teaching steps based on group work.

The process of CIL is presented in Figure 1.

**The Cycle of Internalized Learning - CIL**

*An opening*

The teacher opens with a presentation of a subject matter, be it a social experience, an academic subject or a skill to be taught. The choice of the subject is based on two sources: one is the students' world and students' needs, the other is the formal teaching program. Students are encouraged to respond referring to their past experiences, and raise subjective and concrete associations with the subject matter. At this stage they expressing an initial and usually diffuse, level of self awareness.

*Discussion.*

Following the first presentation of the subject matter, a conceptual analysis is done and a clarification of the personal experiences of participants, moving from the private to the general. Abstractions and generalizations are taught and the understanding of concepts as well as the skills and social norms involved.

*Open Conversation.*

Going back to the private experience, participants are encouraged to bring up again their personal reactions and associations, getting involved in self-examination, giving feedback to others, making requests, wishes, suggestions.

Based on the concepts learned students are encouraged to consider modifications
of the way they understand the issue under discussion, or the way they handle the new skill they learned or enrich their academic knowledge. Suggestions are made by them for a repeat of the initial experience/issue under discussion with modifications.

**Repeat with modifications.**

A repeat of the experience with the changes suggested, (by role playing, simulation, a school performance an outing etc.).

**Repeated discussion.**

The group gets together again for discussion and tries to draw conclusions from the repetition of the experience, enhancing insight into self and others. At this stage the focus is on the development of an autonomous conception of life and on developing a cohesive set of priorities: 'What is more important, what less?' based on personal and social awareness.

**Outcomes.**

Finally the teacher evaluates the process outcomes according to the extent that the students show that they apply personal and autonomous criteria of judgement in the evaluation of their life experiences and are able to make personal choices among alternatives. Outcomes are assessed in the following areas: personal autonomy, enriched knowledge, new skills.

As reflected in Figure 1, the overall goal for the program is the development of the underlying bases of autonomy: self-awareness, sensitivity to others, a sense of self-worth and self-determination as well as self initiative, the ability to apply newly learnt and individually chosen strategies to solve problems, enhanced ability for self advocacy.

Teachers report that students show a heightened degree of satisfaction ('a smile') happiness ('a sprinkle in the eye'), pride in themselves ('I did it, it was my choice, I know'), new interpersonal communications between themselves and others (for the first time going to visit a friend from class'), a heightened sense of competence ('I can!', 'I have power!').
Implementation

Currently, there are 4 published teaching units base on the CIL called: towards adulthood or in Hebrew "Likrat Bagrut – Lev 21": 1. Social Education; 2. Career Education; 3. Towards leaving home for independent living; 4. Citizenship Education.

The implementation of the program into Israeli schools was done in three stages: (1) a demonstration school; (2) nation wide in service teachers' training of schools' delegates; (3) on‐site school staff training with a commitment to change.

A demonstration school. In 1999, at the first stage, the head supervisor of the central area of Israel chose a secondary special education school and together with the school principal they decided to adopt the CIL model of instruction for the whole school. The school principal organized a head team among her staff who learnt the new approach and then guided all other staff on how to work with it. In a matter of one year the school changed completely its' orientation from program centered to students' centered, from teaching students only according to individualized instruction to teaching and working with groups.

The success was dramatic and the school became a 'pilgrims' place for staff from special education programs all over the country. The changes that occurred related to both teachers and students. Teachers reported that they themselves underwent significant change in attitudes towards their students and students exhibited capabilities none of the teachers thought they possessed.

Based on this success the school won a national yearly competition conducted among all schools in Israel and was given the status of an exemplary school. This meant that for 5 years the school got additional funds in order to conduct ongoing documentation, action research, be open for professional visitors, and finally, produce a book describing the basic theoretical and practical principals of the new model as applied to school work.

At that time, our expectation was that the mere exposure to one demonstration school of special education staff such as area and local supervisors, school principals, school teachers and other professionals involved in the education of students with disabilities, will be sufficient for the distribution and application of the model all over the country. This was soon discovered to be insufficient. Thus, the ministry of education, department of special education, embarked on stage two.
In service training. A national supervisor, an expert in the new model, Dr. Pnina Shavit, was appointed to organize in service training courses to interested schools from all over the country. Teachers' trainers were chosen and courses were given in central localities (not in schools) to teachers referred to by their principals. During the years 2000 - 2003 a network of 10 experts covered the country providing courses and school guidance to the teachers who participated in the courses helping them implement the new model of instruction.

However, it was found that in those schools where the school principal was not fully involved and where not every member of the staff participated in the implementation of the CIL, the single teacher could not affect a real change in orientation since the moment the students left the classroom, they encountered a very different style of behavior towards them.

Commitment to change. Since 2004 we entered the third stage of the implementation of the CIL model in special education programs in Israel. It was realized that since the program is not just one other technique or methodology but rather a way of life (as one teacher called it), and since it calls for a complete change of orientation towards the student - from trying to make him 'normal' to enhancing his/her quality of life, it was concluded that the introduction of the CIL model calls for a more general ecological change of school culture and school climate.

Thus today, each school that enters the program, must have the commitment of the principal for its implementation, appoint a leading school interdisciplinary team that undergoes the in-service training in the school and gets a full year supervision and ongoing consultation. One indication of the internalization of the program is when the school culture and school verbal communication style changes from giving orders, directing students, threatening 'wrong doers', to asking for students wishes, points of view and choices and engaging in mutual communication, open conversations without threats and or punishments.

Research

Several research studies were conducted applying the CIL model as the basis of an intervention program. All studies confirmed, both statistically and qualitatively, the effectiveness of the process and the CIL contribution to an enhanced quality of life as a process and as an outcome.
The following are several examples of the implementation of the CIL model in research studies.

We will start with a program on reducing verbal violence among students with intellectual disabilities, the application of the CIL model in an intervention program and its impact on students conducted by Dr. Nirit-Karni Vizer (date). The rational of the study (MA research) was that inappropriately coping in social interactions lead school students to use verbal violence as an expression of social communication and as means to achieve personal goals in social interactions.

The aim of the research was to find out the benefits of a special intervention program based on the CIL model where the subject matter were the different expression of verbal violence such as shouting, swearing, threatening, calling names. A full cycle of internalization was applied to each kind of abuse.

The study included 44 pupils with mild to moderate levels of intellectual disabilities, highly capable of expressing themselves, 25 girls and 19 boys between the ages of 10 to 18 (with a mean age of 14.7) attending a special education school in the north.

Statistical and qualitative analyses indicated that the number of verbal abuse expressions by students was greatly reduced. There was a significant improvement in classroom climate. Exceptional events that spoil classroom smooth running were reduced, and staff was able to take time for normal current activities.

Another study conducted in schools was the doctoral research of Dr. Yonat Ivzori (myself and Dr. Dali Sachs were the supervisors). The title was: Career Education and Vocational Transition Program - beyond preparation for a working life for students with intellectual disabilities enrolled in special education (2011).

The rational of the study was that the transition process from school to living in the community is one of the most significant, complex and multifaceted processes in the life of a person. The student with an intellectual disability needs preparation and assistance in the process of transition to living in the community. They also need to be assisted in the process of adjusting to life in an open and heterogeneous society that is unlike the social environment they were familiar with in the special education school. Additionally they need guidance, mediation, learning, support and assistance in the process of integrating into the working force.

The sample included 77 students with intellectual disabilities. The transition program was applied to 48 of the students (the study group), while 29
students received traditional programs usually applied in special education (the control group). The specially designed intervention program based on the CIL model and principles derived from the human occupational model (Kielhofner, 2002, 2004), were applied with students in four schools, while two additional schools served as the control group.

The qualitative findings showed that participants of the experimental group had a better grasp of work related ethics, developed and consolidated serious approach towards work than the control group. Furthermore, both the students and their teachers were highly satisfied with their participation in the program.

A third study on the efficiency and special contribution of the CIL model was conducted by Dr. Pnina Shavit in her Ph.D. research study on enhancing self-determination in students with intellectual disabilities by means of group interaction.

The rational of the study was that graduates with intellectual disabilities lack capacities for decision making and self determination. The hypothesis of the study was that if we expose students with intellectual disabilities to a learning environment that promotes the development of the qualities and abilities necessary for self-determination, their social abilities will develop, thereby contributing to the feeling that they have a control over their lives. This sense of control will contribute to their meaningful inclusion in society and will contribute to a better quality of life.

The goal of the Pnina's research was to compare the efficiency of two teaching methods in enhancing self determination: the traditional classroom frontal teaching compared with teaching based on The Cycle of Internalized Learning (CIL).

The study sample was composed of 74 students, 35 among them underwent traditional teaching while the remaining 39 experienced the CIL teaching method. The Arc self determination questionnaire (1995) and the quality of life questionnaire by Schalock were translated into Hebrew and administered twice to the two groups, at the beginning and at the end of the intervention program. Five months after the end of the program, the CIL group answered the self determination questionnaire again in order to find whether the program had a long lasting effect on students.

Research findings indicated that students who participated in the program based on the CIL showed higher scores on all measures of self determination: autonomy, self-regulation and empowerment, and on all measures of quality of life: life satisfaction, productivity, social belonging, than students who were
taught in the traditional method of teaching. Achievements were sustained by the CIL students five months after the end of the program.

A fourth research study that investigated, among other things, the effectiveness of a program based on the CIL model was done by Dr. Nirit Karni-Vizer. Her research for the Ph.D was on violence among students with special needs integrated into regular education: impact of a program to increase awareness of violence and encourage self-advocacy abilities as a factor in reducing violence.

The rational of the study was that school violence endangers the safety of students and teachers and undermines educational achievement. In Israel as well as throughout the world, there is great concern about violence in general and particularly its emergence in the school.

Nirit's study focused on students' with special needs that are integrated in general education classrooms in a large regional junior high school. Within the framework of the study the level of violence of these students was examined (physical, verbal, bullying, teasing and hooliganism) and compared with the overall level of violence in the school, and the attitudes towards them by the students without special needs. Also, an intervention program based on the CIL model was implemented among the students with the special needs to enable them to deal with violence.

The study population included 600 male and female students from the 7th –9th grades in an area junior high school. Three groups were selected: an experimental group (N = 182) from the 7th and 8th grades that included special needs students that participated in the intervention program. Control Group A of students (N = 279) from the 7th and 8th grades without special needs who did not participate in the intervention program. Control Group B of students with and without special needs (N=139) from the 9th grades who did not participate in the intervention program.

The Research Methodology combined quantitative and qualitative measures. For the statistical analysis a before and after design was applied and questionnaires on violence, classroom climate and attitudes towards students with disabilities were administered twice, before the intervention program and after the program.
The group intervention program was implemented, to the experimental group, based on the cycle of internalizing learning (C.I.L) method. The program focused on raising awareness to violence and self-advocacy skills.

Findings of the present study showed that no differences in the indirect and direct violence level were found between students with special needs (experimental group) and the other students in the school (control A and control B. It thus becomes evident that the special need students are no different than the other students in the school in terms of violent behavior. No difference was found between the type of violence directed against boys and girls with special needs, but it was found that boys are involved in violence more than girls.

The intervention program implemented in the study caused a rise in awareness among students with special needs regarding the phenomena of violence. The findings indicated that there was an increase in the reporting of incidences of violence by them and towards them following the implementation of the intervention program.

Another finding was that following the intervention program students perceived their relationship with their teachers as being better than before the implementation of the program. That is, they perceived their teachers as being more attentive to them and in turn they felt more free to approach them with their personal issues. This finding is significant because a positive and an open contact with the teacher constitutes an essential starting point in confronting the issue of violence in the school.

In summary – the principles underlying the CIL model of instruction were found by research to be sound and reliable. Indeed learning should be authentic, relevant and functional to all students, with and without disabilities. Learning must help students reach an understanding of their environment and themselves, and assist them in forming their value systems.
This process is mainly social and develops through interaction with others. Within a supportive group with a shared purpose, individuals in the group can construct an identity, deliberate over their ambitions, and examine their beliefs and values in comparison to those of others.

Thus the CIL provides a learning environment where quality of life applies to both the process of education and to its' ultimate goal as well.

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