

Professional Development Programmes: Impact on Life Orientation Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Continuous and intensive professional development aims at equipping Life Orientation teachers with the necessary resources to present the subject, to improve their professional skills and increase their confidence in dealing with the subject. Professional development is considered to be the result of a learning process which is directed at acquiring a coherent overview of the knowledge (both practical and theoretical) as well as the insights, attitudes and repertory that an educator needs for the everyday practising of the profession. To be effective, the professional development of educators should be a seamless life-long experience. The importance of continuing professional development programmes which by

nature is a life-long process, lies in equipping educators with the capacity to respond effectively to major changes in the economy and in the educational system. This study was undertaken to investigate the impact of in-service educator professional development programmes on Life Orientation educators in the Frances Baard District in the North-West Province, South Africa. It was discovered that the professional development programmes that have so far been offered and attended by Life Orientation teachers had failed dismally. This research is timeous in that it has laid bare not only the shortcomings of the current programmes but also points a way towards redress of the problem.

INTRODUCTION

Things develop at such a tremendous rate in modern education and in life in general (one needs only contemplate the challenges posed by the new social media in which children immerse themselves) that teachers require continuous and intensive professional development to equip themselves with the necessary resources to present their particular subjects, to improve their professional skills and to increase their confidence in dealing with their subjects. South African Life Orientation teachers in particular need to participate in such programmes because of the importance of their subject as one of the most important means to equip learners for coping with the challenges of the future (Department of Education 2006:42-43; Rooth and Stielau 2004:45). The same applies for teachers in Burundi, Botswana and Kenya where professional development programmes comparable to those in South Africa, are offered to teachers. The competencies and skills of teachers in these countries are being developed to enable them to deal with life and socio-political issues that are specific to their respective countries (Dakmara et al 2008:96-98). The same applies for Finland, the United Kingdom and Australia where professional development programmes are offered to teachers in accordance with national needs in the context of various traditions in teacher education and training (Prinsloo 2007:185; Dakmara 2008:68). This paper reports on an investigation that was recently launched to see whether teachers in a certain area of South Africa are indeed being adequately equipped for their task through ongoing professional development, in other words, to see if the in-service professional development programmes that these teachers are expected to participate in are indeed effective and successful. The report commences with the conceptual-theoretical framework, on which the empirical investigation was based, then proceeds to a report of the actual empirical investigation that

was done, and then goes on to the findings, a discussion of these, and concludes with a number of recommendations.

Conceptual-Theoretical Framework

Motswiri (1999:2), Mtetwa and Thompson (2000:314), Mutshekwane (2003:45) and Mbunyuza (2005:4) correctly mention that in-service teacher professional development programmes begin with pre-service training, continue through the first few years of teaching and provide opportunities to extend knowledge and skills throughout the educator's career. Subsequent in-service teacher professional development programmes for educators may include workshops, independent reading in addition to study, conferences and also consultations with experts and peers. International literature on teacher professional development programmes indicates that, regardless of their purpose, programmes have traditionally been delivered in the form of workshops, seminars, conferences and / or courses (Ono & Ferreira 2010:59,60). Craig et al (1998:8), Adler and Reed (2000:17) and Bertram et al (2002:21) in turn describe continuing in-service educator professional development (CEPD) as comprising of an ongoing range of activities by which in-service teachers and other categories of educators may improve and develop their personal education, professional competence and their general understanding of the roles which educators and schools are expected to play in their changing societies.

The concept continuing in-service teacher professional development programmes refers to the means through which an educator's personal needs and aspirations may be met. Such programmes allow the system in which the educators serve to provide opportunities for qualified professional educators to update and upgrade their professional knowledge, skills as well as the attitude that will enable them to capture developments in the field of, in this particular case, Life Orientation, and to remain in control of the subject (Stoll et al 2006).

Pretorius and Lemmer (1998:iv), Mutshekwane (2003:398) and Mbunyuza (2005:9-11) identify the main purposes of such in-service programmes as, firstly, to continuously revise educators' subject knowledge and their capabilities to provide appropriate learning strategies for learners; secondly, to improve educators' academic, professional and practical knowledge in order to improve their job performance; thirdly, to remedy the shortcomings of poor pre-service educator training and other problems which surface when an educator is actually practising the profession; fourthly, to upgrade unqualified and under-qualified educators to the status of qualified professionals (especially in areas facing a severe shortage of qualified educators such as mathematics, science and technology); fifthly, to update educators on

changes in information and communication technology, particularly multi-media, geographic information system (GIS), the World Wide Web (www), CD Rom technology and the Internet (electronic communication), and finally, to provide opportunities for educators to exchange ideas and to work together in defining and solving common problems experienced in their respective work environments. The value of peer interaction among educators has been emphasised as a means to instil confidence in bringing about change in classroom practices (Larrivee and Cooper 2006).

According to Mbunyuza (2005:10), the importance of ongoing educator professional development programmes lies in equipping educators with the capacity to respond effectively to major changes in the economy and education system, such as changes in curriculum presentation methodologies, assessment, school organisation and management and to provide for educators' personal and professional development needs. This is in accordance with practices in all European countries. According to Uzerli and Kerger (2007:1), there is "unanimous agreement that all teachers should be provided during their career with opportunities to update skills they need to perform their tasks as well as possible, and thus achieve the aims of a high quality education in their working fields".

According to Loucks-Horsely et al (1998:36-37) and the American Education Research Association (2005:2-4), the following are some of the key features of high-quality educator professional development programmes.

In the first place, such programmes are driven by a clear, well defined image of effective classroom learning and teaching. The emphasis, for example, is on enquiry-based learning, investigations, problem solving and application of knowledge. These programmes are based on an approach that emphasises an in-depth understanding of core concepts and it challenges participants to construct new understandings and the means to measure meaningful achievements.

Such programmes also provide opportunities for educators to build their knowledge and skills and broaden their pedagogical capacity so that the educators can create better learning opportunities for learners. High quality in-service educator professional development programmes enable educators to develop in-depth knowledge of their learning areas and to choose and integrate curriculum and learning experiences.

High quality programmes furthermore provide opportunities for in-depth investigations, collaborative work and reflection, and connect explicitly with other professional experiences and activities of educators. This means that educators are not viewed as objects to which professional development is applied, but rather as an integral part of the professional

development programme. To achieve this, educators' active participation in the professional development programmes is ensured from the planning phase to the evaluation phase.

Such programmes also help build a learning community. Continuous learning is part of school norms and culture; educators are encouraged to learn and should be rewarded for learning.

In addition to all of this, such effective programmes provide support to educators serving in leadership positions such as mentors or monitors of other teachers, agents of change and / or promoters of reforms. They also provide links to other parts of the education system; for example, educator professional development is integrated with other school, district or local community initiatives. Finally, such programmes enable teachers to continuously assess themselves and make improvements to ensure that every day classroom practice conforms to best practice.

An empirical investigation into the impact of an aspect of in-service professional development was launched on the basis of the above conceptual-theoretical framework.

Empirical investigation

General aim

The general aim of the investigation was to determine the impact of in-service educator professional development programmes on Grade 10 Life Orientation educators in implementing the National Curriculum Statement of the Department of Basic Education of the Republic of South Africa.

Research design

A quantitative, non-experimental survey was done (Leedy and Ormrod 2001:196-197).

Study population and participants

A stratified, disproportional random sampling technique was used to select a sample of sixty (n=60) Grade 10 Life Orientation educators from a sampling frame of the 250 Grade 10 Life Orientation educators in the Frances Baard District of the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. The sample accounted for over 20% of the total sampling frame. More than 80% of the schools included in the sample were historically disadvantaged schools and more than 90% of the participants came from historically disadvantaged population groups.

From the urban circuit a sample of four historically disadvantaged schools and two ex-model C-schools (relatively historically advantaged) were selected. From the rural circuit a sample

of six schools were selected. Thirty Grade 10 Life Orientation educators per circuit were selected, thereby giving a sample of 60 Life Orientation Educators.

Data collection instrument

A questionnaire was designed for the purpose of the survey. The questionnaire was based on the conceptual-theoretical framework outlined above, and divided into three parts:

- Part one consisted of nine items intended to glean biographic and demographic information of the participants.
- Part two consisted of four general items related to the participants' pre-service training experiences of Life Orientation and/or the National Curriculum Statement and their exposure to professional pre-service programmes aiming at improving their capacity to teach more effectively and to implement the curriculum more successfully.
- Part three consisted of ten items related to the participants' in-service training experiences of Life Orientation and/or the National Curriculum Statement and problems that the participants encountered with the current in-service training programmes.

Data analysis

Data collected in parts one, two and three of the questionnaire were analysed with the use of descriptive statistical techniques.

Reliability and Validity

Descriptive statistics were used to come to certain conclusions regarding the research questions. No theoretical constructs such as personality, attitude, intelligence, motivation, etc. were assessed by the questionnaire and therefore the statistical reliability of the questionnaire was not calculated. However, an effort was made to motivate the respondents to give their honest responses to the items in the questionnaire.

Due to the fact that no theoretical constructs were measured by the questionnaire, the construct validity of the questionnaire was not determined. For the purposes of this study, the content validity of the questionnaire was an important consideration. The questionnaire was therefore very carefully constructed to ensure that the different sections and items would directly relate to the general aim of the research.

Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to a number of ethical requirements:

- All participants were asked to give their informed consent to participate in the research.
- All participants were informed that their identity would not be revealed.
- Participants were informed that all information provided by them would be treated confidentially and that the information would not be used for any other purpose except for the research.
- All participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the research and before the questionnaire administration they were briefed so that they clearly understood what they were required to do when responding to the items in the questionnaire.
- All the concerned parties gave their informed consent that the research could be done in the schools: the sampled respondents, the principals of the schools in question, the Northern Cape Department of Education and the Ethics Committee of the University under whose auspices the research was done.

Findings

Section 1 of the questionnaire

Biographical information about the participants

The results with regard to the gender of the participants (60% female and 40% male) are consistent with other research findings (Quarts et al 2008:218 - 250), showing that teaching in the area was predominantly a female dominated field. Of the participants, 82% were older than 30 years and the majority of them (73%) did not have marital obligations. The participants were mainly Setswana speaking (65%). As far as participants' pre-service academic qualifications were concerned, slightly more than half of them (52%) possessed only a matriculation certificate, while a substantial number (23%) were not even in possession of such a certificate. However, 82% of the sampled participants were in possession of a recognised teaching qualification. Only 6% had either a Bachelor's degree in Education (3%) or an Honours degree in Education (3%). What is worrying is that 12% of the educators possessed no professional teaching qualification at all. Sixty two percent of the participants had less than 10 years experience in the teaching profession and 20% had between 1 and 5 years experience. Fifty three percent of the participants were teaching in two

and three learning areas, and 7% of the participants did not possess a professional qualification in the learning area(s) that they were actually teaching.

Section 2 of the questionnaire

Pre-service training in Life Orientation (LO) and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS)

On the issue of pre-service training opportunities in Life Orientation (LO) and/or the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), the findings showed that the majority of the participants (65%) had not received any training whatsoever in this learning area.

The quality of pre-service training programmes in LO/NCS

When the participants were requested to rate the quality of the planning and timing of their pre-service training programme, 52% rated it as poor and an additional 15% rated the planning and timing of the programme as very poor, giving it a total poor rating of 67%. Eighteen percent of the participants rated the planning and timing component of the training programme as average and only 15% rated it as good. The majority of the participants rated the planning and timing as poor.

Participants were also requested to rate the quality of the programme facilitators in terms of course content and presentation skills. Fifty eight percent rated the course content to be of poor quality, 29% rated it as average and only 13% rated it as either good (4%) or very good (9%). On the issue of rating the programme facilitator's presentation skills, almost half (48%) rated presentation skills of poor quality and an additional 9% rated these skills as very poor. Forty three percent of the participants rated the facilitators' presentation skills as average.

Another important aspect related to the quality of pre-service training in LO/NCS that the participants were requested to rate was the quantities of course support material. Forty eight percent rated the quantity as inadequate (poor), and an additional 29% rated the quantity as very poor, suggesting that the quantity of the course support material was significantly less than what would normally be expected.

Participants were also requested to rate the quality of the course support material. One hundred per cent rated it as of poor or very poor quality.

Another aspect of course support material which participants were requested to rate was the timing of the availability of the course material. Seventy six percent rated the timing as poor (38%) or very poor (38%). This suggests that the course support material was being made available too late to be of any value to the participants.

As far as the class application relevance of the pre-service training programmes was concerned, 100% of the participants indicated that the training programmes had no relevance for class application. In fact, 81% of them rated the programmes as very poor in terms of their class application relevance.

As far as the funding of the pre-service training programmes was concerned, all the participants (100%) rated the funding as either poor (62%) or very poor (38%).

An important component of pre-service training which the participants were requested to rate in quality was after-training support services. The findings show that 100% of the participants did not receive any after-training support from the course facilitators, school or district office.

Relevance of pre-service training for addressing classroom application problems

This item focused on whether pre-service training in LO/NCS adequately addressed the participants' classroom problems. The results indicate that 92% of the participants either disagreed (47%) or strongly disagreed (45%) that these programmes were effective in addressing their classroom application problems.

Section 3 of the questionnaire

In-service training in Life Orientation (LO) and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS)

Section three of the questionnaire dealt with the in-service training of educators in Life Orientation (LO) and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). The results indicated that all of the participants had attended in-service training in LO/NCS over the previous year.

Level of active participation in LO/NCS in-service training programmes

Results indicated that 92% of the participants rated their participation as low or very low. It is difficult to explain such a low level of participation in a training programme, because one assumes that any training programme would be based on a training needs analysis. The results reveal that 93% of the participants rated their participation level during the implementation phase of in-service training programmes in LO/NCS as either low (48%) or very low (45%). All participants (100%) rated their participation levels during the after-training phase as either low (47%) or very low (53%).

Quality of recent in-service training programmes

Participants were requested to rate the quality of the most recent in-service training programmes that they had attended.

The funding component was rated by all participants as either poor (57%) or as very poor (43%). The funding of a programme tends to affect its quality in many dimensions, such as the quantity, quality and timeous availability of support material and overall sustainability. A second aspect of the planning of an in-service professional development programme that participants were asked to rate in terms of quality was the notice period. Adequate notice is necessary as it gives educators time to adjust their teaching loads and to develop the necessary peace of mind to give the in-service professional development programme the attention it deserves. Eighty five percent of the sampled educators rated the notice period of the most recent in-service programme they had attended as either poor (63%) or very poor (22%). The third and final aspect of the planning of in-service programmes that participants were asked to rate was the duration of the programme. Sixty five percent of the participants rated the length of the programme as poor and 35% rated it as average.

Participants were also requested to rate the quality of the programme facilitator's work with specific reference to selection of course content and the presentation skills. The majority of participants (60%) reported the course content as of average quality and only 18% reported it to be good. Regarding the facilitator's presentation skills, the majority of the participants (78%) rated it as poor, while the remaining 22% rated it as average.

Another major aspect related to the quality of in-service professional development programmes is support materials. Participants were requested to rate course material in terms of three criteria, namely quantity, quality and timing of its availability. Participants rated the quantity of the support material as either poor (70%) or very poor (30%). In many cases participants reported that they had been required to share support material. Participants also rated the quality of the support material as either poor (87%) or very poor (13%). The last criterion that participants were asked to rate was the availability of course material. The majority of the participants (94%) either rated it as poor (77%) or very poor (17%). Support material which is not available or arrives too late greatly reduces the value of the training programme.

The participants were also asked to rate the relevance of the in-service training professional development programmes in terms of assisting educators to solve practical classroom problems. The majority of the participants (68%) rated this aspect as either poor (40%) or very poor (28%). An in-service professional development programme that has very little practical relevance can be regarded as a waste of resources. Programme facilitators are supposed to be modelling techniques that educators could use in classroom practice.

The last aspect of the in-service professional development programmes that participants were requested to rate in terms of quality was the matter of after-training support services. Sixty eight percent of the participants reported that the after-training support services were poor and 32% rated them as very poor. One important way through which programme facilitators can determine whether training outcomes have been achieved is by conducting regular after-training classroom visits and by rendering the necessary support.

The question whether the school management team was offering after-training support services to educators by, for example, regularly visiting those educators who had just come back from an in-service professional development programme, revealed that the majority of participants (85%) reported not having received such support. Sixty three percent of the participants rated this aspect as poor and 22% rated it as very poor. It appears as if district offices had not offered any after-training support to educators as well. Fifty percent of the participants reported services rendered by district offices as poor and the other 50% reported it as very poor.

Participants were furthermore requested to rate their attitudes toward LO/ NCS in- service professional development programmes soon after attending such training programmes. The results indicated that 50 % of the participants had either a very negative, or a negative (18%) attitude towards LO/NCS in-service professional development programmes soon after attending such training programmes.

Classroom application

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the LO/NCS in-service programmes helped them to address their classroom problems.

Eighty three percent of the participants either disagreed (60%) or strongly disagreed (23%) with the statement that the LO/NCS in-service programmes they had attended had helped them to address their classroom problems.

Participants were also asked to give information about the extent to which follow-up LO/NCS in-service programmes were designed to build on previous training programmes. Results indicated that more than half (58%) of the participants strongly disagreed (10%) or disagreed (48%) with the statement that follow-up LO/NCS in-service programmes were designed to build on previous training programmes.

Information was furthermore asked about the frequency of educators' attendance of follow-up LO/NCS in-service training programmes. The majority of the participants (62%) reported that they attended follow-up LO/NCS in-service programmes during every school holiday.

Twenty two percent were uncertain as to how frequently they attended LO/NCS in-service programmes.

Responses about the attainment of a professional development qualification in teaching reflected that 38% of the participants had attained a professional development qualification in teaching during the previous three years, without the assistance of the department. The majority of the participants (62%) had not obtained any qualification and cited financial incapacity as the main reason.

Participants' opinions about taking responsibility for professional development reflected that only 33% of the participants thought that they themselves were definitely responsible (18%) or responsible (15%) for their own professional development. Thirty seven percent reported that the Department of Education was responsible and 30% thought that they and the Department of Education were jointly responsible for their professional development. The results suggest that, despite the widespread discourse about life-long learning, many educators still have a long way to go in accepting responsibility for their own professional development.

Participants' opinions were asked about their current professional development capacity to implement the NCS for Grade 10 Life Orientation successfully.

The majority (63%) of the participants rated their current professional development capacity to implement the NCS for Grade 10 Life Orientation successfully as either low (28%) or very low (35%). This state of affairs is alarming because an educator's perceived professional development capacity to implement the NCS successfully will affect his/her confidence and self-esteem in class. Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of participants doubted their abilities to teach LO successfully to Grade 10 learners.

Summary of findings

In sum, the following findings emanated from the study: The majority of the participants had not received any pre-service training in LO/NCS. In general, the quality of the pre-service educator professional programmes was evaluated as poor. The following factors contributed towards this negative evaluation: poor planning and timing of the programmes; inadequate funding to attend the programmes; poor course content; poor presentations by programme facilitators; inadequate quantity of course material; poor quality of course material; inadequate provision of after-course material and after-training support, and poor classroom application potential of programmes. These findings tie in with those of studies done on teacher professional development in Botswana (Moswela 2006: 623-632) and Namibia

(Mushaandja 2006) in which the low quality of teacher professional development programmes as well as the limited financial resources available for such programmes were emphasized.

All the participants had attended in-service educator professional development programmes for teaching LO/NCS. The majority of participants rated their levels of participation during the planning, implementation and after-training phases of the in-service training programmes as low to very low. In general, the quality of the in-service educator professional programmes was also evaluated as poor. The following factors contributed towards this negative evaluation: the programmes were inadequately funded; the notice periods were too short; the programmes were too lengthy; the course content was of average quality; facilitators' presentation skills were poor; the quantity, quality and availability of the course material were poor; the relevance of the in-service training professional development programmes in terms of assisting educators to solve practical classroom problems was poor; the after-training support services were poor, and the majority of the participants had a negative attitude towards LO/NCS in-service professional development programmes soon after attending such training programmes. This also correlates with a study done in Botswana on teacher professional development programmes on the basis of which Moswela (2006:629) suggests that teachers should be involved in determining the course content of programmes.

The majority of the participants were also of the opinion that attending the LO/NCS in-service programmes did not help them to address their classroom problems. This again ties in with Moswela's (2006:629) findings on the basis of which he advises that teachers know best what their needs are in terms of improving their skills and competencies in order to perform their tasks and thereby achieve the aims of a high quality education. More than half of the participants in the study reported here disagreed with the statement that follow-up LO/NCS in-service programmes were designed to build on previous training programmes. The majority of them reported that they had attended follow-up LO/NCS in-service programmes every school holiday. The minority of the participants had attained a professional development qualification in teaching during the last three years without the assistance of the department. The minority of the participants reported that they themselves were responsible for their own professional development. The majority of them also rated their current professional development capacity to implement the NCS for Grade 10 Life Orientation successfully as low.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following is recommended:

1. Recommendations regarding the Department of Education

1.1 Full engagement of all Education Stakeholders: The successful implementation of LO/NCS depends on the involvement and commitment of all education stakeholders, that is, government departments, school governing bodies, communities, parents, educators as well as the learners. Stakeholders, particularly parents and communities, should be skilled and empowered to be able to help educators in achieving their expected outcomes in Life Orientation.

1.2 Educators with matriculation but no teaching experience

In-service training is imperative and most urgent for this category of educators. There has to be a continuous educator support improvement, classroom teaching monitoring and continuous feedback given to these educators. They require regular professional coaching and mentoring which must be put in place to enable them to get to the desired LO/NCS level.

1.3 Educators with teaching experience but no matriculation certificates

Funding and study opportunities must be made available to allow educators in this category to upgrade their academic qualifications to matriculation level. On-going and appropriately scheduled refresher courses must be designed and offered to increase educator proficiency at acceptable levels of knowledge and skills on LO/NCS.

1.4 Removing the barriers that hinder the implementation of LO/NCS

There is an urgent need for the upgrading of infrastructure at previously disadvantaged schools if successful implementation of LO/NCS were to be realised. This can only be achieved by allocating funds to these schools. To achieve this, a summit on infrastructure development, in which all stakeholders participate, should be held and a well thought-out action plan put in place for the successful completion of this project.

1.5 Classroom application programmes

Lack of planning of workshops and content knowledge can be addressed through meticulous planning by facilitators in order to conduct the programmes effectively and efficiently. Planning of workshops can be achieved by attending to the supply of the necessary support

materials, sufficient time, a solid infrastructure and by insisting on accountability. Regular feedback from educators is also required for learning area managers to enrich and improve classroom application of the programmes.

2. Recommendations regarding teacher education institutions

To rectify the poor quality of teacher education and timing issues, facilitators need to be patient and supportive to educators in need of LO/NCS, particularly the previously disadvantaged educators. Teacher education institutions also require the necessary information, support, funding and quality training to be able to deliver the desired outcomes to the educators.

3. Recommendations regarding teachers

3.1 Improving Grade 10 Subject knowledge

The purpose of continuing professional development programmes for educators is to advance their subject knowledge capabilities. Benefits of continuous professional development are, among others, provision of appropriate learning strategies for learners, opportunities for educators to network and grow through the exchange of ideas and identifying and solving common problems that they experience in day-to-day interaction with students on various learning platforms.

3.2 Formation of District Forums of Grade 10 Educators

It is recommended that Life Orientation Grade 10 educators form Communities of District Forums where lessons are shared about classroom experiences and workbooks containing common solutions for challenges experienced be developed.

3.3 Lessons from Past Grade 12 Examination Results

The country's Grade 12 results of the past three years serve as evidence of the fact that Grade 10 Life Orientation, as the base grade for the Senior Phase, has not been equipping learners with the right set of skills and competencies. It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on scrutinizing and strengthening Grade 10 curriculum development instead of concentrating on Grade 12 examination results as the main critical national yardstick for twelve years of schooling.

Conclusion

The quality of in-service professional development programmes is impacted by a variety of factors, *inter alia* in-service educator professional development programmes having a rather

small effect on the classroom practice of teachers and not being modelled along profiles of best practice; the pedagogical skills required by educators to successfully implement the NCS have not been specified; the programmes are poorly funded, and the schools are poorly managed and under-resourced. These and other shortcomings of in-service professional development programmes could be overcome by taking a multi-stakeholder approach. This research suggests that in-service educator professional development programmes, attended by Grade 10 Life Orientation educators, might improve their skills and knowledge regarding the content of the Learning Area Life Orientation.

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