

## Revisiting the values in Moral Education for Malaysian schools

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In 1983, the Moral Education (ME) subject was first implemented as a core subject in primary one to non-Muslim pupils, whilst the Muslim pupils attended Islamic Education. It was implemented in stages on a year-by-year basis until form five at secondary school by 1993. The first ME syllabus covered 16 core values and 64 sub-values. In 2000, the ME syllabus was revised and the values were then reduced to 36. In 2010, the Standards Primary School Curriculum (SPSC) was introduced. As such, the ME syllabus was further revamped and it now consisted of 14 values. As the SPSC is being implemented in stages on year to year basis, it can be expected that there will be changes to the curriculum for secondary schools. This article intends to revisit the values in the ME syllabus by analysing official documents relevant to ME for Malaysian schools.

**Keywords:** Values; Moral Education; schools in Malaysia.

### Introduction

Prior to the introduction of Moral Education (ME) in 1983 as a compulsory school subject for non-Muslim pupils whilst the Muslim pupils are taught Islamic Education, ME was taught in various formal and informal ways. It was formally taught in Islam (*Ugama Islam*) for Muslim pupils whilst the non-Muslim pupils had the option of learning religious education, outside the normal school time table. The non-Muslim pupils refer to pupils of different faiths and beliefs other than Islam such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Taoism, animism and traditional beliefs

In 1972, Civics was then introduced as a compulsory school subject to all pupils from standard four (10 years old) to form three (15 years old) whilst the civics elements were incorporated in the Local Studies subject for standard one (seven years old) to standard three (nine years old). The Civics syllabus, which was based on the Rukun Negara and the Federal Constitution, aimed at instilling and fostering patriotism, develop attitude of tolerance, as well as understanding and resolving social problems. The Rukun Negara, introduced in 1970, is the National Ideology and it forms the foundation of Malaysia's national policies, including education, until today.

However, the review of the national education system known as the Cabinet Report (1979) found that the implementation of Civics was less than satisfactory. As a non-examinable subject, many teachers and pupils regarded the subject to be unimportant, and in many schools the time allotted for Civics was substituted with the teaching of other subjects

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as the public examinations drew nearer (Ministry of Education, 1979). It was about that time that in the mid-1970s, that there was a growing global concern on the modern and social problems such as drug abuse and moral deterioration among the youth that drew the attention of the educationists and public alike both locally and internationally (Murkerjee, 1983). Schools could no longer remain neutral in terms of educating moral character. In Malaysia, these concerns were similarly expressed in the Parliament and there was a need to provide some form of moral guidance that schools should be responsible for (Murkerjee, 1983). It is in this light that the Cabinet Report (1979) recommended that whilst the elements of Civics should be integrated in all subjects, ME should be introduced as an examinable school subject. It states:

In building a disciplined, cultured and united society, the Cabinet Report (1979) recommended that while Muslim students study Islamic Religious Knowledge, and this includes other pupils who choose to follow this subject, non-Muslim pupils should be taught Moral and Ethics education. All pupils who study this subject, Moral and Ethics Education, must take it in the examination. In both these subjects, respect for the individual and the freedom to embrace any religion in a multi-religious society must be cultivated (Ministry of Education, 1979, 127.1, p. 49).

In implementing the recommendations in the Cabinet Report, the Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced the New Primary School Curriculum (known as KBSR) in 1983 and the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (known as KBSM) in 1989. It was in the KBSR and KBSM that Moral Education (ME) was first implemented as a compulsory school subject for non-Muslim pupils at both primary and secondary schools. Since then, ME syllabus underwent two major revisions, one in the 2000 and another in 2010. This paper revisits the values in ME for Malaysian schools by tracing the values in the development of the ME subject in Malaysia and subsequently discusses on the values of the ME syllabus, particularly for secondary schools.

### **The first Moral Education syllabus (1983)**

Prior to the implementation of the Moral Education (ME) syllabus in schools in 1983, a Special Committee on Moral Education was formed by the MOE to formulate a ME programme that span a 11-year range from primary and secondary schooling. The members of the Committee consisted of representatives of various religious and voluntary groups, school heads, academicians from teacher training colleges and universities. At that time, the MOE participated in a series of workshops on ME in Asian countries sponsored by UNESCO and organized by the National Institute of Educational Research (NIER) in Tokyo, Japan (Mukherjee, 1983). In one of these workshops, there was an attempt to identify 'universal moral values' that participating countries could use in their ME programmes. The list of 'universal moral values' were circulated to respondents from voluntary groups, religious bodies, school heads, teachers and other colleges throughout Malaysia. It was generally based on the feedback from the survey and recommendations from the Special Committee on Moral Education that the 16 noble or core values (known as *nilai murni*) formed the basis of the first ME syllabus in Malaysia (Mukherjee, 1983). These 16 core values of Malaysian society were based on the various religions, traditions and cultures of different communities and were also considered to be consistent with the universal values (Ministry of Education, 1983). These values were: cleanliness of the body and mind, compassion, co-operation, courage, moderation, diligence, freedom, gratitude,

honesty, humility, justice, rationality, self-reliance, love, respect and public spiritedness (Ministry of Education, 1983).

The 16 core values not only formed the content of ME, but were also incorporated across the national school curriculum in all subjects and in the co-curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1988). For each of the core value there were few sub-values that are related to the core value. For example, the core value of compassion has five sub-values, namely sympathy, considerateness, generosity, mutual understanding, and forgiveness. In total, there were 80 values, namely 16 core values and 64 sub-values. All these 80 values were defined so as to avoid possible individual interpretations of the values in the national curriculum.

The aim of the first ME syllabus was “moulding upright, respectable and noble persons through the internalisation and practice of moral values upheld by Malaysian society” (Ministry of Education, Malaysia 1988). The overall objective was to develop individuals who recognise, accept and internalise their roles as responsible citizens. At primary school level, 12 main values were selected whilst at secondary school level, all the 16 main values were taught. All values were inculcated in a spiral relationship with those closest to the pupils, namely family, peers, school and community to widening relationship to include national and international levels. These values were repeatedly taught at every level of schooling but the scope and discussion of each value differ in context of the students’ level of maturity.

In 2000, the ME syllabus was then revised in tandem with the revised national school curriculum for both primary and secondary schools. The national school curriculum was revised as it was the usual practice of MOE to do so after a 10 year-cycle of curriculum implementation so as to be aligned with the National Philosophy of Education (1988), the national agenda or policies, such as Vision 2020, as well as to meet the global educational challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The revised Moral Education (ME) syllabus (2000)**

The revised ME syllabus in 2000 attempted to overcome some weaknesses of the first ME syllabus as reported in a nation-wide review of the national school curriculum. Some weaknesses identified in ME included teachers facing difficulty in teaching same values without any specific issues and situations for all school levels, and that there were too many values (a total of 80 values) to be covered in any one single school year. It is to be noted that at that period of time, MOE participated in several UNESCO meetings and workshops on the global concerns in educating pupils to face the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century which subsequently had an impact on the revised national curriculum.

In the revised ME syllabus, the scope seemed to be more encompassing as it included the development of individuals with good character and the nurturing of responsible citizens (Chang, 2010) as indicated in the objectives. The main objectives were to enable pupils to: (i) understand and internalise noble values that are needed for good character, (ii) aware and accept the importance of harmony between man and environment and strive to sustain it, (iii) enhance understanding and cooperation by sustaining a peaceful and harmonious life in a democratic Malaysia, (iv) develop mature thinking based on moral and spiritual values in making moral decisions and solving problems, (v) develop commitment to act morally, based on justice and altruism in line with the noble values of Malaysian society (Ministry of Education, 2000).

In addressing the issue of the content of the first ME syllabus, the values in the revised syllabus were reduced to 24 values in primary and 36 values in secondary school syllabus. These values were organised in seven learning areas as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Values in the revised Moral Education syllabus for Malaysian schools (2000)

Learning areas	Related Values
1 Self-development	belief in God, trustworthiness, self-esteem, responsibility, humility, tolerance, self-reliance, diligence, love, justice, rationality, and moderation. ((12 values)
2 Family	love and care for parents/family, respect for the family, preservation of family norms, and responsibility towards family (4 values)
3 Environment	love and care for the environment, harmony between people and the environment, sustainability of the environment, and sensitivity towards environmental issues. (4 values)
4 Patriotism	love for the nation, loyalty and devotion to the King and nation, and willingness to sacrifice for the nation. (3 values)
5 Human rights	protection of rights of children, respect the rights of women, protection of rights of labour, respect the rights of the unfortunate, and protection of the rights of consumers. (5 values)
6 Democracy	respect of rules and regulations, freedom of speech and expressions, freedom of religious practice, participation in nation-building, and open-mindedness (5 values)
7 Peace and Harmony	living together in harmony, mutual help and cooperation, and mutual respect among nations. (3 values)

Similar to the first ME syllabus, all the seven learning areas and the 36 values were similarly covered for every school level. The scope and emphasis differed as specified in the academic content of the ME syllabus specifications for every school year. The academic content referred to specific themes and topics depending on the complexities of the situations and issues to be covered in each level of schooling. An additional element to the revised ME syllabus is that, in tandem with the revised national school curriculum, the acquisition of generic skills such as critical and creative thinking skills, conflict resolution skills, social skills, and information technology and communication skills were included so as to prepare pupils to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Ministry of Education, 2002).

In 2010, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced the Standards Primary School Curriculum (known as KSSR) to restructure or “transform” the national primary school curriculum to ensure that the students have the relevant knowledge, skills and values to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The KSSR was formulated in form of statement of standards. The statement of standards comprised of content standards and learning standards which a student needed to achieve in a specific period and level of schooling. Content standards are specific statements on what the students must know and can do, within a specific period of schooling, covering the areas of knowledge, skills and values. The learning standards are set criteria or indicators of education quality and achievements which can be measured for each content standard. With the restructuring of the national primary school curriculum, all the subjects including ME were restructured.

### **The Moral Education syllabus in Standards Primary School Curriculum (2010)**

The scope of the KSSR ME syllabus is an updated version to the revised KBSR/KBSM that aimed at developing individuals with good character, integrity and able to contribute towards harmony and stability to the nation and the global society. The objectives were re-phrased as (i) understand and internalise the universal values, (ii) internalise and practice good conduct, (iii) perform moral and social responsibility in maintaining personal well-

being with family, school, neighbours, society and the nation, and (iv) to develop and apply moral reasoning, moral feelings and moral action in making judgements and decisions (Ministry of Education, 2010).

The values in the KSSR ME were further reduced to 14 universal values, namely belief in God, compassion, responsible, gratitude, humility, respect, love, justice, courage, honesty, diligence, cooperation, moderation, and tolerance. These 14 universal values were organized around 6 themes, starting with self, family, school, neighbourhood, society, and nation. Each theme would be taught according to year of schooling. For example, in Year 1, the values would focus on thematic situations/issues on self, Year 2 on thematic situations/issues on family and self, and Year 3 on the thematic situations/issues on school and self. Similarly to the previous revised ME, generic skills were included in the KSSR ME syllabus such as critical and creative thinking skills, conflict or problem solving skills, facing peer pressure skills, innovations and creativity and social skills. These generic skills were included with the intention of enabling students to face the world of information in the new century with confidence and having an attitude of social and moral responsibilities, as well as to develop resilience and ability to face pressures and life challenges (Ministry of Education 2011).

With the change in the national primary school curriculum to what is now known as Standards Primary School Curriculum (SPSC), which is implemented on year to year basis starting from 2011 at Primary 1, it is expected that the Standards Curriculum will be implemented at secondary school level by 2017. In view of the changes in the national school curriculum for primary schools, it would raise the question on what the Standards Curriculum in ME for secondary school would be like in 2017. The following section revisits the ME for secondary schools in terms of the values in the ME syllabus.

### **Revisiting the values in Moral Education for Malaysian schools**

The revisiting of the values in ME for Malaysian schools is based on two main observations of the current ME in Malaysia, namely the framework of ME in Malaysia, and the changes in the national agenda and national curriculum

#### ***The framework of Moral Education in Malaysia***

Moral Education (ME) in Malaysia is essentially based on values that are considered to be good or noble values (known as *nilai murni*) that are important to Malaysian plural society. In this case the values refer to values that are based on various religions, traditions and cultures of different communities and are consistent with universal values (Ministry of Education, 1983). These values would provide the standard or objectivity for defining moral or noble character and responsible citizens that will enable them to lead a fulfilling life and contribute towards the harmony and stability in Malaysia and globally. However, this set of values seemed to change with each revision of the national curriculum. In the first ME syllabus of 1983, there were 16 core values and 64 sub-values (totally 80 values). In the 2000 ME syllabus there were 36 values and then in the 2010 ME syllabus for primary schools there were 14 values. This raised the question on the list of set values as well as the number of values that would be incorporated in the ME syllabus for secondary schools.

In further reviewing the ME syllabus, it was found that these values are taught in terms of the comprehensive components of moral reasoning, moral feeling and moral acting, largely based on Lickona's model on character education on "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good" (2001). In other words, the ME in Malaysia seems to take the framework of character education that builds on moral values that are considered to be

important for building one's personal character and in the context of citizenry towards the nation and globally, using the dimensions of moral reasoning, moral feeling and moral acting as the basis in the acceptance and internalization of the values.

### ***Changes in the National Agenda and the National Curriculum***

As the national curriculum is a centrally planned curriculum for all national schools in Malaysia, it is inevitable that any changes in the national curriculum would affect the changes to ME which has to be aligned to the aims and goals of the national educational reports and policies such as the National Philosophy of Education. In addition, the changes in the national curriculum and education in general would also be very much aligned to the national policies and goals or agenda (Siow & Chang, 2011). For example, the national curriculum was revised in 2003 as to be aligned with the national agenda of Vision 2020, and in 2011, the national curriculum was changed or "transformed" so as to meet the goals of the new national agenda of New Economic Model or Economic Transformation Programme. In September 2012, the government realised the Preliminary Report on Education Blueprint for 2013-2025 and it can be said that the report would also have an impact on the future changes in the national curriculum, including ME.

Apart from the national policies and agenda, the changes in the national curriculum were also aligned to the global trends in education, particularly those set by UNESCO. This being the case as Malaysia is a member state of the United Nations and hence it can be expected that the educational goals guidelines set by relevant bodies of United Nations and in this case UNESCO would be taken into consideration by the Ministry of Education. For instance, UNESCO's generic 21<sup>st</sup> century skills were included in all subjects, including ME, in the revised national curriculum in 2000 and 2010. In the 2010 Standard Curriculum (KSSR), it was mentioned that the UNESCO's four pillars of education of learning, (learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be) was one of the organising principles of the Standard Curriculum (Ministry of Education 2010).

In short, any changes in the ME subject would be aligned to the changes in the national curriculum, national policies and the global trends in education. This is clearly indicated in the forward in the Education Blueprint (2013 – 2025) by Tan Sri Dato' Haji Muhyiddin bin Haji Mohd. Yassin, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education that states:

This Government is committed to transforming Malaysia's education system over the next one and-a-half decades. Our goal, and the purpose of the education system, is to equip our students holistically to allow them to succeed in the 21st century, with all of the opportunities and challenges that this new era presents. In order to compete with the best in the world, our education system must develop young Malaysians who are knowledgeable, think critically and creatively, have leadership skills and are able to communicate with the rest of the world. Just as importantly, our students must be imbued with values, ethics and a sense of nationhood, enabling them to make the right choices for themselves, their families and the country with a view towards enduring and overcoming life's inevitable challenges.

## **The values in ME for Malaysian schools**

The values found in the three ME syllabuses and the national curriculum as well as national policies, suggest that the values in ME for schools can be grouped under three broad categories as in the following: (1) Belief in God, (2) universal moral values for character and (3) values for citizenship

### *1. Belief in God*

Belief in God is in the first principle of the National Ideology (Rukunegara) and it is pivotal in the National Philosophy of Education that states that “Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God” (1988). This implies that belief in God has a major influence on the lives of Malaysians and that values that are based on teachings of religion should be inculcated. The faith-based values are reemphasized in the Education Blueprint 2012 which states that “Islamic Education curriculum for Muslim students will include a greater focus on understanding the core values and underlying philosophies of Islam and other main religions in Malaysia. Similarly, for non-Muslim students, Moral Education will include an understanding of the core values of all main religions in Malaysia. The Ministry will also look into having Moral and Islamic Education students share certain classes together when common universal values are taught.”

The faith-based values in ME seemed to be based on the premise that all religions advocate good values and that there are some parallels regarding what is good by all religions. As Islam is the official religion in Malaysia and the freedom of worship of other religions is protected in the Federal Constitution (Article 11), it can be assumed that the values in Islam and shared by other religions would form the core values in ME. It can also be assumed that an understanding on the positive values in one’s own religion and other people’s religions would open an avenue for Malaysia’s multi-racial and multi-religions society to respect each other’s religious beliefs, rites, practices, and way of life so as to ensure continual harmonious living among each other.

### *2. Universal moral values for character*

It is generally argued that a list of universal moral values would provide common grounds that are agreeable to improve one’s relationship with each other and for the survival of humankind. Most people would agree that practices such as torture, child abuse, violence, slavery, murder, genocide, corruption and theft are condoned in many, if not all society. For instance, the golden rule of “do unto others as you would have others do unto you” in various forms seemed to be relevant in our global society. Guided by works on philosophy and psychology in moral education, the universal moral values for developing good character would generally fall under two moral principles of justice and caring. Moral principles are desirable as they would “sensitize us to what is relevant when we think about what is right and wrong” (Peters, 1973, pp 144-145).

In terms of the values that are related to principle of justice, it would encompass rights, equality, retribution, autonomy and freedom. As pointed out by John Rawls, the stability of a society or any group would depend upon the extent to which members of that society feel that they are being treated justly. When some members of that society feel that

they are subject to unequal treatment, it can lead to social unrest, disturbances and conflict. In other words, whenever individuals are treated unequally on the basis of characteristics that are arbitrary and irrelevant their fundamental human dignity is violated (Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer, n.d.).

The values that are related to principle of caring would encompass concepts of respect, responsibility, love and compassion in the interdependency and connectedness in one's relationships with others. According to Gilligan (1982), there is a clear distinction between caring and justice. Gilligan (1982) identified three fundamental characteristics of caring as opposed to justice as in the following: (i) it is the concern for responsibility and relationships rather than rights and rules, (ii) it is related to concrete circumstances rather than being formal and abstract, and (iii) it is expressed as an activity of care rather than a set of principles. Psychological work by Hoffman (2000) on development of empathy has indicated that empathy is the key emotion in moral motives.

However, it is to be noted that "reducing moral education to a process of imprinting a good set of moral messages" has been criticized as "bad practice" (Kupperman, 2005, p. 201). Nonetheless, Kupperman (2005) further argued that whilst "the learning rules of good behaviour is useful", it is "inadequate" as "good character should be thought of as a modification of the self of the person who acquires it, rather than as a fund of information in the memory banks" and "learning of rules often will not make virtuous behavior probable" (p. 216). In other words, there is not only a need to have a common or shared set of universal values for character, but it is equally important that there should also be recognition and respect for diversities of values cross- and within- cultures in a plural and borderless society in Malaysia and other countries.

### 3. *Values for citizenship*

A review on the relevant documents on the national policies such as Rukunegara, Vision 2020, Economic Transformation Programme and educational polices such as National Philosophy of Education, national curriculum of KBSM and KSSR, and the Education Blueprint indicated that educating students to be responsible citizens seemed to be an essential element in the education system in Malaysia. One of the main goals of education is to build a moral and ethical society and responsible citizens who can contribute towards harmony and stability in Malaysia and globally.

Westheimer and Kahne in Print (2008) identified three kinds of citizens in modern democracies, namely (i) personally responsible citizen who considers his/her community and accordingly acts responsibly (ii) participatory citizen who actively engages in public affairs and the public life of the community at local, state and national levels and (iii) justice oriented citizen who critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to address areas of injustice. This implies that the values for citizenship would encompass democratic values that would enable students to become citizens who are personally responsible, actively participate in the community at all levels, and address any areas of injustice that threaten the democratic life of the plural society in Malaysia. It is not about "shaping a citizen with a particular set of values but allowing for the development of a person with a disposition to engage in full and open dialogue with others" (Nur Surayyah Madhubala Abdullah, 2008) and this is particularly so in a plural society like Malaysia.

In identifying the values for citizenship, the most important document would be the Federal Constitution of Malaysia. The Constitution is the supreme law of Malaysia and every citizen is obligated to adhere to the Constitution. Apart from the national constitution and laws, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) could also be a point of reference in identifying values for citizenship as it is adopted almost all (except 8



abstentions) members of United Nations General Assembly, including Malaysia. Among its 30 articles are definitions of civil and political rights (including the rights to life, liberty, and a fair trial) as well as definitions of economic, social, and cultural rights (including the rights to social security and to participation in the cultural life of one's community).

In the context of ME, the nature of civil society would be relevant as it plays an important role in building and strengthening democracy through wide range of organised groups and institutions that are independent of the state and voluntary such as non-governmental organisations, independent mass media, social and religious groups. These civil society groups have “respect for the law, for the rights of individuals, and for rights of other groups to express their interests and opinion.” The word “civil” implies tolerance and the accommodation of pluralism and diversity (in [www.stanford.edu/~Idiamond/iraq/Develop\\_Democracy021002.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/~Idiamond/iraq/Develop_Democracy021002.htm)).

In building a civil society, community service would be an important element in ME as it only through active engagement to the community that students as citizens will be able to appreciate and develop the values of democratic life such as tolerance, respect for diversities, compromise, cooperation and moderation. The importance of participation in community service is also highlighted in the Education Blueprint 2012 in which it was stated that the community service element will be a pre-requisite for school graduation.

### **Challenges ahead in identifying values in ME**

Moral Education as a core subject for non-Muslim students was introduced since 1983. The main aim of ME in Malaysia is to develop individuals with good character as well as responsible citizens who contribute to the harmony and well-being of the nation and globally. In revisiting the development of ME subject, and the national curriculum as well as the national policies, it suggests that the values in ME could be categorized under three components, namely belief in God or common faith-based values of all main religions in Malaysia, universal values for character, and values for citizenry for the nation and globally. However, this would pose major challenges in determining a list of core values that would comprised the three components of values that would represent the core values of Malaysia's plural society. It is also a challenge to identify the attributes of these core values that are not only consensually acceptable by peoples of Malaysia from diverse religious, ethnic and culturally background, but are also universally acceptable. In addition, the “appropriate” number of values in ME subject needed to be resolved as this seemed to be an issue with the previous and current ME subject in Malaysian schools.

Nonetheless any changes in ME would need to be aligned with one of the transformational shift in the Education Blueprint (2012-2025) to develop values-driven Malaysians:

Every student leaves school as a global citizen imbued with core, universal values and a strong Malaysian identity. The values they have learnt are applied in their day to day lives, leading to more civic behaviour such as an increase in volunteerism; a willingness to embrace peoples of other nationalities, religions and ethnicities; and a reduction in corruption and crime. Every student also leaves school prepared to act as a leader, whether in their own lives and families, or as part of the broader community and nation.

In the Education Blueprint it is stated that there is a need to develop values-driven Malaysians as students faced numerous challenges that would require them not only to have

leadership skills but also strong universal values such as integrity, compassion, justice, and altruism, to guide them in making ethical decisions. It is also important for the students to know how to balance the development of global citizenship with a strong national identity. In this context, it is essential that in developing the values and guiding students at different levels of schooling (primary and secondary) in making ethical decisions, the comprehensive components of moral reasoning, moral feeling and moral acting should be the core components in ME.

In conclusion, in revisiting the values in ME for Malaysian schools it can be concluded that there is an urgent need for MOE to review the existing core values, and identify the values that are consensually acceptable by the different religious, ethnic and cultural groups that constitute Malaysian society, and at the same time educate Malaysians to be global citizens.

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