LEVERAGING CRITICAL INCIDENTS TO ENHANCE IN-SERVICE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY IN TEMANGGUNG, CENTRAL JAVA

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Abstract: The continual development of professional teachers is essential for upholding an ideal learning atmosphere for students. Although there were extensive studies on pre-service training and early career development, there is a gap in information regarding how in-service teachers, who have years of experience, continue to enhance their professionalism throughout their careers. In this study, teachers encountered several unexpected and impactful classroom Critical Incidents, which provided significant insights into their professional development. This study aimed to examine the critical incidents faced by practicing teachers and how these experiences shaped their professional identity. It explores how these moments affect their fundamental values, beliefs, and teaching methods. The research investigated the real-life experiences of three Junior High

school in-service teachers in Temanggung, Indonesia by using teacher reflections and conducting in-depth interviews. The findings of the interviews with the in-service teachers indicate that students' attitudes towards teachers and their own mental health were associated with a higher frequency of critical incidents in the classroom. The researchers also discovered that critical incidents were far better for their growth compared only to participating in teacher development training, as it provided valuable experience and exposure to real-world situations. This finding had profound implications both in academia and in practical applications. Teacher education programs can enhance their preparation of pre-service teachers by acknowledging the impact of significant incidents. Furthermore, the results can be used to enhance professional development programs for teachers, enabling them to analyze their critical incidents and use these experiences in their development.

Keywords: *critical incidents, in-service teachers, professional development, teacher professionalism*

INTRODUCTION

The educational field is always changing, requiring teachers to be flexible and consistently enhance their professional skills. Many studies have been conducted on the training/initial professional development of pre-service ELT teachers and less attention has been paid to the ongoing professional development of experienced ELT teachers. For instance, Emilia et al. (2022) highlighted that training programs can enhance teachers' ability to select suitable texts and design tasks aligned with PISA evaluations. Similarly, online training initiatives in Indonesia were found to improve teachers' ICT skills and professional growth, offering the dual benefit of reduced costs and less disruption to classroom teaching (Ghassani & Sugandi, 2023). Additionally, Martínez-Mena et al. (2022) emphasized the importance

of leadership, communication, emotional intelligence, and teamwork in fostering professional success.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Indonesia, despite its potential, has faced challenges. Revina et al. (2023) identified issues related to the relevance of training, feedback mechanisms, and follow-up activities after workshops, which have contributed to teacher dissatisfaction. Monica (2023) noted that while English educators in Yogyakarta found TPD programs beneficial, they struggled with workload management and a lack of continued support. Similarly, Averina and Kuswandono (2023) pointed out constraints such as overwhelming workloads and limited program diversity, despite the programs' positive effects on self-efficacy, reflective competence, and classroom practices. Importantly, Murwaningsih (2024) concluded that while teacher professional attitudes influence welfare, self-development is a critical driver of improved performance.

Critical incidents represent another significant factor in teacher professional growth. Defined as high-stakes occurrences that surpass available resources and often involve uncertainty (Shortland et al., 2020), such incidents serve as catalysts for professional learning. Joshi (2018) demonstrated that reflecting on critical incidents allows teachers to extract valuable insights for future practice in the English language teaching context. Pourhassan and Nazari (2023) further showed that professional development courses focusing on these incidents significantly enhanced L2 teachers' ability to address learner engagement and knowledge challenges. Reflection on critical incidents not only fosters skill development but also supports the evolution of professional identity.

Critical incidents, as reflective tools, play a vital role in professional development. Yu (2018) argued that critical incidents enhance participation and improve learning from personal experiences. Examining teachers' perspectives on significant occurrences is essential to understanding how they adapt and grow in dynamic classroom settings. Chien (2018) noted that these incidents lead to professional learning in areas such as classroom management,

instructional strategies, and individual learner differences. Teachers use reflection to bridge theory and practice, as Singh et al. (2019) emphasized. Yin (2018) highlighted the importance of structured reflection, where educators reassess their methods and student outcomes, fostering a sense of agency over their professional development.

In today's complex educational landscape, teachers must possess diverse skills extending beyond subject knowledge. Fauth et al. (2019) found that teacher competence is linked to student interest and achievement. Teacher educators need a combination of technological, pedagogical, and reflective skills (Uerz et al., 2018). However, challenges such as limited resources, inadequate preparation, and stakeholder-related issues hinder teacher effectiveness in Indonesia (Abdillah & Fithriani, 2023).

Experiential learning has been identified as an effective approach for professional growth. Tias and Tongjean (2022) highlighted the role of hands-on experiences in improving teachers' classroom practices. Similarly, A study from Suyatno et al. (2023) also demonstrated that giving real-world experiences such as guiding students, completing administrative activities, and learning in the workplace may assist pre-service teachers to transform into more professional teachers through *Kampus Mengajar* program. TPD programs is potential to foster creativity, innovation, and improved teaching outcomes (Ahmad et al., 2019; Wijaya, 2022). Feng et al. (2018) critiqued traditional workshops for their lack of sustained collaborative learning. So, based on the Ministry of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia, Kunandar (2011) was advocating instead for continuous professional development by making Indonesia's "*Guru Profesional*" framework.

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), critical incidents serve as key moments for teacher growth. These occurrences encourage introspection, enabling educators to refine their strategies and improve student outcomes. For instance, reflecting on instructional failures can prompt teachers to adapt and innovate their

methods. Professional development focused on critical incidents enhances educators' ability to address engagement and learning challenges (Joshi, 2018; Pourhassan & Nazari, 2023). Such moments transform setbacks into opportunities for continuous development, ultimately enhancing classroom effectiveness.

In-service teachers are ideal participants for this study due to their extensive experience and reflective capacity. Their firsthand accounts of critical incidents offer valuable insights into the complexities of classroom dynamics. In-service teachers can analyze their responses to challenges, identify effective strategies, and highlight areas requiring further support. Moreover, their developed professional identities make them well-suited for understanding the impact of critical incidents on teacher development.

By focusing on in-service teachers in rural areas like Temanggung, this study aims to uncover the unique challenges they face and identify strategies for overcoming them. This approach ensures the findings are grounded in real-world practices, offering actionable recommendations for improving TPD programs in ELT contexts. This study addresses a significant gap in the literature by exploring how critical incidents influence the professional development of English teachers in Temanggung's Junior High Schools. It aims to provide insights for educators and policymakers to improve TPD frameworks. The research is guided by the following questions:

1. What specific critical incidents or experiences did in-service teachers encounter that significantly contributed to their development as professional educators?
2. How did the critical incidents described by in-service teachers contribute to their TPD?

METHOD
Research Design

This research used a case study approach to thoroughly examine the impact of critical incidents on the professional growth of

English instructors in Temanggung, Indonesia. This qualitative approach aligns with Yin (2014), who promotes in-depth case studies to explore complex phenomena like the intricate relationship among teachers' experiences, professional growth, and the specific context of rural education.

By relying on a small group of in-service teachers who have experience in teaching for more than 10 years, the case study design allowed for a thorough exploration of individual views and narratives. This technique provided a thorough knowledge of how important episodes impact teachers' beliefs, practices, and professional identities in the context of the rural setting's particular problems and opportunities.

Research Setting and Participants

The study conducted on English teachers in junior high schools in Temanggung, Indonesia, with a status of public and private schools. The target population were three in-service English teachers who had experienced at least one critical incident during their careers. One CI was chosen as the minimum number of considerations for selecting participants because a single incident can provide deep insights into the challenges and learning moments that significantly impact a teacher's practice.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Teachers	Gender	Age	Educational Background	Experience in Teaching	School Status
Mrs. Pharita	Female	42	Bachelor degree	19	Public School
Mrs. Wiwid	Female	58	Diploma two	28	Public School
Mrs. Rahma	Female	59	Bachelor degree	31	Private School

A case study approach was employed to recruit participants. This method focuses on the in-depth exploration of in-service teachers

(with a minimum of 10 years in the field) who possess a rich history of classroom experiences and diverse educational backgrounds (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To protect participant confidentiality, names were pseudonymized by replacing them with a pseudonym that shares the first letter of the original name. Potential participants were identified through collaboration with school principals and teacher professional development organizations. The inclusion criteria focused on experienced, full-time secondary school teachers.

Data Collection

The combined approach of written reflections and in-depth interviews offers several benefits. In this study, the initial written reflections allowed participants time to reflect on their experiences, potentially leading to deeper and more thoughtful responses during the interviews (Flick, 2018). This approach leveraged the strengths of both methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of critical incidents (CI) and their impact. First, the participants were invited to complete a written reflection activity. This activity prompted teachers to identify and describe critical incidents they have encountered in their classrooms, focusing on the specific events, their initial reactions, and the subsequent impact on their teaching practices and beliefs. They were given information on the meaning of CI and how to write it using Richards and Farrell's principles (2005) about context, issue, and resolution before they filled out the reflections. The written reflections provided a starting point for the interviews and allowed participants to gather their thoughts beforehand.

Following the written reflections, semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary data collection method as depicted in the following table.

Table 2.

Semi-structured interview questions

Theory	Questions		
	Context	Issue	Resolution

Richard and Farrell's principles	1. Could you please describe the specific context in which the critical incidents occurred?	1. What was the core issue or problem that arose during the incident?	1. How did you respond to the critical incident?
	2. What were the relevant factors, such as the classroom environment, student behavior, or curricular demands, that contributed to the situation?	2. How did this issue impact you personally and professionally?	2. What strategies or actions did you take to resolve the issue?
	-	3. What were the specific challenges you faced in addressing the issue?	3. How did this experience contribute to your professional growth and development?

This approach allowed for flexibility while ensuring key areas related to critical incidents are explored. The interview built upon the written reflections, prompting teachers to elaborate on specific incidents, their emotional and professional development journeys triggered by these events, and any additional critical incidents that may not have been captured in the initial writing. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian language to ensure clear and nuanced communication. Furthermore, the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and translated into English to examine the data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study, following the two-part data collection approach outlined in the methodology section, were conducted in a phase. The first phase focused on analyzing the written teacher reflections. Thematic analysis was employed, involving an iterative process of coding the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring themes and patterns related to critical incidents. Initial codes were developed based on the research questions and may be further refined as new insights emerge. Based on the initial coding, the

reflections were categorized into broader themes related to the types of critical incidents encountered, the initial impact on teachers' beliefs and practices, and any initial reflections on their professional development journeys. This analysis involved identifying similarities and differences across the teacher reflections, considering factors like subject area, teaching experience, and school context.

The second phase focused on analyzing the data from in-depth interviews. All audio recordings were transcribed. The transcripts were coded using the same thematic analysis approach employed for the written reflections, ensuring consistency, and facilitating the integration of findings from both data sources. The coding process was further refined based on the interview data. New themes or sub-themes emerged during the interviews, necessitating adjustments to the initial coding framework. This phase explored how the interview data explained more than the written reflections. The researcher examined how teachers elaborated on their initial reflections, delved deeper into the emotional impact of critical incidents, and provided richer narratives about their professional development journeys triggered by these experiences.

The final phase involved integrating and interpreting the findings from both phases of the analysis. A cross-case analysis approach was used, comparing, and contrasting themes across different teacher participants. This allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how critical incidents influence teacher development in Indonesian secondary schools. This also employed for a deeper understanding of how teachers use storytelling to make meaning of critical incidents and how these experiences contribute to their professional identity development. Finally, to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, member checking was conducted. Participants presented with a summary of the identified themes to ensure their experiences were accurately represented and to provide opportunities for feedback. This multi-phased data analysis approach capitalized on the strengths of triangulation, a method that utilizes

multiple data sources to enhance the validity and richness of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Critical Incidents Faced by the Teachers

To find out what critical incidents teachers have encountered, 15 teacher reflections were collected. Researchers have identified three distinct categories of occurrences, especially relating to students' attitudes; toward friends and teachers, students' competency; students' vocabulary, and students' health; physical and mental health.
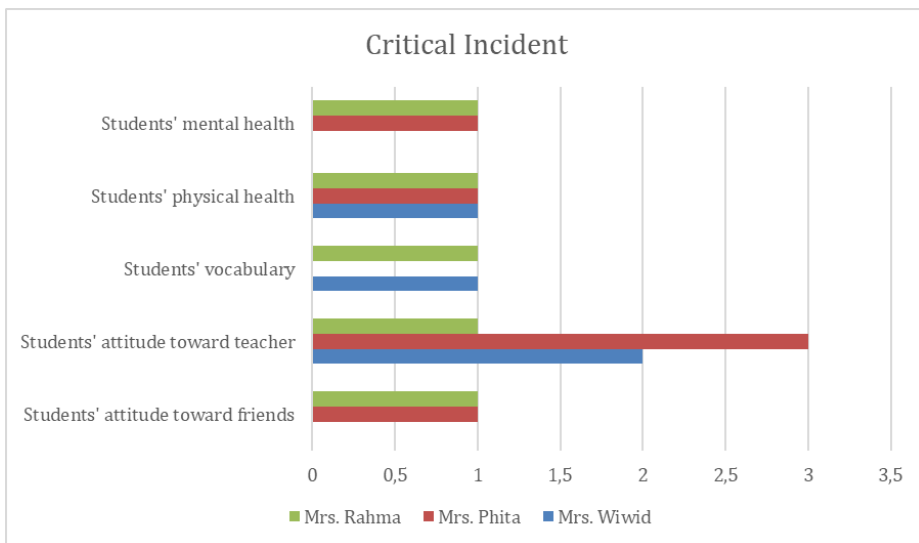
Figure 1. Critical Incidents faced by the teachers

Figure 1 revealed all the incidents that have been categorized. The category with the highest number of answers was determined by students' attitudes towards teachers. The teacher-student contact is undoubtedly critical in the process of learning. This debate demonstrated the challenges that teachers had faced in the classroom. The table also indicated that student proficiency in English is not the primary important incident. There were additional aspects beyond academics, such as attitude and health.

Students' attitude

The most frequent critical incident identified in earlier studies was the student's response. Based on this research, student's attitudes can be categorized into two distinct groups. Learning is a collaboration that occurs between students and teachers. The actions of students towards their teachers can have an impact on the process of learning. As important is the need to provide special attention to engaging with other students.

a)   *Students' attitude toward others*

The research results indicated that the interaction between students is not always positive. Differences in perception may arise because of variations in possessions, aspirations, or opinions. This occurred to some of the teachers who were interviewed. Students fought their academic pursuits. Similarly, one of the teachers stated:

> *"Once students were fighting, then I broke it up, one of them was still in class, which we considered as the right one because no one was right with the person who was fighting. For the other one, I told him to go to the Counseling room. After that, I called them to go to the class and tried to ask them one by one." – Mrs. Pharita, translated into English.*

The reflection above indicated that Mrs. Pharita employed an organized strategy for problem-solving. Because of a lot of student conflict in her previous classes. By adapting to the circumstances, she struggled to make things better without causing harm to other students who did not engage in the fight. By inviting one of the students who are fighting to another room, the wrath of both parties can be mitigated. This educator recognizes that eighth-grade students are, in fact, in a state of transition as they develop a more mature thought process. Sometimes, students' behavioral issues that appear may be the result of prior events. It is crucial to prioritize safety and alleviate tension in such circumstances. It is advisable to refrain from intervening

independently when experiencing intense emotions, as the issue is currently developing an intense conflict. The assigned staff member of Counseling should be contacted promptly by one individual, while the other individual should remain with the student to ensure their calming presence until help from other teachers comes. The study aligned with research from Ivaniushina and Alexandrov (2018) by highlighting friends' attitudes that are strongly related to a student's educational outcomes. The incident described by Mrs. Pharita underlined the need for effective classroom management strategies. Her approach of separating the students and seeking additional support demonstrates proactive problem-solving.

 b) *Students' attitude toward the teacher*

The researchers discovered that the teacher was not respected. Teachers are also human beings, and they can make mistakes. The teacher has encountered the following incident:

> *"The students are often angry and did not accept what I said. For example, 'Let's pay attention students!', then this student got angry. So, the point is that students nowadays are more used to protest, but protesting to just defend themselves."*– Mrs. Wiwid, translated into English.

Mrs. Wiwid believed that students are more sensitive and easily irritated with their teachers since they have unstable emotional tendencies, as evidenced by the results of her reflection. She consistently strives to offer her students comfort and comprehension in response to this. Although students are free to offer feedback as part of the teacher evaluation process, they should do it constructively. Anger may damage to disrespect elderly individuals, particularly teachers. The research expands on previous studies by emphasizing the importance of student well-being is strongly associated with better academic performance (Egan et al., 2022). Mrs. Wiwid's reflection on student disrespect suggested potential emotional regulation

challenges. This is in line with Zheng (2022) who found that teacher interpersonal behavior and student-teacher relationships play a crucial role in fostering students' well-being by providing emotional support and meeting their emotional and social needs. Mrs. Wiwid's effort to foster understanding highlighted the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) strategies in the classroom. By implementing social and emotional learning (SEL) in classrooms, teachers can promote student success. Still, teachers need to understand its foundations, common curriculum components, and challenges and benefits to effectively implement it (Todd et al., 2022) Other critical incidents, such as students who verbally disparage teachers and English lessons, also occur. This undoubtedly leads the teacher to feel disappointed. However, the teacher assumed that the most effective approach to managing students is to convey the significance of English in the future. A study from Yuzulia (2021) also found that students have high motivation to learn English due to intrinsic and extrinsic factors, including passing national exams, teacher inspiration, and its benefits for their future careers.

Students' competence in dealing with vocabulary

Mastering the vocabulary is not the only thing that matters in learning English, but it is part of it. Especially for basic learning, it is important to know what words mean to understand what a sentence means. Here is an incident that the teacher experienced:

> *"At that time, in the 2000s the students' vocabulary was also still very lacking for children of junior high school age. Then now at the beginning, I provided a solution by giving one or 5 dictionaries for one class to help those whose vocabulary is still lacking." – Mrs. Rahma, translated into English.*

Students were required to comprehend vocabulary, as indicated by the reflection. In that situation, students did not know English from their primary school. Mrs. Rahma was obligated to make more effort

to guide these students, as she had to provide it from word to word rather than from sentences. In this case, English lessons were already assembled in written form. It was challenging for her students. There is still a lack of understanding among educators regarding the effective transmission of knowledge to students who possess a limited vocabulary. The solution is for students to learn in groups, progressing from words to sentences. It is also beneficial to provide them with some form of motivation. The teacher frequently provided an example of an individual who did not prioritize their abilities, which could result in disappointment when applying for a scholarship or job. The findings correlated with past research on the need for teachers to adapt instruction based on student needs (Vaughn, 2019). In his study, he explored adaptive teaching during reading instruction which can be effectively implemented through teacher adaptability, reflecting students' instructional needs, and aligning with explicit instruction. Mrs. Rahma's experience with students lacking basic vocabulary emphasized the importance of pre-assessments and differentiated instruction.

Students' Health

The research's findings indicated that concerns about students' health are crucial and should not be undervalued. Several problems may hinder the running of educational programs. Underestimating the health of students can have serious consequences, particularly in terms of long-term health impacts. The physical and mental health of students were the two categories of student health identified by this research.

 a) *Students' physical health*

A student's state of health is one of the factors that helps a class go successfully. Another key occurrence that needs to be addressed right once is one's physical health. One of the teachers' reflections is provided here:

"One day when I was teaching in a class of 7E, the student went to school although she was already dizzy, she forced it, so she got here with a lot of nosebleeds. I told her to go to the School Medical Room, but she didn't want to. Automatically while explaining the material, I was looking at her to control her health condition." – Mrs. Pharita, *translated into English.*

From Mrs. Pharita's explanation, she found a student who had a nosebleed and quickly dealt with the problem. The teacher is responsible for whatever happens in the classroom because students are indirectly entrusted by their parents to the teacher in the classroom. In that situation, the learning environment can be significantly disrupted, impacting not only the ill student but also their healthy peers, who often feel an obligation to address the situation. Interviews reveal that many students demonstrate a persistent eagerness to engage in learning even while experiencing illness. They do not want to be moved to the School Medical Room or sent home with children who have serious illnesses. As a solution, each class has a health box that can assist students, as well as several initiatives that restrain the students' illness. For example, teachers could work with the community health center to tackle specific diseases or have breakfast together every morning on certain days.

b) *Students' mental health*

Teachers must consider not only physical health but also mental wellness. If the instructor lacks a deep understanding of each student, it will be challenging for them to accurately perceive the thoughts and emotions experienced by the students. The story concerning students with mental problems:

"There was a student who had problems at home and then he brought those problems to class. His English was good, but he often felt that he was more than others. At the end of the lesson, when I gave the test,

the results were less and unsatisfying." – Mrs. Rahma, translated into English.

Based on Mrs. Rahma's findings, it was observed that student who experience internal or psychological issues may negatively impact their academic performance. Intellectually smart students face disadvantages due to familial issues. To overcome the issues, Mrs. Rahma provided guidance and actively interacted with the adolescents. It was discovered that the student experienced a deficiency of attention from both his parents and siblings. During the class, he tried to excel, employing both passion and manipulation. As a teacher, Mrs. Rahma endeavored to provide individualized attention to her students, while providing the guidance to persistently pursue undertakings that one feels competent in and perform them diligently. Undoubtedly, she was contented with the fervent students in that class. However, she made a conscious effort to be attentive and fair, just like other teachers.

How Critical Incidents Contribute to Teacher Professional Development

The study found that teachers define teaching as an ongoing process of personal and professional development. Although teacher education builds a strong foundation, real improvement thrives through practical experience. This is in line with Zhang's (2022) study, which found that technology-based education and teacher professional development can enhance teaching quality in English as a Foreign Language classes, but current programs need improvement. High-quality teacher professional development programs should also consider sustainability and teacher motivation.

When entering the classroom, the participants felt that it revealed a world that is significantly more complex than just textbooks and lesson preparations. Teachers faced a diverse range of students, each influenced by distinct family origins and individual circumstances. From the study, the teachers discovered a success that

went beyond simply academic accomplishment. It evolved into a molding perspective, cultivating an open-minded educational atmosphere, and comprehending the underlying reasons for a student's actions. The conventional perception of a teacher, positioned at the forefront of the classroom imparting knowledge, evolves into a more nuanced comprehension. The teachers assumed the role of a companion, accompanying students on their educational paths, and helping by giving direction, and motivation. This idea reflected in the viewpoint from Akhsan's (2023) study that revealed that teachers are essential in education as they fulfill the roles of educators, mentors, motivators, and facilitators. They prepared students for rapid shifts and helped them adjust to a dynamic world. For teachers, administrators, and other professionals, mentoring is good for ongoing education. According to Cahyaningrum et al. (2024), they proposed three general mentoring categories; self-focused, mentee-oriented, and relationship-oriented which would help one to reach mentoring competency. Furthermore, the identity development that takes place in the sociocultural surroundings shows their values, views, and points of view. In this situation, a proficient teacher would motivate students more. A study from Malureanu and Enachi-Vasluianu (2021) mentioned that teachers exerted a substantial influence on the long-term development of students, shaping their academic achievements, behavioral tendencies, drive for learning, career decisions, and perspectives on life. Over time, this understanding decreases the hold of rigid anticipations and replaces it with compassion and renewed recognition of the significant influence a teacher may have on a student's development.

CONCLUSION

These findings drew attention to the various challenges that teachers encounter in the classroom and highlighted how critical incidents have a big impact on their professional growth. The primary findings validated previous research, emphasizing the significance of student attitudes towards teachers and peers, student

well-being including mental health, and the necessity for personalized instruction that accommodates individual student needs. The results emphasized the need for ongoing professional development for educators. Teachers who actively engage in self-reflection, employ formative assessments, and incorporate social-emotional learning (SEL) tools play a vital role in fostering inclusive and supportive classrooms. For instance, Mrs. Pharita demonstrated self-reflection by de-escalating student conflicts through organized problem-solving and collaboration with counseling staff, recognizing the developmental needs of her students. Future studies could enhance this study by integrating student perspectives and classroom observations to acquire a more holistic comprehension of student experiences. Moreover, carrying out research on these topics in various educational settings, encompassing different countries and development conditions, would enhance the applicability of the results. To create pleasant learning environments, teachers, students, and the wider community need to work together collaboratively. Through collaboration, it may guarantee comparable opportunities for academic achievement for all students.

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