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THE COMPARATIVE FUNCTIONALITY
OF
FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION
FOR WOMEN:
REPORT ON PHASE V

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DRAFT

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The United States has one of the highest literacy rates in the world and an educational system that is the pride of the democracy. Belief in the effectiveness of education as a major vehicle of upward mobility stands as a hallmark of its social and political ideology. Moreover, Americans feel that education is a major key to development and that the American educational experience is worth transmitting to the developing world.

This paper examines the assumption of the applicability of the U.S. educational experience to women's education in the new nations. The period under consideration is 1850 to 1918, the formative years that witnessed and shaped the growth of public education in the U.S., a transformation all the more remarkable in a nation that initially perceived education as a private, individual responsibility.

Several parallels between the U.S. of the late nineteenth century and the developing world of the latter decades of the twentieth century make the applicability question particularly relevant. The U.S. was a new nation in the late eighteenth century world of emerging nation-states, as the LDC's are new in the twentieth century world of industrial states. Both had educational antecedents in the European tradition, in the case of the U.S. through cultural heritage, and in the case of the developing nations through colonialism. Third, in the period under consideration both educational systems are embryonic; in the U.S. from the seventeenth through the mid-nineteenth century, education was the responsibility of the various states and handled in a variety of ways depending on the predominant settler heritage, geographic region within the U.S., relative

wealth of communities, and agricultural or industrial economic base.

Of course a major difference is in perceptions of the role of education. The rise of the common school — free, coeducational, basic education for white American children of every social class — was at that time unparalleled in the world. The school was perceived as the real melting pot Nathan glazer described 75 years later, as it molded the children of immigrants and Yankees, urban factory workers and rural farmers into Americans. The LDC's, on the other hand, exist in a time when basic public education is perceived as a basic human right and citizens view access to education as a right and need that should be a first priority of new governments.

The current question becomes: does the model of the U.S. common school have any applicability to the needs of LDC's, especially in regard to female education, a century later. Of course there are no right or wrong answers, pat parallels or instant panaceas. This paper will discuss a brief history of U.S. education before 1850 as it related to girls and young women; describe the common school; identify parallels and differences between LDC school systems and U.S. varieties of the time; and analyze the applicability and possible outcomes of attempts to utilize the principles of the U.S. common school in LDC educational systems of the twentieth century.

I.

American education was as diverse as the people who settled the "new land," however, the general educational philosophy and tenets of the various groups were very similar. All of the early colonists shared the concern of preserving and maintaining European culture and manners in a new land. Failing to perceive Indian cultures as civilization, colonists talked at great length about establishing schools as a defense against the cultural barrenness of the new land.

The desire to emulate European upper classes, while simultaneously creating a more democratic society, shaped subsequent events. The novel experiment of a democracy in which all men had a voice in decision-making necessitated an informed electorate, albeit exclusively of propertied gentlemen. The theoretical and ideological underpinnings of this new democracy logically demanded that educational opportunities had to be expanded beyond the upper class to the middle class of landed gentry so that all voters could be capable of making rational decisions. In fact, Thomas Jefferson, the first architect of a national school system, returned time and time again to the theme of the necessity of educated voters if the U.S. noble experiment was going to work.

Ideological considerations made expanded educational opportunities imperative. By 1787 the Northwest Ordinance required that each township allocate a square mile for a school, and each state also had to allocate land for an academy or institution of higher learning.¹

From the earliest days the colonies and later the United States, perceived education as vital to the functioning of the polity. In addition to the ideological necessity of education, the importance of education also came to the fore with the rise of Jacksonian democracy

with its emphasis on the dignity and rights of the common man. It was generally believed that every man had the right to an education. Schools no longer aimed to educate future leaders, but to provide all the nation's young men with the common concepts and experiences that made them Americans. The emphasis on education for citizenship as the responsibility of the nation and the right of the individual reinforced the blind faith of Americans in the positive values of education and its necessity for the successful operation of a democracy. This desired commonality of experience for the good of the polity, re-inforced and encouraged the common school movement.

The Jacksonian era also emphasized equality of opportunity. As Horace Easton, first superintendent of schools in Vermont advocated:

Let every child in the land enjoy the advantages of a competent education at his outset in life—it will do more to secure a general equality of condition than any guarantee of equal rights and privileges which constitution or laws can give.²

These generally acknowledged and accepted tenets of common education for the benefit of the nation and education to equalize opportunity were manifested in different ways in different parts of the country. In the north, Massachusetts was the educational vanguard in both school establishment and administration. The first state to require a school in every township, the first state to institute a compulsory education law, the first state to establish a girls' high school — Massachusetts was the pace setter in education.

The South, on the other hand, was more relaxed about education and pedagogy. Here the emphasis was on acquiring proper manners and becoming a gentleman.

The westward growth of the new nation really highlighted the emerging educational distinctions. Eastern schools clung to classical traditions and attempted to emulate the schools and universities of Europe, while the West attracted a different type of individual with different educational needs. Westerners needed skills of survival and practical knowledge that would aid them primarily in agriculture. Consequently, they showed a strong interest in math and science.

II.

Where were women during the founding and expansion of the nation? They were right beside the men, although female educational opportunities always lagged far behind those offered men.

Initially education in the colonies reflected the educational modes of the European communities from which the settlers came. Females were to attend to household responsibilities and church duties. Women, like children, were to be seen and not heard. In church in Puritan Massachusetts, females were not allowed to speak and to question doctrine was heresy. Anne Hutchinson, a strong-minded woman who dared interpret the word of God for herself, was summarily tried and banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.³

Emma Willard had to teach herself mathematics and science because such rigorous subjects would overtax the brain of a female. When she asked if she could observe the entrance examinations of male students

at the University of she was denied, again based on the possibility of exhaustion of the female brain by such mental rigors.⁴

In the colonies and the new nation, the European model of sex segregated education remained the pattern for the upper classes. In New England, Massachusetts again the lead the way and in 1824 the town of Worcester, Massachusetts established the first girl's high school in the nation.

In the South, girls were usually educated by private tutors. As in the case of the southern gentleman, great emphasis was placed on non-academic accomplishments and skills thought necessary for the southern lady. Southern girls were much more likely to be proficient at needlepoint, embroidery and French than their sisters in the rest of the nation.

In the West, pragmatism carried over into the schools in terms of pupil composition and subject matter. More schools were co-educational, mainly because two schools were more costly than one. Pioneer women and girls had no time to emphasize Romance languages and needlework; they needed English, mathematics, geography and such scientific information as was available at the time. For middle and working class urban youth, education was also a coeducational affair.

Throughout the period under discussion, the percentage of girls in school was much lower than that of boys. Girls, as in current LDC's, were the last to enroll and the first to drop out of school. Save a few female educators, no one really thought

that female education was as important as that of men. The brains of women were thought to be smaller than those of men. Woman's place was still primarily in the home. She could not vote, was likely to be married by the age of 16, and needed her education for very little purpose, according to the dominant beliefs of the time. After all, the purpose of female education was to make girls "fit wives for educated men."⁵ Consequently, if one had to decide among several children in terms of school attendance, a daughter would not necessarily be a priority candidate.

Many young women of the nineteenth century attended dame schools, private establishments run by widowed women and/or spinners that taught young girls basic literacy and numeracy skills and any other specialized skills that the dame might have. Usually the dames were barely more than literate themselves, so the other skills taught were those learned informally by watching the dame complete her housekeeping chores of cooking, sewing, kitchen gardening, etc.

Women were very often teachers in the primary schools. One reason for their presence was that they did not demand the salaries of male teachers. Moreover, matriculation to female sponsored and/or staffed institutions was considerably cheaper than tuition to male run private schools. In the public arena, females received considerably less pay than their male counterparts.

Enrollments and access to educational opportunity for women became significant only with the passage of compulsory education laws. Again, Massachusetts lead the way. In 1852 Massachusetts instituted compulsory education for both sexes for children between eight and 14 years of age. The youth had to attend at least six consecutive weeks and a minimum of 12 weeks in a given calendar year.⁶

The coming of compulsory education really marks the beginning of an era in female education. Compulsory education meant that it was against the law to keep your daughter at home working on the farm all year. In Massachusetts, followed rapidly by increasing numbers of states, God-fearing, law-abiding Christians did not want the taint of civil disobedience to bring them shame — so daughters went to school.

The common school came into its own between 1850 and 1900. A confluence of movements and social forces resulted in a coalition of businessmen, social reformers, abolitionists, and labor leaders all working toward reform and overhaul of the educational systems of the various states.

The common school, as the emerging institution came to be called, was free, coeducational, and often rural. The school maintained, as its goal, the education of youth between five and 14 years of age. Two major goals girded the system: 1) education for citizenship, so that men could constitute an informed electorate; and 2) education to provide jobs skills and the ability to earn a livelihood.

Throughout the nineteenth century the facilities were rudimentary. Literally one large room with slat benches and dirt floors, heated by a massive fire which as often as not bellowed smoke through the entire room rather than warm air, often lacking panes for the crude windows, the learning facilities were makeshift, rarely providing comfortable environments conducive to learning.⁷

The schools were supported by town taxes assessed on the basis of property or bond issues, depending on the legislation of individual states. State funding of education was a radical departure from any education philosophy existing at the time. In the mid-nineteenth century many Americans still believed that the individual family should finance its children's education unless the family was one of paupers. This belief was manifested through the rate bill, a bill which determined

the amount charged a family for each child in school, calculated by the number of days spent at school during a given academic year. Virtually, a tuition charge per pupil, the rate bill made a parent think twice about sending all of his children to school for the entire year. Girls, of course, suffered most under this system. Parents reasoned that a boy had to make a living; therefore it was more important to send him to school to get "some learnin'."

Poor families were exempted from paying the rate bill. However, the bill was discriminatory against the poor, for to have one's rate bill waived, one had to publically declare one's poverty. Thus in Puritan-ethnic conscious nineteenth century America, many families preferred to keep their children at home and illiterate rather than publically acknowledge their poverty.

The educational reform movement of mid-century challenged the form of support to public education and gradually individual states assumed coterminous responsibility with local communities for financing common schools. As states began to offer funds to local communities for public education, communities began to take a stronger interest in public schools. The monies plus the abolition of the rate bills, persuaded many families to send their children to free common schools.

The common school usually offered an eight year course of study with the educational cycle divided into a three year primary section, a three year intermediate phase and a two year completion phase, the grammar grades. The curriculum emphasized basic skills at the

primary level. English, grammar and mathematics formed the basis of the curriculum. Geography was the next addition, and science courses were introduced as knowledge of scientific principles and their applicability emerged, especially in the frontier areas.

The common school was well named. Not only was it established for the common child with the goal of teaching common values, the students all used the school's one common room. Grade distinctions were usually made by makeshift rows. The smallest children were seated on short benches in the front of the room, closest to the teacher and the fire. Older children sat progressively further from the front, with senior scholars sitting against the back wall.

Given such physical facilities and close contact, pedagogy had to be adaptive. The open classroom and tutorials in which older children teach younger ones are not twentieth century innovations. Senior pupils were often required to help younger students learn to read; upper classmen corrected arithmetic, explained scientific principles and generally assisted with the education of the young. Modern studies have shown that children teaching other children is a meaningful device, one that was certainly extensively used in the nineteenth century common school.

The close quarters and relative isolation of rural schools, made them especially adept at utilizing community resources. The Midwest and Western wilderness and prairie formed a natural learning laboratory. School teachers made varying use of the opportunities according to their own backgrounds and teaching strategies.

The coeducational aspect of American common schools is rarely recognized for the phenomenon it was. The European tradition on which so much of early colonial education was based, did not support co-education. In nineteenth century America, a nation in which women did not have the vote; were initially barred from participation in the greatest social movement of the time — the abolition movement; and were generally believed to be intellectually inferior to men — girls still managed to attend the same schools and sit in the same classes as boys.

The possible reasons are many. The frontier spirit encouraged equality of educational opportunity. The ideological pragmatism of the nineteenth century also helped. Labor shortages and skilled manpower needs of the frontier did not allow for the luxury of discrimination; able bodied persons were needed in all areas of employment if the wilderness was to be subdued. Another reason for co-education was cost. Here again pragmatism won over ideology, for sex segregated education was twice as costly.

Through all of the fads and experiments that have characterized American education over three centuries, the public school has been the most innovative and the most enduring. It is also the educational institution most relevant to the developing world.

Several parallels with the developing world are relevant. In the period of establishment, 1850 to 1918, these schools were founded in predominantly rural areas in which only a small percentage of the adult population was literate. Literacy usually preceded the move to an urban area. The developing world is overwhelmingly rural and, similarly, a small percentage of the adult population is literate. Furthermore, substantial evidence indicates that literacy in the LDC's tends to encourage rural to urban migration.

The school facility of one large room, the one room school house, is also similar to schools in many developing nations. Often when schools are built with separate classrooms, open venting for air movement circulates sound as well as air, and audibility from one classroom to another is quite clear. Consequently, the teacher is faced with a de facto one room school house with a large open classroom.

Curriculum comparisons also yield similarities between the U.S. rural school and its counterpart in the developing world. Teachers in one room schoolhouses taught basic skills; in the LDC's as well, basic skills are ostensibly the rudiments of the curriculum. The common school teacher taught basic skills mainly for two reasons. First, the state of knowledge was not as advanced as in the twentieth century information explosion. In most instances, drilling in English and mathematics with a smattering of geography and science exhausted the teacher's skills and knowledge. Second, basic skills education

was appropriate and necessary for survival and upward mobility in the era of westward expansion. While curriculum in the formal schools of the developing world often tends to be diffuse with a bewildering array of subjects through which the basic skills may get lost, the non-formal programs are similar to the common school, for their programs stress basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Women's roles in education are also similar. Women were often teachers in the common schools, in some states and territories they comprised over 60 percent of the teachers.⁸ Similarly, in many developing countries, the majority of primary school teaching staffs are female. For instance, 77 percent of Philippines primary teachers are women, while Benin females form 70 percent of the primary school teaching force.⁹

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American women were more desirable than men as teachers because they would work for less pay and were more acquiescent to the requests and demands of parents and local school boards. In one New England town, while a female was paid from \$1.50 to two dollars per week, plus board, a male in the same community received \$23.00 per month, or approximately \$5.85 per week.¹⁰ Similar disparities exist around the world, particularly in LDC's in which women are viewed as having lesser needs than males.

Educational reformers such as Henry Barnard and Horace Mann, strongly influenced by Prussian models of education, were convinced that women were, by nature, better teachers and were especially artful in achieving close rapport with young children. Similar attitudes

exist today, especially in the Moslem world. Moroccan teachers find their occupation "particularly suitable" because in the school situation, "women are in contact only with other women or with children."¹¹

The enduring faith that education is critical to the perpetuation of the democracy among Americans, is matched by an equally ardent belief among leaders of developing nations that education is basic to democracy and a prerequisite to economic development takeoff. New nations come into being with the cry of universal education. Conferences from Bandung to Addis Ababa have re-affirmed a primary commitment to education -- education, first and foremost. Moreover, UNESCO and other international humanitarian and voluntary agencies all proclaim the importance of literacy and numeracy, while citing education as a basic human right. In an age when all nations claim to be democratic, one can quickly see how education becomes a necessity to perpetuate the democratic or would-be democratic state.

Of course there are significant differences between the common schools of nineteenth century America and the public schools of twentieth century developing nations. Pedagogically, our knowledge of the world is so vast that continuing curriculum choices must be made. One hundred years later we understand more about the process by which children and young adults learn. Politically, the gap between rich and poor countries has widened considerably. With the revolution of rising expectations and the need to telescope social change, countries do not have the luxury of experimentation in education.

Competing demands for limited funds compel establishment of development priorities. Education can be assured a significant portion of development funds only if it produces tangible social benefits and social rates of return equal to those realized from investments in other sectors.

Moreover, in the U.S. a national consensus for universal, free primary education formed in the nineteenth century. In many LDC's, a similar consensus does not exist, for the middle class often has a vested interest in restricting educational opportunities so that it can continue to enjoy the privileged status that derives from education.

Several aspects of the common school stand out as particularly relevant to education in the developing world, but four characteristics are especially appropriate: 1) the rural nature of the majority of one room schools; 2) the universality of co-education; 3) use of pedagogical innovations; and 4) the compulsion factor in school attendance.

The rural nature of the one room school house makes it especially relevant, for the overwhelming majority of third world peoples live in rural areas that are either without schools or serviced by a facility that is the equivalent of the one room school. They are plagued by the same problems that bedeviled the American rural school: difficulty in attracting and retaining teachers; limited access to new teaching materials and technology; and most important -- limited funds.

The environments in which learning takes place are also similar; each holds a high percentage of illiterate adults who believe that education is important; however, the ^{adults} are unable to provide the supports that create an environment conducive to learning and supportive to student achievement.

One of the first lessons to be learned from the one room school mistresses and masters is that a teacher must rely on his or her own skills and ingenuity, while viewing his or her environment positively. The African Primary Math Series, developed by Education Development Center and West African Primary Math Project, encourages teachers to use common materials fully obtainable within the local environment. Ordinary substances such as sand, leaves and

sticks are used in new ways to teach basic skills. From these teaching strategies teachers should be able to apply the ideas to their own environments.

The second aspect of the common school directly applicable to the developing world is its coeducational nature. Discussed earlier as an unheralded phenomenon in the U.S. in its own time, coeducation and its impact is of critical importance to girls and young women in LDC's. Coeducation assures that the same curriculum is available to both men and women (although females beyond the common school must be vigilant to insure that they are not tracked into a traditionally female course). In Europe and the U.S, as well as in many LDC's, female curricula tend toward the classics, humanities and fine arts, rather than vocational and scientific emphases. Coeducation increases the likelihood of female benefits from curriculum innovations and new courses, for quality education has traditionally gravitated toward male student populations.

Coeducation also creates a more realistic social environment that encourages the breakdown of stereotypes. Men see that females can be equally intelligent and women learn that men are fallible.

Coeducation certainly augments admissions possibilities to the Old Boy network. Often contacts really secure a job, especially in the developing world where the educated, by mere fact of their small number, form an elite. A name and the right recommendation are often all important. A woman is much more likely to acquire the contacts or at least be acquainted with decision-makers if she has attended the same schools. Moreover, she will

have had the opportunity to see the Old Boy Network in action. Such exposure begins with primary education which encounters children in their formative years, before stereotypes are ironclad.

In the third aspect of the common schools, pedagogical innovation, the technique of special significance is the utilization of older children to teach younger children. A time honored technique borne of necessity and desperation (too few teachers and too much boredom in older students), the technique has proved a very successful teaching mechanism. In a study of British school children, both tutors and tutees benefited. ¹² Each group achieved higher test scores than did cohorts who did not have the tutorial experience. The old adage that one really learns as one teaches is truly applicable here.

Since one of the major problems in LDC education is retention of both literacy and numeracy, the technique should be of benefit in the area of cognitive development by providing more opportunities for students to utilize their cognitive skills in a meaningful way.

Children teaching children is a technique useful in the affective domain as well. By encouraging students to help others, it develops by demonstration the value of sharing for the benefit of the common good.

Pedagogically sound, it demands closer attention to ongoing lessons. Students are very concerned with "getting it right" so that they can, in turn, "teach it right." In Liberian classrooms attention levels increased noticeably and the quality of

questions rose meteorically when university seniors realized that they would, in turn, be teaching certain concepts to underclassmen.¹³

Project Innotech, an AID sponsored project in Indonesia, and its spinoff, IMPACT, utilize the strategy on the community level. In the Indonesian program, literate school children teach parents as well as younger children, thereby diffusing their knowledge to even greater numbers.¹⁴

The fourth aspect of the U.S. common school that is relevant to the LDC's is its compulsory nature. This aspect of formal education in the LDC's is a politically sensitive issue. It is difficult to require school attendance by all children when there are not adequate places to accommodate the youngsters if universal compliance could be achieved. Moreover, most LDC's already allocate an average 20 percent of their development budgets to education, an incredibly high amount for poor nations to invest in a single sector.

However, the compulsory nature of primary schooling is a major key to increasing the number of girls who have access to education. Parents cannot argue that girls are needed for domestic chores, nor can they discriminate and send boys to school while girls remain at home to maintain the farm and/or household if the law demands that young girls between the ages of six and 14 years of age attend school.

Compulsory education is beneficial to the state as well as the individual. A long-term investment, it assures a broad based literate population by the next generation.

Compulsory education goes hand in hand with free primary edu-

cation. The problem with compulsory education is, of course, money. A nation cannot enact compulsory education laws and demand that indigent parents pay for the compulsory schooling. The irony is that free education, the hallmark of the American common school system, is the major stumbling block to LDC educational takeoff. Although developers know that investment in primary education is most cost effective in social rates of return, it is clear that investment in other sectors can match the social rates of return of education at all levels.

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W.

This essay has attempted a retrospective view of American educational history to ascertain what, if any, relevance the American experience has for the developing world. The discussion focused on the American common school established and consolidated between 1830 and 1900.

Four aspects of the common school seemed relevant to the developing nations and the role of women in educational development. The schools selected for further discussion were rural, co-educational, innovative, and attendance was compulsory.

The rural aspect is important to LDC relevance, for the bulk of populations in the developing areas are rural dwellers. Problems faced by the American one room school are similar to those confronting the LDC's today. Teacher retention, new curriculum, the open classroom were all problems to be grappled with then and now. Some American solutions such as stress on basic skills and use of the environment as a science laboratory were ingenious and easily translated to LDC's.

Coeducation was a major hallmark of the American common school. The coeducation factor proved critical to the gradual advancement of women in the U.S. Only through educational access were barriers smashed. The same pattern is visible in female education in the LDC's. In the new nations it is especially important to expose boys and girls to each other at an early age before the development of sex-related stereotypes.

Pedagogically, the idea of children teaching children, which evolved in the early common schools because of crowded conditions and ungraded classes, has worked in the twentieth century schools of the U.S. and Great Britain. It is a particularly effective technique for the developing world because it requires no special equipment or supplies. It demands only an innovative spirit and a commitment by older children to do their best. Results have shown that both tutors and tutees benefit from this symbiotic learning experience.

The compulsory nature of primary education in the U.S. was analyzed as the fourth characteristic of the common school worth transmitting to new nations. Compulsory education provided a major boon to female education, for it took the onus of attendance off the female child and placed it squarely on her parents' shoulders. When girls were compelled by law to go to school, so they did. Obviously, this factor has major implications for increasing the number of girls in school in the developing world if appropriate legislation were to be enacted on a country by country basis.

In sum, the American common school -- the one room school house -- is a part of American culture and mythology. A noble educational experiment, it has direct relevance for the developing nations. Through coeducation and compulsory attendance, the nature and numbers of female participation could be dramatically increased.

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FOOTNOTES

¹Adolphe E. Meyer, An Educational History of the American People (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1969), p. 99.

²As quoted in Henry J. Perkinson, The Imperfect Panacea: American Faith in Education: 1865-1965 (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 12.

³Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle (New York: Atheneum, 1974), pp. 9-12.

⁴Ibid., p. 25.

⁵Walter B. Kolesnik, Coeducation: Sex Differences and the Schools (New York: Vantage Press, Inc., 1969), pp. 70-73.

⁶Frederick M. Binder, The Age of the Common School, 1830-1865 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1974), p. 80.

⁷For an outstanding, detailed description of the Midwestern one room school house see Marshall A. Barber, The Schoolhouse at Prairie View (Lawrence Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1953), parts of which are reprinted in David B. Tyack, Turning Points in American Education (Waltham, Massachusetts: Blaisdell Publishing Company, a Division of Ginn and Company, 1967), pp. 167-171, 220-225.

⁸Binder, pp. 76-79.

⁹Ester Boserup, Woman's Role in Economic Development (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), p. 129.

¹⁰Tyack, p. 158.

¹¹Boserup, p. 127.

¹²Alan Cartner, Children Teach Children (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

¹³Experiment in course, "Curriculum Innovations and Methodology," University of Liberia, March-July Semester, 1977.

¹⁴For project paper and further information, see education specialists in ASIA/TR/EHR.

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