

Using Student Feedback as a Tool to Improve Instructional Strategies

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the effects of repeated student evaluations of teacher's effectiveness and its impact on improving instructional strategies in a secondary classroom. The secondary classroom is often a challenging environment for all teachers. Teachers in secondary education are always looking for innovative ways to engage students in to the lesson. Many teachers find it difficult to implement instructional strategies every student will find engaging. This is especially true for students with significant behavior problems within the classroom environment. Teachers are continuously looking for feedback on their instruction to improve their practice in order to create an effective learning environment. So why not help teachers improve their instructional strategies utilizing the audience they serve daily? What if students provided teachers with feedback on how to improve and create engaging strategies? The first section of this literature review defines feedback and explains its importance in relation to students and their academic achievement. The second section focuses on the effects of student feedback on instructional practices within a learning environment. The final section discusses possible interventions to improve instructional support in a secondary classroom derived from student feedback.

## Chapter 1

### Overview

Student feedback is a unique approach that many teachers utilize to measure their effectiveness within a learning environment. Student feedback helps recognize the needs of the learners in the classroom, improves teaching practices, and sets a climate for a positive relationship between teachers and their students. Feedback provides accurate, incremental, and actionable measures of student learning and behavior, that is directly linked to units of meaningful practice to classroom teaching and learning (Tucker, 2009). By examining student feedback, teachers are given a transparent perception of effective and non-effective methods in student academic success. The use of student feedback results in multiple benefits for teachers: (a) Students rate teachers highly, (b) teachers were motivated to modify instruction, (c) teachers could make changes in instruction the before the end of the term, and (d) faculty realized a positive correlation between the student feedback and student learning outcomes. These results in turn can help forge an environment between faculty and students that is conducive to learning and growth (Harris & Stevens, 2013).

Feedback can have different functions depending on the learning environment, the needs of the learner, and the purpose of the task (Evans, 2013). There is a substantial and growing body of research in education contexts considering feedback and its importance in student learning. Feedback is seen as a crucial way to facilitate students' development as independent learners who are able to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning, allowing them to be prepared beyond graduation, and into professional practice (Ferguson, 2011).

Throughout education, teachers use feedback from administrators to help improve their practice. Valuable feedback allows a teacher to be reflective and transparent about the methods used to increase student academic success. Student feedback, refers to the expression of values, opinions, beliefs, and perspectives of individuals and groups of students in a school and to instructional approaches and techniques that are based on student choices, interests, passions, and ambitions. Listening to and acting on student preferences, interests, and perspectives helps students feel invested in their own learning and can ignite passions that will increase their persistence (Briel & St. John, 2017). Implementing student feedback empowers not only students to be accountable for their learning, but also teachers to be accountable for their strategies in instruction and motivation. If students share their opinions on the effectiveness of teachers' lesson, how can teachers improve and meet the needs of the learners they serve?

### **Statement of Problem**

The purpose of this study was to determine how educators can use student feedback as a tool for improving instructional strategies in a secondary classroom.

### **Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis is that the instructional strategy used will have no impact on student feedback.

### **Operational Definitions**

**Student Feedback/Evaluation:** For the purpose of this study, student feedback is defined as a set of reaction for students in response to their teachers' instructional performance. Teacher evaluation based on students' feedback of teaching is a common practice. One of the main

purposes of collecting student evaluations is to provide professors with feedback so they can improve their teaching practices. As with all learning processes, feedback is considered one of the most powerful tools to achieve progress (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Evaluations provide a unique perspective on teaching practices, and have proven to be valid and reliable in many different settings.

**Instructional Strategies:** For the purpose of this study, instructional strategies are defined as methods teachers utilize to support student academic achievement in a given subject. Teachers model a specific skill, in which students learn, and independently practice within the learning environment. The goal of instructional strategies is to support students in becoming strategies and critical thinkers.

## **Chapter II**

### **Feedback**

Feedback is defined as information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior to improve [ability] (Shute, 2007). Within education, teachers often use feedback as a tool to assess the quality of their instruction. Furthermore, formative feedback should be nonevaluative, supportive, timely, and specific. It is usually presented as information to the learner in response to some action on the learner's part. When feedback is delivered correctly it can significantly improve learning processes and outcomes . Within the context of the classroom, feedback exists in a variety of forms: written comments, grades, marks, oral responses and non-verbal gestures. The concept of feedback as a one-way communicative activity, where the source of information is external to the learner, has been criticized due to its dependency-creating effect on learners (Sadler, 2010).

### **Student Feedback**

Student feedback is the act in which students contribute a formative analysis of the instructional strategies provided within a learning environment. Floden (2017) expands on this notion explaining that receiving feedback from students has become a normal part of life for teachers worldwide. This puts pressure on teachers from several sides and is an influential factor leading them to tailor their teaching to students' preferences. By utilizing student feedback, teachers are forced to modify their instructional practices to ensure engagement is accessible to all learners within the classroom. Studies have found that positive and negative student feedback has an impact on teachers' methodologies. Society distinguishes between positive feedback on strengths, correct responses, and accomplishments and negative feedback on weaknesses,

incorrect responses, and lack of accomplishments. Regardless, “feedback,” needs to be constructive: positive information should not be needlessly flattering, and negative information should not be unnecessarily detrimental (Finkelston & Fishbach, 2012). Positive feedback has a large impact on teaching and helps improve courses. Additionally, negative student feedback can create an experience of more negative feelings related to the student, and teachers are more likely to introduce unjustified changes to their teaching in order to please students (Floden, 2016). However, the manner to which the student evaluation is accepted and modified upon depends solely on the teacher. The more readily teachers accept student feedback as such and view the evaluation as instrumental to improve learning outcomes, the better. The teacher who is non-receptive to feedback may find challenges accommodating the needs of their students within the learning environment. Student feedback should not be dismissed by teachers, but instead be used to benefit both the teacher and the student for academic success (Harris & Stevens, 2013).

When evaluating instructional strategies of teachers, student feedback is a valuable measure. Since student ratings are the most, if not the only, influential tool of teaching effectiveness, active participation by and meaningful input from students can be critical in the success of teachers and their instructional practices (Chen & Hoshower, 2003). Furthermore, since students’ input is the root and source of student evaluation data, meaningful and active participation of students is essential. The usefulness of student evaluation data is severely undermined unless students willingly provide quality input. Student evaluation provides a realistic perspective on the effectiveness of teachers. Conducting effective formal feedback sessions and developing other methods for soliciting input from students can resolve problems, boost morale, encourage academic support and assistance, and provide meaningful materials for the art of teaching (Timpson, 2009).

## **Importance of Student Feedback**

Student evaluations of teaching effectiveness have traditionally served two functions: as formative and as summative measurements of teaching. One formative use of student evaluations is as feedback to instructors who wish to modify their teaching practices. Many studies examined the usefulness of teaching evaluations in improving teaching performance. Teaching evaluations are also used to improve course content, format and structure (Chen & Hoshower, 2003). Student feedback provides the opportunity for both teachers and students to reconceptualize their roles in the classroom: through learning, assessments, and evaluations student-generated feedback challenges both parties to re-think the nature of the teacher-student relationship (Plank, Dixon, & Ward, 2014). If feedback is to be framed as purposeful dialogue then both students and teachers have significant roles to play. Students must be willing and able to provide feedback to teachers not only about their learning needs but also about the teaching they experience. In turn, teachers must create the conditions that support active student learning. Eliciting formal and informal feedback from students presents challenges for teachers, but to develop young people who will be confident, connected, actively involved, [and] life-long learners demands that both parties are willing and able to take on the rigorous task of garnering student-derived feedback.

Plank et al. (2014) asserts, that teachers no longer can expect to control the teaching and learning agenda. Furthermore, they should not expect students to be passive recipients in learning and assessment. Instead, teachers are now expected to foster learning focused partnerships with their students, at the same time developing the reflective habits of mind that will enable their students to become independent, autonomous learners. Additionally, for students to participate fully in a productive and learning focused partnership with teachers, they must be both willing and able to take ownership of and responsibility for their learning. Students

must also possess the confidence to articulate their learning needs to others and be assured that such disclosure is essential to the improvement of learning and teaching. The creation of a trustful, mutually supportive and respectful learning environment is therefore critical to student participation and disclosure of evaluations.

In order to evaluate and differentiate teacher performance reliably and consistently with specific criteria that include measures of how well teachers move students forward academically marks an important shift in thinking. The change is significant because policy making around improving teacher quality to date has focused almost exclusively on teachers' qualifications rather than on their effectiveness in the classroom and student results. As society progresses, and evaluation measures change throughout districts, many states are requiring districts to use student growth models to determine student academic progress, collect data from multiple classroom observations (sometimes with multiple observers), and administer surveys of students, peers, and parents (Jacobs, 2016).

Feeney (2007) confirms the notion that without quality student feedback to inform teaching, a teacher's independent creation of meaningful goals for his or her own professional growth will likely go unmet. If teachers are not granted the opportunity to set new goals for professional growth, they will not benefit from the increased motivation and professional strategies that result from new goals generated from student feedback.

### **Impact of Student Feedback on Instruction**

Feedback is valuable and effective in student learning within secondary classrooms. Additionally, it is considered a vital approach to facilitate students' development as independent learners in order to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their own learning (Ferguson, 2011). Nielson

(2014) states, the overall goal of teacher evaluation is to answer two underlying questions: (1) What are students learning? and (2) How do we know they have learned it? Using student feedback can provide an inside perspective to both questions.

Student feedback can provide a focus for a variety of instructional practices. First, evaluations are a tool for effective professional development. Ritter and Barnett (2016) assert aligning professional development to the evaluation system is one promising strategy for creating effective developmental educators. Educators operating in environments with meaningful student evaluation systems can be most helpful when changing the dynamic of instruction. Secondly, student feedback creates a space for meaningful reflection. Through evaluations, it encourages teachers to be more self-reflective and seriously examine data on student learning. Reflective practices have led teachers to shift their attention towards student's feedback where learning is viewed as an active process. Teachers reflect upon their students' feedback and attempt to develop good relations with students (Iqbal, Ramzan, & Arain, 2016). Lastly, it motivates teachers to seek more opportunities for feedback. Teachers are willing to become more open to evaluation as they see professional growth as a result of constructive criticism (Ritter & Barnett, 2016).

Student evaluation of the teaching process is an important quality assurance tool with the potential to give data that can be used to inform the development of courses and guidance on instructors (Tennant & Khamis, 2017). Student feedback has the opportunity to be both qualitative and quantitative evidence of an instructor's level of effectiveness. Besides, who better to evaluate an instructor than the people who are the recipients of the instructor's teaching? (Beyers, 2008). Evaluation provides data with which to assist the faltering, to motivate the tired, and to encourage the indecisive. To help faculty members modify their performance is nothing

more than a logical extension of the expectation of feedback. Just as students need feedback and guidance to correct errors, faculty members require feedback and helpful direction if they are to improve their performance (Seldin, 1989).

### **Instructional Strategies from Student Feedback**

Evaluation is a human process that involves being responsive to the needs and requirements of the learning process (Feeney, 2007). Quality student feedback supports teachers in making decisions about what to teach and how to teach to the needs of their students. Student evaluations has no significance if it is not interpreted, questioned, discussed, and reflected on, ultimately leading to making more effective teaching choices.

When using student feedback there are several categories of instructional strategies that relate to effective teaching. These include: 1) strategies involving new content, this incorporates teachers identifying critical information, chunking content into “digestible bites”, and synthesizing new information, 2) strategies involving practicing and deepening previously learned content, teachers review content, organize students to practice skills, strategies, and processes, examining errors in reason, assigning homework, and revising knowledge, and 3) strategies with cognitively complex tasks, teacher engages students in problem solving, decision making, experimental inquiry, and investigation task (Marzano, 2009). Through student feedback teachers can assess their effectiveness of student learning with these methods. Meaningful evaluations and implementation of these strategies creates effective teachers that are skillfully able to affirm students prior knowledge, daily progress, and effort so that students are motivated to keep trying, to set reasonable goals, and to envision short term and long-term achievement as possible as possible and necessary outcomes (King & Watson, 2010).

Additionally, student feedback can help: a) establish and maintain classroom rules and procedures, b) increase student engagement, c) create effective student relationships, and d) construct high expectations in a learning environment (Marzano, 2009). Teachers have the opportunity to develop an environment that is conducive to not only the growth of the scholar, but also the growth of their professional practices. The process of student feedback highlights and forms excellent teaching, and supports teachers in recognizing how to implement new instructional strategies (King & Watson 2010).

## **Chapter III**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of repeated student evaluations of teacher's feedback and its impact on improving instructional strategies in a secondary classroom. Instructional strategies were selected through a school-wide content area focus on improving student writing utilizing the writing process. Specifically, the strategies implemented focused on the pre-writing stages to support students in effectively understanding the elements of a successful essay. Student evaluation was administered using a digital survey through Google Forms.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study included a convenience sampling of 14 eighth grade students at a public middle school in Baltimore, Maryland. The designated school has a diverse staff, who serves a large population of 85% of students who identify as African- American. The social classes vary from every community member. This particular school is labeled a Title 1 school, which signifies it serves many students who receive free or reduced lunch. Additionally, it also serves students who come from middle-class families. The sample consisted of seven females and seven males, ranging from ages 13 through 15. Of the selected students, four of have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and one has a Behavior Intervention/504 Plan. The sample consist solely of African American students.

### **Design**

This study was based on a pre-experimental pretest-posttest design using a convenience sampling. A pre-test was administered using a teacher-created writing assessment that focused on students' mastery of key Common Core ELA reading and writing standards. The rubric used to score students writing measured students reading comprehension, written expression, and knowledge of language conventions. The teacher-created assessment was used to determine the baseline data of students receiving instruction. Students were administered instruction through Google surveys and received instructional writing strategies to support their writing. After the treatment, all students were reassessed to measure if their writing skills increased using the methods implemented. This will help establish if student feedback impacts instructional approaches that contributes to their writing performance.

### **Materials**

The researcher created a writing assessment that contained a non-fiction text with one constructed response writing task. Each student is assessed in September at the beginning of the school year, to determine their reading comprehension, and writing abilities. Students are reassessed quarterly and scores are tracked through a data cycle. For the purpose of this study, students first quarter assessments were used to measure growth. There is no data on reliability or validity as the test was created by the teacher.

Student feedback was evaluated weekly for the students through a Google form survey created by the teacher and experimenter. The form included five questions. The first question was based on a Likert-type scale that stated "I enjoyed this week's writing task". The next two questions were based on a Semantic- differential scale stated, "On a scale of 1 to 3 where 1 is the easiest and 3 is the hardest, how would you describe the writing strategy used today". The last

two question were open-ended responses, which served as reflective questions. Students were also provided with a bank of statements if they found their reflection challenging to describe. There is no data on reliability or validity on this survey, as the survey was created by the experimenter.

### **Procedure**

The study was conducted over the course of six weeks. The writing assessment was administered to all students in the class. Students were categorized based on their initial writing ability scores. Weekly instruction was delivered to both groups, reading task, and writing graphic organizer that matched their writing levels. In their designated groups, students practiced reading comprehension of two nonfiction texts and completing a writing task.

Students practiced their writing fluency strategies through organized writing centers and peer practice. The centers included methods like listing, a pre-writing strategy that encourages students to list key elements, ideas, quotes, and phrases of the text that will help answer the writing task, and outlining which supported them organizing information structurally.

At the end of each week, students were instructed after class to log into their google accounts and complete their weekly Google survey. The survey measured students' reflection on the writing strategies.

## Chapter IV

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of repeated student evaluations of teacher's feedback and its impact on improving instructional strategies in a secondary classroom. Specifically, the strategies implemented focused on the pre-writing stages to support students in effectively understanding the elements of a successful essay. Data gathered included a dependent group t test analyses to analyze if there was a difference in student academic achievement in writing once providing feedback on instruction to their teacher. The significance level for these analyses was set at  $p = .05$ . Also, descriptive statistics in the form of means and frequencies of responses were used to provide additional understanding of the impact of the interventions implemented.

### Descriptive Statistics

Shown in Table 1 are the pre-survey and post-survey mean scores for students' enjoyment of the writing task. The number of participants for both administrations of the survey was 14 students. Data reveals in the pre-survey, students mean scores was 2.929, with a standard deviation score of 1.3848, and a standard error mean of .3701. Comparably to the post-survey, students mean score was 2.286, with a standard deviation of .7263, and a standard error mean of .1941.

**Table 1**

#### *Descriptive Statistics on Enjoyment of the Writing Task*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Prewriting Enjoyment	2.929	14	1.3848	.3701

Post Enjoyment	2.286	14	.7263	.1941
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Reflected in Table 2, a dependent samples t-test was conducted to compare differences between students' pre-survey and post-survey results on the enjoyment of the writing task. The mean difference of the students in the experiment was a cumulative survey scores was .6429 with a standard deviation of 1.5984. The significance level for this t-test analysis,  $t(13) = 1.505$  was  $p > .05$  at .156. As a result, there was a failure to reject the null hypothesis, and findings suggests there was no evidence of statistical significance when comparing pre-survey and post-survey of student enjoyment of the writing task.

**Table 2**

*Paired or Dependent t analysis of the pre to post enjoyment of the writing task*

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-Writing Enjoyment compared to Post Enjoyment	.6429	1.5984	.4272	-.2800	1.5658	1.505	13	.156

$p > .05$  no statistically significant differences

**Table 3**

Shown in Table 3 are the pre-survey and post-survey mean scores for students rating of their writing ability. The number of participants for both administrations of the survey was 14 students. Data reveals in the pre-survey, students mean scores was 2.857, with a standard deviation score of .8644, and a standard error mean of .2310. Comparably to the post-survey,

students mean score was 2.143, with a standard deviation of .5345, and a standard error mean of .1429.

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics for students' perceptions of their writing ability*

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-Writing Ability Rating	2.857	14	.8644	.2310
Post-Writing Ability Rating	2.143	14	.5345	.1429

Table 4

Reflected in Table 4 is a dependent samples t-test was conducted to compare differences between students' pre-survey and post-survey results on their writing ability. The mean difference of the students in the experiment was a cumulative survey scores was .7143 with a standard deviation of 1.1387. The significance level for this t-test analysis,  $t(13) = 2.347$  was  $p < .05$  at .035. As a result, data shows to reject the null hypothesis, and findings suggests there is evidence of statistical significance when comparing pre-survey and post-survey of students rating in their writing ability.

Table 4

*Paired or Dependent t analysis of pre to post student perception of writing ability*

	Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			

				Lower	Upper			
Pre-Writing Ability Rating compared to - Writing Ability Rating	.7143	1.1387	.3043	.0568	1.3718	2.347	13	.035

P<.05 statistical significant difference

**Table 5**

Shown in Table 5 is the data in which students were asked to rate the writing strategy that they preferred. Over half the students (57.1%) reported that strategy two was the most preferred.

Table 5

*Strategy Preferences*

Strategy	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1.0	2	14.3	14.3	14.3
2.0	8	57.1	57.1	71.4
3.0	4	28.6	28.6	100.0
Total	14	100.0	100.0	

## **Chapter V**

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of repeated student evaluations of teacher's feedback and its impact on improving instructional strategies in a secondary classroom. Specifically, the strategies implemented focused on the pre-writing stages to support students in effectively understanding the elements of a successful essay. Data analysis completed in Chapter IV indicated that students perceived that their writing ability improved with the various treatments.

### **Implications of Results**

The data indicated that there was a significant difference in students writing abilities after the intervention was implemented. The results revealed utilizing student feedback, supported the teacher with implementing interventions, that would ultimately improve students writing abilities. Additionally, students felt more confidence in their ability to write effectively, after intervention(s) was implemented. The post-survey results reveal an overall increase of students' perception of their writing abilities. The intervention supported students in feeling less intimidated by the demands of a writing task, and supported their understanding of the structure of a quality written response.

The results indicate that teachers should implement opportunities for students to provide feedback on lessons. Every student within a learning environment, learns in a variety of ways. Implementing a feedback system within the classroom, creates a safe space for all learners to admit their areas of opportunities with content and concepts. Additionally, it provides teachers with an understanding of possible learning gaps within a lesson. Using this feedback tool creates a transparent dynamic between teacher and student.

## **Threats to Validity**

All studies suffer from threats to the validity of the study. In particular, those threats are divided into threats involving external validity and threats involving internal validity. In terms of this study the threats to external validity involve the number of students involved in the study. The sample size of only 14 students who provided feedback and was given the intervention may affect the validity.

With an extended time interval and larger sample size, the results of the experiment could be more generalized. Another threat to validity is the time frame of the intervention implementation. The intervention only took three weeks where students meet once a week to practice their writing. This decreases the likelihood of the impact of feedback on the intervention as it was in such a short time frame. Lastly, another external validity is that students received the intervention in one of the six classes they are enrolled in for the fall academic semester. Students might not been able to provide feedback in their five other courses, which could possibly impact their perception on the necessity, accuracy, or validity of providing effective feedback to their teacher.

## **Comparison of the Findings of This Study to the Findings of Previous Research**

Previous research has linked student academic success to student evaluation on instruction. Tenant & Khamis (2017) state, feedback from students of the teaching process is an important effective system that provides data that can be used to inform the development of courses and guidance on instructors. Student feedback has the opportunity to be both qualitative and quantitative measures of an instructor's level of effectiveness. Considering students are the recipients of an instructors teaching, their feedback provides an authentic critique of content and

concepts (Beyers, 2008). Good feedback practice can not only provide useful information to the students in improving their learning, but also can offer decent information to teachers which is eventually improve the learning experience for the students (Al-Bashir,, Kabir, & Rahman 2016). In this study, teacher was able to utilize the student feedback to tailor the intervention for the students in the writing process. The feedback from students was quantitative and qualitative as the instructor was able to use the data to measure students writing ability pre and post survey. Additionally, the survey provided an insight to students' perception of their current skills, confidence, and areas for improvement in relation to writing.

The act of assessing has an effect on the assessor as well as the student. Assessors learn about the extent to which they [students] have developed expertise and can tailor their teaching accordingly (Yorke, 2003). While producing relevant and informative feedback in meeting the students' demand, the teachers themselves need to have fair idea about the students' progression. Through student feedback, teachers become more involved in reviewing and reflecting on students' performance which drives them to make better learning environment. (Al-Bashir, et Al., 2016).

The traditional way of feedback, from teachers to students, is a common system utilized within a learning environment. This current study challenges the traditional feedback system, and creates a platform in which feedback is student driven to support their learning. In a previous study completed by Chen & Hoshower (2003), student feedback employs expectancy theory to evaluate some key factors that motivate students to participate in the teaching evaluation process. The results show that students generally consider an improvement in teaching to be the most attractive outcome of a teaching evaluation system.

## **Implications for Future Research**

Results from this research implicate the value of student feedback in instructional strategies. However, further research should be conducted on the impact of student feedback on instruction. Current teacher evaluation systems place a high rating on student driven learning environment. Implementing an evaluation system on instruction supports the notion on students being the ambassadors of their learning. Additional surveys for student feedback should be implemented to measure the direct impact on their evaluation to their academic success. A control group would be useful to determine if there is a difference. Measures taken over an extended period of time, such as an entire academic semester or school year would provide a more in depth research result. Additional research should be conducted on the need for student feedback in educational settings. Some techniques that could be researched are the value of informal questionnaires, restorative practices, and student surveys.

## **Conclusion**

This study reminds teachers of the importance of student voice within the learning environment. The findings will hopefully motivate schools, teachers, and administrators to build a culture of meaningful and transparent conversations on learning. Additionally, this study supports students becoming advocates for themselves and their learning abilities. Feedback should be a platform in which all learning community members, including students, can participate in an effective improvement process. Future studies should last longer than six weeks and incorporate a larger sample size. Ultimately, this study reflects the importance of student feedback on instructional strategies.

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