

METHODOLOGY

DesinfoEND: Developing critical thinking to counteract disinformation across Europe

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1. Dialogic Media Literacy

1.1 What is Dialogic Media Literacy?

Dialogic Media Literacy refers to an approach that emphasizes the importance of dialogue, critical thinking, and active engagement in the context of media literacy. Dialogic Literacy recognizes that media literacy is not just about consuming and understanding information but also about actively engaging with it, questioning it, and participating in conversations and dialogues surrounding it (Flecha, 2000). It promotes the development of skills and attitudes that enable individuals to critically analyse, create, and share digital content while actively engaging in dialogue with others.

Digital Literacy and Media Literacy (DLML) are nowadays very connected because of the emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). According to the European Commission (2023): "Media literacy has never been as important as it is today. It enables citizens of all ages to navigate the modern news environment and take informed decisions. It is a crucial skill for all citizens regardless of age, as it empowers them and raises their awareness. It also helps to counter the effects of disinformation campaigns and fake news spreading through digital media."

It is important to note that although the concepts of disinformation and misinformation are used as synonyms, there is a big difference between them. When we talk about *disinformation*, we are referring to a verifiable false or misleading information created, presented, and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public. In contrast, *misinformation* is verifiably false information that is spread without the intention to mislead, and often shared because the user believes it to be true.

According to the EU Digital Scoreboard (2020), there is a lack of digital skills and media literacy among vulnerable adults across all European countries. Research around the present Knowledge Society have considered the ICT learning as a key element for an inclusive society (Xie et al., 2020; Guner and Acarturk, 2020; Seifert, 2020). In Europe, a basic level of digital knowledge is now a necessity in over 90% of professional positions, akin to the essential requirements of literacy and numeracy skills. The influence of ICTs in the labour market is present in many fields, such as business, transportation, and even agriculture (European Commission, 2023). However, in the same report, statistics reveal that around 42% of Europeans lack basic digital skills, including approximately 37% of individuals within the workforce. As outlined in the EU Actions to Address Low Digital Skills (2021), in 2019, one-third of the adult population in the EU who were employed or seeking employment (over 75 million people) lacked at least basic digital skills and had not used the internet in the past three months. This proportion was higher among individuals with low levels of education, +55 years old, and the unemployed. At the same time, over 90% of jobs already require at least a basic level of digital skills.

1.2 Why is Dialogic Media Literacy important?

In the digital environment, information can spread rapidly through various channels, allowing misinformation and disinformation to spread quickly and extensively. In this regard, access to digital tools is increasingly within reach of everyone, including the ability to generate false or misleading information or disseminate misinformation. Additionally, people tend to seek information that confirms their existing beliefs and opinions, which can lead to the creation of information bubbles (Dahlgren, 2021). Furthermore, the lack of media and digital literacy can make individuals more prone to believing and sharing misinformation without questioning its accuracy.

Therefore, disinformation represents not only a threat for democracy but also for individuals and society. The spread of both disinformation and misinformation can have a range of harmful consequences, such as threatening our democracies, polarising debates, and putting health, security, and the environment of EU citizens at risk (Colomina et al., 2021).

For this reason, it is important to provide citizens with critical thinking and both digital and media literacy skills, which are acquiring a strategic importance in the contemporary information society. In this sense, the Declaration of Human Rights article 26 states that every person has the "right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications". This implies that individuals have the right to access and benefit from scientific knowledge, advancements, and applications that contribute to human well-being, development, and progress. It encompasses the idea that scientific progress should be harnessed for the improvement of humanity and that everyone should have equal opportunities to enjoy the benefits that arise from it.

Indeed, Digital Literacy and Media Literacy can play a significant role in fostering a citizenship based on fundamental rights and EU values, such as freedom of expression and active and responsible participation in society. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges in this regard. The pandemic's impact on media consumption patterns has led to individuals spending more time online, which has both positive and negative implications for media literacy. On the positive side, increased internet usage has provided opportunities for individuals to access a wide range of information, stay connected, and engage in meaningful online activities. However, it has also created an environment in which misinformation and disinformation about the origins of the pandemic have proliferated (Pulido et al., 2020).

The spread of disinformation contributed to public discontent with the imposed restrictions and measures implemented by governments to control the outbreak, such as wearing masks, practicing social distancing, implementing lockdowns, and imposing travel restrictions. In this context, digital and media literacy became essential in enabling individuals to critically evaluate and verify information, identify reliable sources, and make informed decisions based on accurate and trustworthy information. It is crucial to acknowledge that the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored the need for robust digital and media literacy initiatives to combat disinformation, promote responsible online behaviour, and ensure that citizens can navigate the digital landscape in a safe and informed manner.

1.3 Digital Competences (DigComp)

Digital competence is one of the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (Vuorikari et al., 2022), also known as DigComp, provides a comprehensive description of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that individuals need in five competence areas: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, problem-solving, and safety.

- *Information and data literacy*: To articulate information needs to locate and retrieve digital data, information, and content. To judge the relevance of the source and its content. To store, manage, and organize digital data, information, and content.
- *Communication and collaboration*: to interact, communicate and collaborate through digital technologies while being aware of cultural and generational diversity. To participate in society through public and private digital services and participatory citizenship. To manage one's digital presence, identity, and reputation.
- *Digital content creation*: to create and edit digital content. To improve and integrate information and content into an existing body of knowledge while understanding how copyright and licenses are to be applied. To know how to give understandable instructions for a computer system.
- *Safety*: to protect devices, content, personal data, and privacy in digital environment. To be aware of digital technologies for social well-being and social inclusion and of the environmental impact of digital technologies and their use.
- *Problem solving*: to identify needs and problems, and to resolve conceptual problems and problems situations in digital environment. To use digital tools in innovative processes and products. To keep-up-to date with digital evolution

DigComp also establishes eight levels of competence based on the structure and vocabulary of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), ranging from "basic" to "advanced" levels (Vuorikari et al., 2022).



1.4 Dialogic Media Literacy potential to tackle disinformation.

Dialogic Media Literacy has significant potential to tackle disinformation in today's information landscape, by equipping individuals with the necessary skills to use digital tools, navigate the internet, search for information, and communicate online. Digital literacy promotes digital inclusion and empowers people to take advantage of opportunities offered by digital technologies. By addressing the digital gap, the aim is to ensure equal opportunities for everyone to benefit from the digital age.

Specifically, dialogic approaches facilitate individuals in questioning and critically evaluating the credibility and reliability of information sources. Through engaging in dialogue, interactive discussions, and collaborative research, individuals can learn effective methods to verify information from multiple sources and identify reputable fact-checking organizations. This enables them to discern between reliable information and misinformation. Moreover, dialogic approaches encourage individuals to actively participate as creators of media content, empowering them to contribute to the digital landscape responsibly and ethically by promoting accurate information and countering disinformation.

Moreover, by working together, individuals can join forces and combine their knowledge and skills to tackle the challenges of disinformation. This collaborative approach not only helps strengthen relationships among people but also creates a shared sense of responsibility in fighting against false information. When individuals collaborate, they can develop more effective strategies and have a stronger influence in countering the spread of disinformation.



2. Interactive Groups: A Successful Educational Action for combating disinformation

2.1 What are Interactive Groups?

Interactive Groups are a way to organize the classroom in small groups where participants work together through dialogic interactions, following the principles of dialogical learning (Aubert et al., 2009). Provides an inclusive classroom organization that yields optimal outcomes in enhancing knowledge and fostering unity among students in today's society. The main aim of Interactive Groups is to collectively meet the learning objectives and achieve altogether their learning expectations. These groups enhance the effectiveness of learning by multiplying the diversity of interactions among participants, teachers, and community volunteers, facilitating the attainment of excellence for everyone while maximizing the efficiency of invested time. In other words, interactive groups generate accelerated learning for all participants (Valls and Kyriakides, 2013).

In today's diverse society, classrooms have become more heterogeneous, posing challenges to ensure the success of all participants with their different cultures and learning levels. This challenge cannot be solved by teachers alone. A dialogical perspective of learning emphasizes the inclusion of all voices (teachers, participants, and volunteers) to organize sessions that meet the needs of everyone. Despite diversity being often seen as a difficulty, scientific evidence shows that facilitating dialogical interactions and including everyone in the classroom leads to greater learning and better results (Diez, Gatt, & Racionero, 2011).

One highly effective strategy in this regard is the implementation of interactive groups (Valls and Kyriakides, 2013). These groups promote dialogical interactions among participants of different levels and cultures, with the assistance of volunteers. The underlying principle is that mutual help among peers enhances learning. Those who grasp a task quickly are challenged to explain it to others in their own words, which reinforces their own learning. Simultaneously, those who struggle with the task have someone to explain it to them in a different way than the teacher, often leading to better understanding. Interactive groups also foster better peer-to-peer understanding and values such as solidarity among participants (digiUP, 2015-2017).

2.2 How do Interactive Groups work?

As presented in the digiUP project (2015-2017), the key considerations before working with interactive groups are as follows:

a) Forming heterogeneous groups: It is essential to organize the session in a way that allows participants to collaborate in diverse groups, comprising individuals from different cultures, age groups, and skill levels. The more diversity there is within a group, the more varied the interactions will be, and everyone in the group will benefit from

learning experiences that surpass those of homogeneous groups. Therefore, at the start, the teacher divides the class into small heterogeneous groups consisting of 5-6 individuals, although the group size may vary based on the number of participants in the classroom. The crucial aspect is to ensure that each group contains individuals with different skill levels, even if there is no diversity in terms of cultures or ages in a particular class. One way to achieve this, especially when working with computers, is to assign two individuals per computer to facilitate interaction while performing tasks. This is particularly relevant in ICT courses, as there are often participants who possess prior knowledge of certain applications from their work or personal experience but may have uncertainties or lack knowledge of more advanced functions ([see Curriculum for concrete examples](#)).

b) Planning the sessions: The teacher engages in pre-class preparation of activities. Subsequently, the teacher holds meetings with volunteers to provide them with a comprehensive understanding of the activities, enabling them to effectively support the interactions among participants. It is crucial for volunteers to have a clear understanding of their role, which is to facilitate interactions. Reminding them of this during the activity explanations before class can be beneficial.

The role of the teacher:

Teachers are responsible for providing a clear explanation of the specific activities to be carried out during the session, which the volunteers are already familiar with. They play a crucial role in resolving doubts when participants are unable to do so on their own. However, it is important to emphasize that the primary focus should be on facilitating interaction among participants, encouraging them to learn from and reflect upon each other's contributions, rather than solely focusing on their individual tasks.

Hence, one of the teacher's responsibilities when forming interactive groups is to help participants mix in heterogeneous groups. It is essential to explain to participants the significance of working with individuals who possess different skills levels, competencies, profiles, knowledge, and cultures, and how this enhances learning for all. As sessions progress with interactive groups, it should become increasingly natural for participants to seek help, clarify doubts, and engage organically with others in the groups when they encounter challenges.

It is crucial to ensure that participants explain their doubts to each other, as this promotes a deeper understanding of the activities and the reasons behind them. Merely imitating someone who is proficient in a certain task without understanding the underlying concepts will hinder participants from effectively learning how to utilize computers, smartphones, or the Internet independently.

The role of the volunteers:

Volunteers serve as coordinators of interactions and are present in the classroom to ensure that the diversity among participants is organized in a manner that enables everyone to reach the same level of knowledge. They play a vital role in fostering meaningful dialogues by asking thought-provoking questions that encourage reflection and active participation from all individuals. It is important to note that volunteers do not function as teachers, as their role does not involve explaining content or correcting activities. Therefore, they do not require specific knowledge of digital competencies to participate in the classes. Instead, their focus lies in engaging

with participants individually and in groups and reporting their observations and the progress of tasks back to the teacher.

Having a volunteer in each group is important as they ensure the presence of genuine dialogical interactions. Additionally, volunteers may offer different forms of assistance compared to the teacher. In cases where volunteers are not available, it becomes the teacher's responsibility to foster self-management within each group, allowing for these interactions to occur among the participants as adults.

It is crucial to encourage participants to express their doubts and support each other in understanding the activities and the reasons behind them. If everyone simply imitates a proficient individual without truly comprehending the underlying concepts, they will not effectively learn how to use computers, mobile phones, or navigate the internet. Such understanding is crucial for independent application beyond the classroom setting.

The role of the participants

Participants should be informed in advance that they are expected to collaborate and work together during activities. In cases where individuals initially work on tasks individually, it is important for the first person to finish to help others who may still be working. It is crucial for everyone to actively share their reflections and conclusions to ensure that all participants comprehend the task at hand and that no one is left behind.

2.3 Interactive Groups applied to Media Literacy

Interactive Groups are applied to digital and media literacy, with the aim of participants learning not only how to access information or digital tools, but also how to use those resources to verify information. To achieve this, digital and media literacy are divided into three steps.

1. ICT basic learning sessions

In the first step, the facilitator must present the content that will be covered in that session and provide a theoretical explanation on how to search for information or what resources can be used to do so. This allows participants to apply this knowledge in practice. In this regard, it is important for the facilitator not to rush the learning process and to take the time to explain the theoretical content in detail, at the pace required by the group.

2. Searching information about a chosen topic in small groups.

In the second step, participants are divided into groups or pairs to engage in activities that help them become familiar with the platforms and apply what they have been taught at the beginning of the session. The main objective of this activity is for participants to start familiarizing themselves with scientific articles and platforms for accessing scientific knowledge (such as [Sappho](#) and [Adhyayana](#)¹). This is a crucial first step in verifying information in digital media. If all the activities are not completed, they can be continued in the next session. Furthermore, it is important for the facilitators to encourage both individuals in the group to use the computer and carry

¹ Adhyayana (about education) and Sappho (about gender) are Social Impact Science Platforms created by the Allinteract project (2020-2023). They are non-populist participatory platforms, available to everyone, both to consult and to contribute. Grounded on the principle of citizens' participation in science its main objective is to provide citizens with a participatory science-based tool that helps them to distinguish between science-based statements and hoaxes.

out the exercise together. If one of the individuals has a better understanding of the content, they should explain it to their partner. This way, the interactive groups work is fostered.

3. Presenting the information found to the rest of the class.

The third step is the sharing of findings. The groups and/or pairs should present to the rest of the class everything they have found and explain in detail the information they have discovered. It is likely that different perspectives will emerge at this point regarding what has been researched. Therefore, it is important for the facilitator to moderate the discussion and provide space for all participants to express themselves. Lastly, it is crucial to guide the discussion based on evidence-based information and prevent an exchange of opinions without scientific foundation.

The role of the teacher is to help participants learn about the databases for searching evidence-based scientific information through the platforms and thus combat disinformation. In this way, participants can apply this knowledge in interactive groups.

2.4 Why use Interactive Groups for Media Literacy?

In today's information society, a significant portion of the information we require in our daily lives is available online. Developing digital competences becomes crucial to accessing and navigating this digital world. Implementing Interactive Groups in courses related to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) not only facilitates faster and more effective learning but also fosters reflective dialogue among participants, volunteers, and teachers. These interactive groups promote important skills such as information processing and critical thinking, which are fundamental requirements in today's Information Society (DigiUP, 2015-2017).

The concept of interactive groups aligns with the ongoing social changes, and it has been recognized as one of the Successful Educational Actions within the research project INCLUDE-ED: Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education (2006-2011). This project, dedicated to investigating compulsory education in Europe, identifies Successful Educational Actions (SEA) (Flecha, 2015) as interventions that contribute to improved learning and solidarity among participants. According to the project, the main characteristics of Successful Educational Actions (SEA) actions are:

- They contribute to an enhanced learning and foster a sense of solidarity among participants.
- They possess universal qualities, with shared elements that remain consistent across different contexts.
- They can be implemented in various educational settings and levels, yielding comparable results.

3. Dialogic Media Literacy Gatherings

3.1 Why carry out Dialogic Media Literacy Gatherings

Dialogic Media Literacy Gatherings (DMLGs) is a Successful Educational Action that contributes to respond to current European challenges in media literacy, concerning educational institutions and civil society.

The significance of media literacy and the need to enhance it, have been recognized in the European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP). The Digital Education Action Plan prioritizes the enhancement of digital skills, including media literacy. The EU Directive acknowledges the importance of media literacy in effectively and safely using media. In the same way, UNESCO suggests the Five Laws of Media and Information Literacy. These laws highlight the importance of citizens' access to information and the dynamic nature of media and information literacy as a lived experience involving knowledge, skills, and attitudes in accessing, evaluating, using, producing, and communicating information, media, and technology content.

For these reasons, it was identified the need to develop a project that achieves the goal of promoting media literacy to combat disinformation. Therefore, the desinfoEND project has transferred Dialogic Gatherings (DGs) into the field of media literacy. The DGs, which occur in different countries and across various disciplines, are part of the Successful Educational Actions (SEAs).

3.2 How to implement Dialogic Media Literacy Gatherings

The implementation of Dialogic Media Literacy Gatherings can be done through Scientific Dialogic Gatherings and/or Pictorial Dialogic Gatherings. The main aim of both gatherings is intended to foster critical thinking.

3.2.1 Scientific Dialogic Gatherings

First, it must be considered that it is not necessary to have academic knowledge to start or participate in a Dialogic Media Literacy Gathering. The goal is precisely to learn, share and foster critical thinking, and Dialogic Scientific Gatherings show how this is possible for everybody. Dialogic Scientific Gatherings can start with the interest of learners to get involved in this domain or can be introduced as a different approach to subjects such as health, education, gender violence, migration, ethnic minorities, etc. The participants can use different resources to access the works and articles worked in a Scientific Dialogic Gathering (ScienceLit, 2016-2018).

Setting up a gathering

A first meeting with people interested in a Scientific Dialogic Gathering takes place in which together the following decisions are made. We collectively select topics (depending on the pace and interests of the group) from the options provided, and through dialogue, we choose an original scientific work or impactful article related to the domain we wish to discuss. Everyone can make suggestions and discuss why it would be interesting to read it and share their thoughts about it in the Dialogic Scientific Gathering. Participants, volunteers, and teacher must decide on the chapters or pages that will be read for the next session. Then, each participant must read at home or in the classroom what was agreed on, select a paragraph, and search for additional verified information to be used for argumentation during the Scientific Dialogic Gathering.

During the gathering

The first step to start a Dialogic Scientific Gathering is to choose the moderator. Once it is chosen, the moderator opens the floor by asking who would like to explain their chosen paragraph and writes down a list of people who wish to talk or intervene and gives the floor to the first one who raises their hand. The person who has the floor reads the chosen paragraph out loud while the rest of the participants listen. The participant explains why they chose this paragraph and shares their thoughts on the paragraph with the other participants. In the case of Dialogic Media Literacy Gatherings, it is important that, when sharing ideas on the phrase or paragraph highlighted, they do it using verified complementary information related to the selected paragraph. Afterwards, the moderator asks if someone would like to add a comment and gives the floor to the people who wish to speak, so they can give different interpretations and share experiences about the paragraph. Once the interventions are completed, the moderator asks if the participants agree to move to another paragraph and move forward to the next participant on the list ensuring the participation of all the people willing to contribute. It is important to note that there is no obligation for everyone to participate in the discussion, as some people may prefer not to intervene for different reasons but still benefit from the discussion by listening to other participants. However, the moderator must always have to prioritize those participants who have participated less. To do so, a round of words can be conducted so that every person in the Scientific Dialogic Gathering gives a brief opinion on what was read.

When the Scientific Dialogic Gathering finishes, the participants agree on the next chapters, articles, or work to read for the next session. Thus, the process starts again.

3.2.2 Dialogic Pictorial Gathering

The use of images facilitates a dual learning process: first, it promotes the development of critical visual literacy skills, and second, it enhances understanding of the content covered in each session. Thus, images serve not only as a basis for discussing the images themselves but also to explore the associated topics. The discussions revolve around the images in a circular manner, creating spaces for

debate. The objective is to analyse and reflect on the images, taking into consideration the previously covered content in each thematic session, as well as the knowledge and life experiences of each participant. The educator can use suggested questions to stimulate and enrich these debates.

The images used come from various mass media sources such as newspapers, magazines, television, the internet, and photography. The educator provides materials that introduce the thematic content for the day's discussion. This content guide allows the teacher to provide context and present each theme. Once the theme is introduced, the participants comment on the selected images one by one, discussing what they observe in the image, what the image suggests, their personal thoughts, how they relate it to the session's content, their existing knowledge on the subject, and its relevance to current events, among other aspects. As the course progresses, participants begin to connect the images from one session to those from previous sessions (DIMELI, 2002-2004). In this way, vulnerable adults will improve their media literacy, digital literacy, thinking competencies as well as social and intercultural competences.

3.3 The Role of the Moderator and the Volunteers

One of the persons participating in the Dialogic Pictorial Gatherings has the role of the moderator. This person is chosen through a dialogue, and their function is to ensure egalitarian participation of everyone. It is not necessary to be an expert in the topic to be used to give clarifications and explanations. It is sufficient that the person moderating the session has knowledge about the proper functioning and criteria of Dialogic Pictorial Gatherings to facilitate collective meaning building. The participants bear the responsibility to discuss, exchange views and come up with questions. The main function of the moderator, therefore, is to maintain the order of interventions and, as mentioned before, to prioritize the participation of people with more difficulties speaking in public while their preference is not to do so. The moderator is responsible for ensuring a fair and equal distribution of the available time.

Other points for the moderator to consider are:

- To never impose their opinion
- To not explain or present the content or judge the interventions (Science Lit, 2016-2018).

4. Evaluation of Media Literacy Competencies

For evaluating the digital skills of the participants in the course, it is suggested to use the scale developed by Clifford et al. (2020) as part of the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp). The [DigCompSat](#) tool has been psychometrically validated and offers a comprehensive approach for digital competence, suitable for adaptation to various areas of life. Its purpose is to empirically assess the range of the DigComp 2.1 competences through three digital skills levels: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced. The assessment tool is divided into 5 dimensions that are needed for most people to advance in their professional career: Information and Data Literacy, Communication and Collaboration, Digital Content Creation, Safety and Problem Solving. Since this project is mainly focused on enabling participants to acquire skills for searching and verifying information on the Internet, greater emphasis has been placed on developing digital competences within the dimension of Information and Data Literacy. The suggested procedure for assessing these competences, is to conduct a pre-course and post-course evaluation. This way, it will be possible to ascertain whether the participants have increased their digital skills based on what they have learned during the course.

On the other hand, and in addition to the quantitative self-assessment of the digital competences, it is suggested to carry out a qualitative evaluation of the participants through communicative focus groups. This qualitative evaluation methodology allows to grasp more perspectives and personal experiences in a shorter time than with individual interviews; and also, by implementing communicative focus groups, unlike individual interviews, it allows participants to interact among them and challenge their views, increasing the possibility of ending up with a more realistic account of the topic addressed. Additionally, using communicative focus groups is helpful to identify the similarities and differences between the participants' perspectives and points of views (Nyumba et al., 2018)

5. About the desinfoEND project

The desinfoEND project is part of the Erasmus+ Programme 2021 and its main aim is to combat disinformation across Europe by developing critical thinking and media literacy skills of vulnerable adults through Dialogic Learning and the implementation of two different Successful Educational Actions: Interactive Groups and Dialogic Media Literacy Gatherings. The project is coordinated by Asociación de Personas Participantes Agora from Spain and the rest of the Consortium is formed by 3 associations and 1 federation and 1 foundation from 4 different European countries: European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) (Belgium), Group of European Integration (GIE) (Romania), Federacion de Asociaciones Culturales y Educativas de Personas Adultas (FACEPA) (Spain) and Villa Montesca Study Center Foundation. The project has a duration of two years (2022-2024).

To achieve the goals of the project, two outputs will be created: 1) An innovative Toolkit (Curriculum and Methodology), co-created with vulnerable adults that supports inclusive and participative ICT and Media Literacy training through the implementation of Successful Educational Actions with a sustainable and dialogic approach. The two outputs of the Toolkit are based on the results from three Pilot Courses carried out in Spain, Italy, and Romania; 2) A MOOC to train adult education professionals and volunteers on how to combat disinformation in their ICT courses and/or other areas of knowledge, using the Dialogic Media Literacy Methodology. The contents of the MOOC are designed with the contribution of participants and volunteers of each partner organization.



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