



# A Critical Incident,

Technology in the Classroom.

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This assignment, as indicated by the title, will explore, analyse and comprehensively evaluate relevant theories and literature surrounding the use and implementation of technology in the classroom. It will explore the theme of classroom management and address the importance and effect of a positive classroom environment as part of this. It aims to explain the role of a critical incident in terms of reflection and teaching practices, making subsequent links to educational reforms. At the core of this assignment is the observation itself, therefore it is important to include school and class context about the environment in which the observed critical incident took place. Donaldson's Four Purposes as in *Successful Futures* (2015) will be an integral part of this assignment, and links will be made between the critical incident and the four purposes, which will provide an element of criticality regarding the incident. The second element of criticality will come from the literature review, which will highlight key points of researched literature that indicate either similarities or differences in the perspectives, explanations and theories put forward. To summarise and conclude, the assignment will evaluate the focus of the critical incident and make suggestions and recommendations that may help to evolve or improve research and theories. It will then assess and summarise the approach the author has taken, making key connections between the approach and reflection.

An important aspect of this assignment, as briefly mentioned above is the element of criticality. Therefore, at the basis of this assignment is the theme of critical reflection and critical self-reflection, which is often viewed as a form of critical thinking. It can be defined as the process of a person questioning and considering their own "assumptions, presuppositions, and meaning perspectives". (Mezirow, 2006) Critical reflection provides the opportunity to acknowledge and re-assess what has happened, as well as examine thinking by deepening understanding of practices, contributions and ideas. To examine thinking, the use of probing questions is imperative since they "stimulate the discussion." (MacKnight, 2001) This critical reflection and these probing questions result in better understanding of how existing knowledge and ideas can influence interpretations and thoughts. An important factor to note about critical reflections is that they can be applied across all tenses of time. They are not limited to being used during the incident or after but can also be used in the future, by setting out actions that a person may want to take when future events occur. (Eraut, 1994) Similarities between this and the definition of a critical incident by Tripp (2011, p13), can be drawn in the sense that they both feature reflection and consideration of personal interpretation and prior knowledge.

Critical reflection plays an important part in understanding thoughts and can be used for future planning. Brookfield (1988) claims that this can be achieved by delving deeper into four key areas that call to question, personal beliefs and social structures, cultural influences on thinking, alternative ways of thinking and the truth in terms of knowledge and assumptions. Drawing on the ideas of Kolb (1984) he would suggest that critical reflection is regarded as a part of the learning process and therefore will direct future actions and either change or create ideas. In other words, critical reflection of a past event helps to set goals in the form of actions that a person may wish to take in the future, to produce a more favourable outcome. It is likely that these actions and goals will be based on new and adapted theories and

conclusions reached as a result of the critical reflection and thus merits its use or importance in developing professional practice. Critical reflection and reflections in general are a key part of the curriculum reforms in Wales and feature heavily for both students and teachers. Critical reflection is viewed as an “integral skill” that supports the effective implementation of the four purposes of the curriculum. (The Hwb, 2020b) Furthermore, critical reflection is essential for trainee teachers since it contributes to meeting some of the criteria of the professional standards for qualified teacher status (QTS). Being able to critically reflect will help to develop and further professional learning of the teacher while also modelling the behaviour that is expected of students.

For better understanding, objectivity and help give meaning to the research, it is important to include relevant information about the environment and details of the school in which the observation took place. This will help to explore, consider and make a judgment on the possible theories and relevant literature in relation to the school and class environment. (Trowell and Miles, 1991) However, due to the nature of the observation, in terms of educational research, some data will be redacted in order to provide anonymity to the school and students involved. Therefore, this assignment will abide by the standards and regulations set by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). The school itself is situated in the Swansea area and is an English medium comprehensive school that caters to GCSE pupils from ages eleven to sixteen. The social community surrounding the school is mixed and some areas within the catchment of the school are known to have a particularly low socio-economic background with a high number of council estates and generalised poverty. This is reflected in the percentage of free school meals, which is calculated at 29% as of the end of 2019 (Estyn Report, 2019). However, this is believed to have significantly increased as a result of the global pandemic but is not yet published.

In terms of classroom context of the critical incident, the class was a mixed sex year eight modern foreign languages (MFL) lesson, made up of around 20 students total. The lesson took place during second period, and the students were seated according to the seating plan. Just to the right of the room as you entered the door, there was a laptop trolley. The classroom was a generic or typical setup with an interactive whiteboard and teachers' desk at the front, with the students' tables set up in rows. The pupils entered the room in a disorganised fashion, still noisy and talkative from the corridors. The critical incident occurred when the teacher tasked the students, as they entered the class, to collect a laptop from the trolley at the front of the room and then log on. As they did so, the noise of the corridor crept into the class and the low-level disruption increased. Nearly all students were engaging in individual conversations but were still doing as they had been asked. (Appendix B) Although, during this process technological issues meant that some students couldn't log on, others had no battery and so the noise rose further as they got up and went back and forth to switch devices. In the meantime, other students who had been successful in logging on were now playing games. When the teacher then tried to provide students with instructions and modelling of their task, many of them did not engage and instead were talking with one another or engaging on the laptop.

The teacher then seemed to really battle with the students, trying to gain their attention in order to give them their task and instructions of the lessons' activity, many of them continued doing what they wanted on the laptops and ignored her requests for quiet. This wasted a lot of class time and the teacher had to employ a warning system that removed the laptop if they did not comply with her instructions of quiet and no touching.

In retrospect of Donaldson's four purposes (The Hwb, 2020), it could be argued that this critical incident links and shows connections to purpose four, ethical informed citizens. Teaching in classes should resonate with the wider world, and as this purpose suggests, teachers should teach in a way that prepares students to be active members of society in Wales. A fundamental part of this is for students to "understand and consider the impact of their actions when making choices and actions" (Welsh Government, 2015) In this critical incident, the students were made to think about their actions in terms of consequences. The teacher made it very clear and was explicit in saying that making the wrong decision to ignore her or continue touching the laptops would result in them being removed. This demonstrates perfectly the way that these lessons can be taught to students, so that they are able to understand the impacts of their actions and importance of thinking about the way they behave in terms of outcomes and consequences.

One of the three cross curricular skills that features in the new curriculum, and is emphasized to all teachers, is digital competency. In its briefest form, digital competency refers to "the concept of developing technology related skills." (Lomami et al in Estyn, 2019) Digital competency, as part of Donaldson's Successful Futures (2015) argues that the use of technology and digital devices in the classroom important and should be encouraged because it provides students with the opportunity to develop their digital skills. These skills are essential when considering the wider world and their future lives, and will help students to better negotiate and adapt to the constant development and changing demands of the technological world in which they live in. Digital competency is more than just about knowing how to use technology correctly, it focuses on building transferable skills that will support the students through their learning journey and into the workplace. (The Welsh Government, 2018)

Using laptops, devices and other technology in the classroom not only ensures that classroom resources used by teachers are varied, which Barber and Mourshed, (2007) says is important to ensure quality of teaching, and therefore indicates the effectiveness of a school system. It also helps to build and strengthen the students' digital skills, in the hope that they will become "enterprising, creative and critical thinkers". (The Welsh Government, 2018) This aligns with one of the four purposes, which states that all children will be "creative contributors ready to be citizens of Wales and ready to play a full part in life and the world of work." (Donaldson, 2015)

Another integral aspect of the curriculum, as reinforced by the Welsh Government (2015) is real-life contexts. Hawks (2014) says that using laptops and other devices in the classroom will contribute to the creation of these real-life contexts. He suggests that they help to encourage students to think about the material in a

different way and results in better understanding, whilst also developing an element of criticality. In this perspective, using devices and laptops in the classroom setting are necessary for aligning internal school life with the realities of the external outside world. Furthermore, using resources such as laptops can help to meet the need for differentiation of tasks, which makes the work more accessible for all learners, regardless of their academic performance or current ability. According to Stanford et al (2010) using technology to differentiate by using software that aids the learner in different ways, including reading and pronunciation, allows the teachers to work more efficiently as it can decrease the time spent creating differentiated content for learners.

However, consideration must be made to some of the drawbacks of technology in the classroom. One of the main issues is practicality and reliability, as the critical incident demonstrated, technology is not always reliable and while it is important, if it doesn't work correctly or there are issues, it wastes valuable teaching and learning time which seems counterintuitive. The Sero Consulting (2018) report found that some of the key barriers facing the implementation and embedding of technology in the classroom was "unreliable IT infrastructure" and "incompatibility of kit" which perfectly captures some of the largest challenges schools face with implementing technology. It comes as no surprise that implementing a substantial and faultless infrastructure comes at a cost, which the harsh reality for many schools, is simply not an option, nor is the cost associated with the constant upgrades and development of new devices. On a government funded school scale, it simply isn't plausible.

Furthermore, it is possible that introducing technology in the classroom environment could act to expose and exacerbate the differing levels of wealth and poverty among the students. Means and Olsen (1997) highlight the fact that technology can cause staff and students to become isolated from the rest of the school since their familiarity of the technology and access at home can vary so drastically. There are differing levels of access to technology which can limit the type and extent of digitalised or technology-based work that children can complete, which could result in a deficit in some students, while others excel. This could then have adverse effects on teaching and learning as the accessibility must be equal for both types of learners and consideration must be made in respect of the time given to complete tasks. Technology shouldn't highlight differences in wealth among students nor should it single any one student out.

Another topic that must be considered, relative to the critical incident, is the effect and importance of the classroom environment and classroom management. Classroom management is an important aspect of teaching that must be considered, and it essentially encompasses "all aspects of what is going on in the classroom while a lesson is being taught." (Prevention First, 2014) This includes input and interactions from the teacher and students' as well as the influences of the classroom environment. Setting and managing the classroom environment is important for teachers, as "positive classroom environments help to enhance, promote, and encourage students' learning in all academic settings." (Wilson-Fleming and Wilson-Young, 2012)

An important element of classroom environment that must be examined, in retrospect of the critical incident, is the influence and effect of the noisy school corridors in setting the tone of the lesson. The transition through the school corridors from the previous lesson to this one seemed to contribute to the tone of the lesson and subsequent struggles with classroom management. Chandler (2017) says that the first five minutes of a lesson is crucial for setting and establishing engagement, therefore it is important for teachers to consider controlling the way students enter the classroom. If after this five-minute time frame has passed and the teacher has not established an optimal learning environment, it is extremely hard to regain control and stop low level disruption from escalating. Often as a result valuable teaching time is lost or wasted.

The nature of the entire school moving through the corridors at the same time lends itself well to heightened noise levels and an opportunity for behaviour to change. Burns (2021) found that by introducing and implementing silent corridors in schools helped to guarantee a more focused and quiet start to lessons, with minimal need for teacher intervention. This ensures that students enter in the right manner and are promptly ready to start learning, and thus time is less likely to be wasted. In this perspective, it would be argued that the defiance and disruption noted within the critical incident would not have happened or would have been minimised, had the school implemented a silent corridor policy. This is because the students would have entered in a more focused manner, which would have provided the teacher with the opportunity to better set the lesson and control any influences of the laptops on behaviour. Work by Michaela Community School also supports the view of silent corridors in schools, having implemented the policy themselves. Headteacher, Katherine Birbalsing strongly believes that because of the strong sense of order and discipline children who attend can be children with “real childhoods” and that the silent corridors have almost completely stopped bullying. (The Time, 2018)

However, many academics have criticised this view on silent corridors and instead believe that silence is uncomfortable for some students and can result in a fear of being “put on the spot, called-out, shown up, shamed or humiliated” (Wenham, 2019). The issue with this fear, is that it changes and shifts the dynamic of the classroom environment from one of comfort and inclusion to one that is almost the opposite. When the classroom environment is not indicative to making the students feel comfortable, learning suffers. Holley and Steiner (2005) place great emphasis on the fact that the classroom must feel safe and comfortable, to allow students with the opportunity to feel happy to take part in honest communication and provide them with a sense of belonging. They argue that this environment allows them to form healthy relationships within the classroom. This idea of an optimum teaching environment and healthy relationships aligns with the ideas of Boostrom (1998) who agree that creating a “safe space” allows students to willingly participate in lessons and address their struggles with challenging topics. Active participation and engagement are crucial elements of teaching and learning and have been linked to “higher levels of learning.” (Whelan, 1997)

From the critical incident, I initially identified technology as a primary focus of this assignment, and through the exploration of this then identifies other key areas of relevance. As we move forward into an increasingly digitalised world, it's not surprising that technology is used as an essential resource to aid learning, and more importantly, is underpinned by the feature and emphasis of digital competency within the curriculum for our learners. However, these reforms are new and have not yet been fully explored in terms of how teachers can merge these values and philosophies into their teaching, in a way that compliments other important aspects such as behaviour management and the classroom environment. By exploring and analysing this critical incident with technology at the focal point, as a practitioner, I have been given the opportunity to think about possible conflicts between practical theories and curriculum values. This has provided me with the opportunity to think more deeply about the different ways and means that technology is used by teachers within the classroom to meet the demands of the digital competency value and allow our students to fulfil the purposes of education.

Using the abstract conceptualisation section of Kolb's Model (1984) I would put forward a recommendation or learning outcome of better setting the tone of the lesson. Perhaps systematically placing the laptops elsewhere in the class may have helped to mitigate the outside influences of the corridor on behaviour as the students entered the class. As Chandler (2017) says, the first few minutes of the class are vital in gaining and maintaining engagement, therefore making sure that extraneous variables such as the noisy corridors or laptops are as controlled as possible, gives the teacher a better opportunity to establish an effective learning environment that focuses on teaching and engagement.

In terms of technology, most literature seems to unanimously agree that the positives far outweigh the negatives and in retrospect of the DCF I am inclined to agree. Therefore, using the action plan section of Gibbs (1988) reflection cycle, I have identified a solution for similar situations. In the future, when inevitably technology fails either due to poor infrastructure or faulty devices, I must be innovative in my pedagogy and actions. Innovation is a key aspect of pedagogy and in this case is the solution. As we know, it is featured in the teaching standards, and must be demonstrated for a teacher to gain Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). My interpretation is that innovation isn't just about creating new and exciting ways to teach, it also captures an ability for teachers to be reactive and innovate solutions to problems as they arise in their lessons, essentially forming an adaptive pedagogy. This therefore means that emphasis should be placed on innovation and resourcefulness among teachers and in theory would suggest that any teacher who has fulfilled the requirements of QTS should have the capability to innovate a solution that balances or negotiates these situational conflicts of learning, engagement and technology.

In terms of managing and negotiating the issues surrounding accessibility and differing levels of ability among students, it is important that the teacher thinks carefully about the work that they are setting and again uses effective pedagogy.

Differentiation should be a key aspect of a teachers' pedagogy and used or transferred by the teacher in the same way it is for regular written work. This means that regardless of the methods used for learning and class work, the teacher will "demonstrates knowledge, understanding and experience of high expectations and effective practice in meeting the needs of all learners, whatever their different needs." (The Welsh Government, 2019)

This assignment has delved into different theories and literature regarding the implementation and usage of technology in the classroom. By providing a detailed description of the context of the observation the author has been able to identify key themes and link them to relevant literature, in order to reflect and evaluate on what was observed. Within the assignment inclusion has been given to both perspectives of technology, considering the views of those who are strong advocates and believe that technology should be embedded into teaching practices. As well as those that view technology less favourably and believe that it can have negative impacts in terms of practicality, cost and highlighting poverty.

It has also discussed classroom management and environment, in terms of interaction of the students' and teacher as well as the effects of the environment around them. As part of this, analysis into the effects and impacts of noisy corridors and setting the tone of the lesson has been made, with particular focus on the arguments for and against silent corridors being implemented within schools. This has allowed the author to evaluate and make recommendations that fully consider differing and sometimes conflicting views within literature, ultimately aligning the observation with educational literature and her own pedagogical beliefs.

The author has been careful to implement a balanced approach to this assignment, which considers both perspectives of any given topic and has been mindful to evaluate and recommend in a way that encompasses reflective practice. This has been achieved by questioning and challenging assumptions and beliefs of the author, to deepen understanding and knowledge of technology in the classroom and classroom environment and management. By truly understanding these topics and the differing beliefs of others, the author has been able to stimulate a discussion that has changed and developed her interpretations and thoughts. Ultimately, the resulting factor has been a development in pedagogy, concerning the need for innovation and ability to adapt while remaining aligned with the real-world demands.

## Appendix

### **Appendix A**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| Date and time, year group:<br>22/09/2021 9am year 8                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Where and When:</b> Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context<br>First period on a Wednesday morning.<br>AOLE-Mathematics and numeracy.<br>Year 8 students of a mixed sex class.<br>Seating plans in use, students sat down with minimal low-level disruption.<br>Workbooks already handed out so students could open them straight away and begin starter problems which were written on whiteboard for students to attempt. Classroom displays relevant to the subject hung up on walls.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>What happened:</b> a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Starter activity preprepared and written on whiteboard ahead of time (before students arrived)</li><li>• The students were given 6 starter questions in total, that all related to the lesson content</li><li>• As students were welcomed into class the teacher gave out workbooks. Many simultaneously and unprompted/ without being asked, began to complete/attempt these questions in the workbooks provided.</li><li>• Those who did not start independently were prompted by the teacher directing their attention to questions.</li><li>• Teacher then started morning register, and told students that they must finish attempting questions by the end of the register</li><li>• Explicitly mentioned that there was no pressure to finish all questions- but an attempt must be made.</li></ul> |
| <b>Areas of possible exploration:</b> what you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider?<br><br>-The purpose and theory behind a starter or settling activity- how does this affect behaviour and attention<br>-Classic conditioning? autonomous beginning of tasks without being prompted- how has this occurred<br>-Effects of time constraining tasks-does this aid learning-how?<br>- Attempt vs completion – pressure and stress?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Notes:</b> any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here)<br>-As lesson and methods were introduced- some fidgeting appeared- stretching, pen clicking, whispering- Began the main lesson exercise just as this began to spread among the class- after 4/5 students were disengaged.<br>- While back of teacher turned offering 121 support to students in need- 2 boys not doing work and messing around from their seats.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

## Appendix B

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| Date and time, year group:<br>22/09/2021 10am year 8 pupils                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Where and When:</b> Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context<br>MFL (Spanish)- Second period (10am)<br>AOLE Languages, Literacy and communication.<br>Year 8 students of a mixed sex class. Seating plans in use,<br>Visual aids and prompts used as decoration on classroom walls- relative to subject area                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>What happened:</b> a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)<br>-Students entered the classroom loud and disruptive- chatting loudly- laughing and giggling.<br>-Counting down from 3 in Spanish to gain attention and start lesson- not the most effective (low level disruption continued)<br>- Fuss and increasing low level disruption over logon issues and desire from a handful of students to know what the lesson content is<br>-Amongst rising fuss over laptops, logon and waiting for the task- a select few members of the class started to play games.<br>-Teacher well negotiated- implemented technique to see students' hands either side of the laptop to re-engage attention to herself and away from laptops.<br>-Waited for complete silence and all hands visible before giving clear instructions with a time frame<br>-Teacher walking around class through students to check students are completing set task offering help and guiding them if needed.<br>-Clear and precise instructions- Backed up by written on the board. |
| <b>Areas of possible exploration:</b> what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents?<br>What avenues of research could you consider?<br><br>-How does technology benefit learning within the class- Are there any negative implications of using technology- can it have converse effects on behaviour<br>-Effects of transitioning between lessons- how does this affect learning?<br>-Behaviour management- techniques to visually demonstrate attention of students<br>-Navigation of differing needs of students in the classroom<br>-classroom management (Size and environment)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Notes:</b> any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here)<br>Lots of noise and chatting as class entered lesson<br>Nature of lesson and usage of technology (laptops) acting as a distraction encouraging chatting and a lack of attention.<br>Teacher having to constantly remind students to not touch laptops when she was explaining task.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

## Appendix C

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| <p>Date and time, year group:<br/>22/09/2021- Science 3rd period (11.20am)<br/>Year 8 mixed sex class.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <p><b>Where and When:</b> Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Science laboratory classroom- Typical layout with lab countertops around the perimeter of the classroom with tables in rows in the centre (tables split up in pairs) and an interactive whiteboard at the front, along with the teachers' desk.</li><li>-Seating plan employed within the classroom- science lab- with counters around the outside of the room. 3</li><li>-Class took place after morning break.</li><li>-Little decoration or classroom embellishment however- 1 of the 4 key purposes of the curriculum (Donaldson's) learning aim was featured on the wall- with area for extension work- catering for M.A.G learners to maintain the trajectory of progress.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p><b>What happened:</b> a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Class started by teacher asking class to line up neatly outside the class (Saying they would not be let in until they were quietly and orderly) teacher used opportunity to check each student for their masks and equipment.</li><li>-Starting activity given (do it now task) asked for silence and described silence – exact expectations set by teacher for all students to complete the task quietly as the register was taken.</li><li>-Welsh used to ask for quiet and to answer register- Integrating Welsh language as part of curriculum reforms</li><li>- Once finished register the teacher used a timer for students to finish activity- the timer had background music and a visual.</li><li>-Starter activity opened into class discussion after timer sounded- students encouraged to provide answers- hands up employed and random student selection.</li><li>-Starter activity linked to previous learning and lesson content of that question.</li><li>-Students made aware of links between the lessons by the teacher telling students to use previous work to help them answer this week's starter questions.</li></ul> |
| <p><b>Areas of possible exploration:</b> what you think could be" under the hood" in these incidents?<br/>What avenues of research could you consider?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Teacher centred- demanding quiet and asserting dominance (I am the teacher you will listen; you will learn) demonstrated by lining up and equipment check- assertive dominance of teacher</li><li>Behaviour management- assertive discipline and classroom management.</li><li>Use and implementation of timers</li><li>Craft vs profession- child development models employed.</li><li>Behaviourism, constructivist, humanist approach.</li><li>Cognitive science in education</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p><b>Notes:</b> any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here)</p> <p>Teacher is new- they mentioned that they were still getting used to class names and warned that students names may be said incorrectly. Did misname a student's name wrong twice- class laughed and used it as opportunity to create a small amount of noise</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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