

Why won't teachers change the way they teach?

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There is “*a persistent stubborn continuity in the character of instruction*”

(Cuban & Tyack 1995)

This problem seems to be world-wide



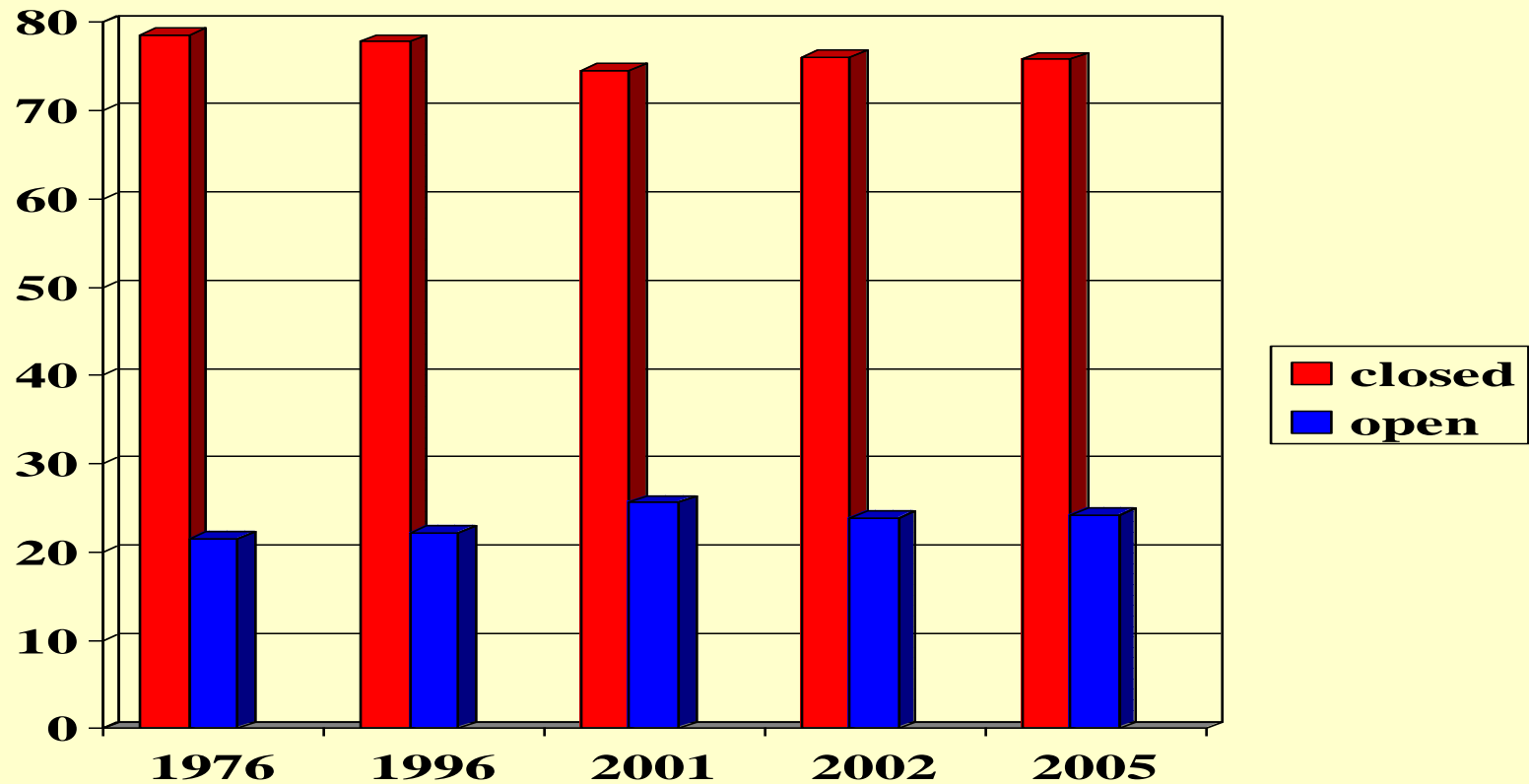
The UK Experience

The attempts to promote whole class interactive teaching with extended discussion has resulted in

“A rash of lessons characterised by fast and furious closed questioning and superficial answers”

(Cordingley & Bell 2007)

Pre and Post Literacy Hour Questions (Upper Primary)



And in the USA

It has been estimated that recent innovations designed to change classroom practice have produced the following result:

- 50% of teachers made no attempt to change
- 40% tried but failed
- 10% were successful

(Yair, G. 2000)

While in Singapore

Teach Less Learn More (2005) advocated less telling and more talking and less drill and practice. But three years later observations showed

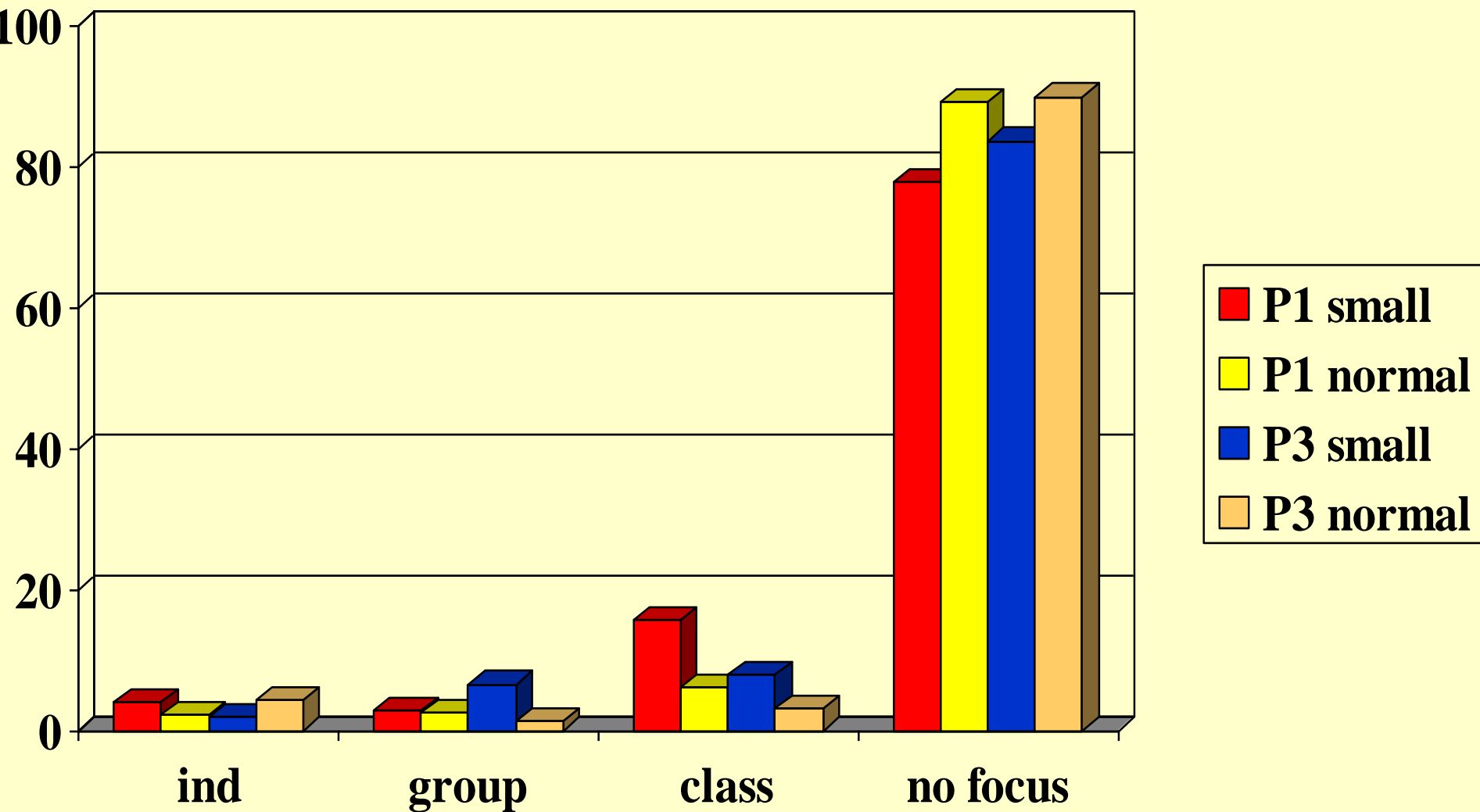
- Classroom talk dominated by teachers talking
 - Teachers' questions were closed rather than open
 - Weak integration of assessment with instruction
- (Hogan & Gopinathan 2008)

A recent study in Hong Kong on small class teaching

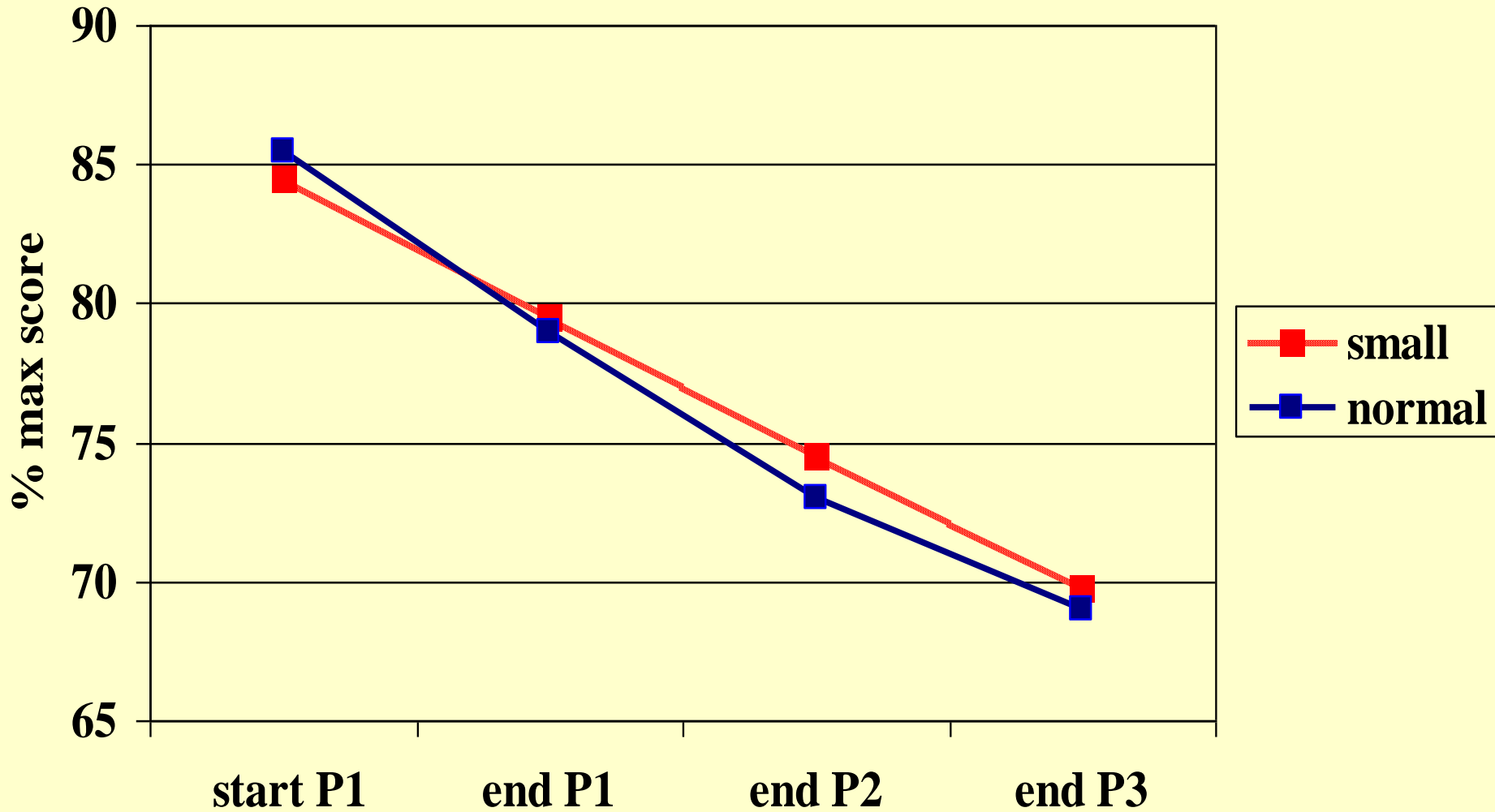
Hong Kong lessons in both small (< 25) and normal (> 35) primary classes mostly consist of either *teachers talking and pupils listening*, pupils **reciting and singing** in unison or working individually in silence.

These activities take up around 70% of the lesson leaving 10 minutes of a typical 35 minute lesson for extended exchanges between either the teacher and the pupil/s or between pupils in groups or pairs.
(*Galton & Pell, 2010*)

How do Hong Kong pupils receive attention?



The Consequences: Declining School Learning Orientation in Hong Kong



Research on effective teaching

John Hattie (2005) surveyed the research and found that the following were important in raising standards

- More **teacher-pupil talk**, particularly the use of challenging questions
- **Informing feedback** (self regulation) that **reinforces effort** rather than merely praises the correct answer
- Pupils sharing in **pairs or groups**
- Putting what is to be learned in contexts that have **meaning for pupils**
- Using **assessment** of pupils to inform future **teaching**
- **Peer tutoring**; older pupils helping younger ones

When we increase the use of these measures we improve pupils' disposition to learn

Why don't teachers change?

- Teachers are not **smart** enough! (lower qualifications than most other professions)
- Too many conflicting **theories** so not internalised and thus abandoned in the face of expediency or crisis.
- Unclear **terminology** such as '*active*' '*meaningful*' '*creative*' '*individualised*' '*personalised*' learning.
- Too many **external constraints** (overloaded curriculum, testing, parent pressure etc.).
- **Subversion** by pupils
- The **perception gap** in teaching between what teachers *think* they are doing and what *actually happens* because teaching is an **emotional** as well as **rational** activity.

The Gap between educational researchers and teachers

The gap between research and practice is wide, not primarily because educational researchers are self-indulgent or irresponsible in the kinds of research that they do or in the ways they report it, nor because teachers are unprofessional or anti-intellectual in their approach to practice, nor even because of inappropriate organisational arrangements but primarily because the kind of knowledge research can offer is of a very different kind from the knowledge that classroom teachers need to use (Donald McIntyre 2005:359)

The Gap between research and practice

- Teachers need knowledge about *how* things work while research generates *propositional* knowledge.
- Teachers test validity in terms of *practical utility*. Researchers seek for *coherence* in their argument and *truth* in their conclusions
- Researchers produce *generalisations* while teachers need knowledge which is *contextualised*.

“We will therefore never have research *based* practice-only a research *informed* one” (McIntyre, 2005:359

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Is change
possible?

The case of
artists working
in schools



Background

- Schools have always employed artists and some achieve striking results. However once the artist leaves ‘normal service’ is generally resumed. Creative Partnerships (CP) aims at sustainable change by having artists in schools for longer periods
- The project concerned 10 artists (or creative practitioners in CP language). There were 3 visual artists, 3 dancers, 1 photographer, 2 film makers and 1 actor. Schools tended to be situated “in difficult circumstances” (Galton, 2010)

**Initial
Encounters:**
*Giving pupils
space and
time*



Initial encounters with artists

- Artists initially focus on finding some aspect which interests pupils (favourite TV programmes; musical tastes, photographing interesting buildings chosen by pupils)
- Pupils encouraged to ask questions which are often answered by another question '*Why do you ask that?*' leading to extended dialogue. '*Its been more about raising questions rather than making decisions. Films don't happen by accident*' (Artist's comment)
- Pupils given a task and left to get on with it initially while artists watch (building a dance sequence; creating scenery for a play)
- When making suggestions artists often build on pupils ideas

Initial encounters with teachers

- Emphasis tends to be on the outcomes with little choice
- Frequent rapid question-answer sequences with short wait times resulting in ‘cued elicitations’ to get the desired answer.
- Teachers intervene very quickly and suggest solutions (e.g. making scenery: ‘You could be a garage-you a semi-detached etc’)
- Teachers don’t always build on pupils ideas: They change them.

Initial encounters: What pupils say

Interviewer: *Are artists the same as teachers?*

Pupil: *No: they let you make the big decisions.*

Interviewer: *How do you feel about that?*

Pupil: *Scary at first in case it goes wrong.*

Interviewer: *But if it comes out right at the end?*

Pupil: *It's magic. You feel all proud and warm inside*

Interviewer: *And don't you feel like that with
teachers?*

Pupil: *Sometimes but not often.*

RISK TAKING and OWNERSHIP



Seeking permission

The artist has got the pupils to design and paint scenery for the local pub pantomime. Jason is leader of the castle group

Jason: *Can I paint this red?* (pointing to the tall turret)

Artist: *What do you mean by 'can'? Does it mean are you allowed or are you able?*

Jason: *I can do it alright but am I allowed?*

Artist: *Why ask me? You're running this group.*

Jason: *I know that but we usually ask teachers first.*

Explaining decisions

Artists often explain their decisions by reference to their feelings. They will talk about aspects of their lives including the emotional impact. Teachers don't often give reasons for their decision making.

Artist: (To a pupil who wants to make paper snowflakes to put on trees which are to be part of the pantomime scenery.) *'Look Anne, I've no more time to give. I've got this [the castle] to finish, the trees to assemble, the paint to clear up. I haven't any more time to give today. I've had it. Do you see? It isn't because it's a good idea. It is a good idea but it's come too late in the lesson.*

**When it's
learning do as
you think but
when it's
behaviour do
as I say**



I can't condone but I understand

When pupils misbehave artists while dealing with the problem often tried to convey to pupils that they understood the reasons for the behaviour. They usually did this by relating something from their own experience

Pupils have decided the tent is a time machine but when they take turns to enter there's lots of laughing and fooling.

Artist: When I was your age my brother and I had a tent in the garden. We wanted to sleep in it but my mum said we wouldn't get any sleep because we'd be giggling all night. So do you think when we go in the tent you could not have a giggle? I know it's hard but you'll have to stop yourself. That's if you want to hear all the sounds when you go on time travel. So are you ready for the challenge?

Some Key Elements in artists' class- room practice



Some characteristics of artists' lessons

1. Pupil Exploration often preceded formal presentation.
2. There was a high proportion of pupil talk, much of it occurring between pupils.
3. The metaphor “teacher as a *listener*” was characteristic.
4. Pupils' questions and comments often determined the focus of classroom discourse
5. The ethos encouraged pupils to offer speculative answers to challenging questions.
6. Lessons often required pupils to reflect critically on the procedures and methods used

Artists and Teachers

Where do
artists
learn these
teaching
skills?



Communities of Practice

Most of the 10 artists belonged to small cooperatives where they shared ideas, critiqued each other's work etc. For them *creativity* was more about exercising *flexibility of the mind* rather than producing unique objects. They adopted this same approach with pupils.

There is growing evidence that an approach, embodied in Hong Kong's '*learning circles*' can have similar effects with communities of teachers planning jointly, observing each other's lessons and reflecting critically on the outcomes.

A knowledge creating school system

David Hargreaves (1999: 122) distinguishes between traditional research which he calls *mode 1* and *mode 2* research where knowledge is created in the context in which it is to be applied. Each context represents a node where

“each node is a problem solving team possessing an unique combination of skills and is linked to other bodies by a large number of lines of communication.”

The result is a kind of *spider's web* in which new knowledge is generated as the network becomes increasingly interconnected

A person's legs, wearing blue jeans and white shoes, are captured in mid-stride as they step across three large, mossy rocks in a stream. The water is shallow and clear, reflecting the surrounding greenery. The background is a soft-focus green field, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting. The overall mood is one of careful navigation and progress.

Improving Teaching: The next steps

Promoting successful professional learning communities

Takes place over a lengthy period

Offers intra-school as well as inter-school sharing & support

Involves collaboration with peers, mentors & outside experts

Takes account of contexts (school environment, pupils etc)

Provides resources & opportunities to practice new ideas

Addresses key issues in curriculum & instruction

Must be linked to specific content areas



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