

Introduction

Massey University recruitment data indicate that few students in New Zealand enter university from decile 1, 2 and 3 secondary schools. National research on school effectiveness (Nash and Harker, 1998) supports this data. These schools show a sharp decline of students entering form 3 (year 9) and going on beyond form 5 and 6 (years 11,12) and completing University Bursary (year 13). Recent statistics show that nearly one third of students from decile 1-3 schools are leaving without formal qualifications. The Maori roll tends to be highest in these low decile schools. The percentage of Maori students leaving school with no qualifications, or less than 12 credits at level 1, has, in spite of a variety of incentives and intervention programmes, deteriorated over the last decade (33.5% in 1993, 38% in 1998, 35% in 2000). The percentage of such students attaining higher qualifications has remained static at around 0.4 % (NZ Educational Statistics, 1993, 1998, 2000). Research has shown that socio-economic status, rather than ethnicity, has the stronger influence on the level of school leavers' attainment (Fergusson et al, 1991).

The drop-out rate in the low decile schools is not a reflection of the ability of students in these schools as a small number of students successfully attend university in later years for "second chance" education. This suggests that school leavers from low decile schools may also be attracted to undergraduate programmes if sufficient incentive and school support is given.

The early attrition rate of students from minority ethnic groups and working class backgrounds, are often influenced by the parents' own experiences of schooling in general and their expectations of tertiary education in particular. Social, and related family, processes therefore, may work to discourage entry into university, regardless of academic potential or achievement (Fergusson and Woodward, 2000). An explanation for this is that the experience of inequality works to undermine a family's store of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1977, Harker, 1990) or knowledge of how the system works.

Surveys into home environments and social constructs determined by class, seem to suggest that patterns of low achievement and career aspirations are set very early in the life of a child (Sennett and Cobb, 1993, Pinto, 1999). While such dispositions are acquired through socialisation, they may also be changed by altering socialisation experiences (Bohman, 1999, Dyke 1999, Nash et al, 1990, O'Neill, 1990, Nash and Harker, 1992, 1994), with schools in particular able to provide 'scaffolding' that gives learners wider experiences. Mehan *et al* (1996) suggest for example, that extensive guidance may have to be provided at the beginning of a particular learning experience but that the 'supports' can then be removed slowly as learners internalise the help that that support provided. Although the relationship between class position and university participation is complex with many interrelated influences, it is clear that one significant aspect is the amount of knowledge parents gain about the nature and value of university study and how realistic they see such study for their children. Such expectations and values are passed to children in a myriad of ways, both subtle and overt. For most working class families the idea of children going onto university is not even considered as possible or desirable - that is if it is considered at all. University education is simply outside the realm of their experience and as such almost an alien concept. In order to increase university participation of under-represented groups, therefore, it seems logical to address this issue of expectations and knowledge directly; or to put it another way, to try to increase the cultural capital of working class families with respect to university education.

The Vice-Chancellor's Bursary Award

In the past means-tested "access awards" have provided one strategy to encourage study by students from low income backgrounds. Such individualised approaches can be

difficult to handle, as they require extensive data-gathering exercises that are time-consuming and expensive. These approaches do not influence school culture in schools where university study is clearly underrepresented, nor do they reach students at an early enough age in their secondary education to encourage further study.

With this in mind Massey University introduced a new initiative, the Vice-Chancellor's Bursary Award Scheme (VC Award), in 1998 which was aimed at increasing access to university study for children from under-resourced families, with this under-resourcing to be defined in terms of both economic and cultural capital. This was followed by a proposal in 1999 to set up a pilot programme, to attempt to encourage students from low decile schools to attend university. Three pilot schools were selected for participation using the following criteria:

- That they are decile 1 or 2 schools
- That enrolment numbers are at least 400 students
- That enrolment figures are stable
- That they represent a high discrepancy between the percentage of F3 entrants who complete School Certificate and F3 entrants who complete Bursary
- That they show strong leadership and evidence of positive school development
- That they are situated within one of Massey University's recruitment areas.

The students deemed eligible for receiving The *Massey University Vice-Chancellor's Bursary Award* are initially selected from the 5th form. The schools have the responsibility for selecting the students that meet the eligibility criteria. The university then reviews and approves the nominations. The programme is designed for students:

- From families with limited history of tertiary education
- From under resourced families
- Who have positive attitudes
- Who have academic potential

The objectives and activities for the pilot were developed collaboratively by an advisory group comprising representatives from the three pilot secondary schools and Massey University. The scheme consists of two components. The first is the awards in the form of certificates issued to selected students at the end of the 5th, 6th and 7th form year. The other is the bursary itself issued to select students at the successful completion of their 7th form year, and achieving Massey University entrance into an undergraduate programme. These students will be awarded at enrolment a waiver of first year tuition fees up to a maximum of NZ\$3100 and a NZ\$500 cash grant to cover the first two weeks living expenses. The first finalists for the Bursary Award will be announced in November 2001. It may not be the same students that achieve the awards and the bursary. Late developers and new enrolments enter the competition for the scholarship along with first and second year recipients.

As an outcome of the Advisory Group meetings Massey University agreed to:

1. Collaborate with the selected schools to identify eligible students by no later than their fifth form year, judged according to the following criteria: Students selected for the *Massey University Vice-Chancellor's Bursary Award* will:
 - Demonstrate the academic and personal qualities required for university study.
 - Demonstrate continued academic achievement needed to gain University Entrance to a Massey University undergraduate programme by the end of their 7th form
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 - Be selected jointly by their secondary school and Massey University to receive the *Vice-Chancellor's Bursary Award* according with the criteria consistent with the intent of the programme.

1. Through selected collaborative activities, assist the schools to develop and nurture a culture of
 - learning and teaching that extends to an appreciation and capacity for university study for all eligible students regardless of personal circumstance and prior experience
 - peer support for individual and group academic achievement that does not, through competition or recognition, disadvantage or alienate some students through the process of celebrating the achievements of others.

1. Sponsor a "visit to Massey" day for all 5th form student award recipients from the three schools, accompanied by one family member each, to explore possible options for university study based upon interests and experiences. (This took place in March 2000 for cohort 1 and in March 2001 for cohort 2).
2. Carry out agreed evaluation activities coordinated by a Massey University College of Education researcher to assess outcomes of the scheme for the schools, students and Massey University.
3. By the end of the students' 7th form year, assist the target schools to identify up to three Vice-Chancellor Bursary Award finalists at each school. Work collaboratively with the three target schools to recruit additional resources from private and public sources to boost the funding available to these students.
4. Provide learning and mentoring support to the recipients of the bursary award following enrolment at Massey University to ensure the student's on-going success.

Support activities

The competitive nature of the awards and the bursary was seen as a potential problem as Maori and Pacific Island students, in particular, may perceive that they are competing

against their "mates" and opt out for that reason. To decrease the potential of competition for a limited resource, other funding agencies were sought to boost the number of bursaries available at the end of the 7th form. This was successful as the Tindall Foundation (The Warehouse) agreed to match every scholarship in the three pilot schools for two years. Thus the schools were able to advertise to students that six scholarships would be available at the end of their F7 year. Over the two years that will mean 36 students will have received financial, academic and mentoring support for their university studies via the Massey

system. These students will be followed in a longitudinal study to evaluate the success of their university studies.

Other schools have since been added to the scheme. At present eight schools in the North Island have joined with their first cohort receiving the certificate awards at the end of 2001. Businesses have been approached for sponsorship for the schools to match that of the Tindall Foundation. So far OPUS (International Consultancy) has picked up one of the schools. Massey University continues the effort to add others.

The presenting of the award was followed by activities that were intended to develop and nurture a culture of expectation of university study. In particular, students selected were invited to visit Massey University, Palmerston North campus, for a special open day at the beginning of their year 12 to help familiarise them with a tertiary institution. Because previous research (Lauder and Hughes, 1990, Nash and Harker, 1992, Nash, 1993) had shown that family perceptions of further education influence the child's expectations, pupils were strongly encouraged to bring an adult caregiver with them. This was intended as both a familiarisation exercise for the parents and a chance to encourage positive attitudes to the University in the wider family.

The students were formally welcomed and hosted overnight by the University's Te Kupenga Marae, or Maori formal meeting space. This was intended to be an important part of the experience for the students and their caregivers, especially as many were themselves Maori. It was hoped that a range of positive 'hidden curriculum' messages

from this first contact with the University would be transmitted to the general school community. This welcome emphasised the value the University placed on the Awards and on the students who had gained them. For Maori students in particular the Marae stay would help to affirm their cultural heritage and provide a more friendly first impression of an otherwise unfamiliar place.

After acceptance into a university programme a system of mentoring support will be provided by the Massey to ensure a good start to their studies since it is recognised that high levels of drop-out are common among first year students from working class backgrounds (Stampen and Hansen, 1999, McKenzie and Schweitzer, 2001). This will start at the beginning of 2002 and will be monitored longitudinally.

The Evaluation Study.

Over the first two years that the pilot scheme has been in operation, a small team of researchers has been monitoring its progress. The initial data collections have resulted in a number of insights and trends being identified, which have been mostly consistent across the three schools. As a result it has been possible to make ongoing adaptations where necessary, such as those mentioned above, while building on the gains that have been made. In general, the majority of participants have been supportive of the programme throughout and have felt that it was making a positive contribution to helping students from low decile schools identify university study as a viable option. However, the Pilot Study also noted a number of areas in which the programme could be strengthened to enhance this process.

The data was collected by means of follow-up activities - with the students in focus-group discussions, with caregivers in telephone interviews and with key school staff members in informal and other meetings. In particular the effects of the interim awards and visits on the perceptions of the participants were examined. The results are reported below as key

examples of dialogue gathered in the process. Our research has made us aware of possible future refinements as following cohorts progress through, while at the

same time testing how well the mechanisms, deliberately intended to break the cycle of structural inequality, may have succeeded so far. .

Effects on Students of the Interim Awards

The students were interviewed following their visit to Massey University and a few months after first receiving their certificate. They were asked what getting the Award had meant to them:

"overwhelmed! I couldn't believe I'd get an award for such an important thing". cohort 1

"oh my god I can do this! It's encouraged me to do better in the proper SC exams and not just think I'm going to be a failure" (from a student who had done badly in the mock exams) cohort 1

"I got a shock. It was very good and made me very happy" Cohort 1

"I couldn't figure out why I got it, but I was really pleased" Cohort 1

"I was puzzled - what was the award about?" Cohort 1

"I was surprised. I thought - I don't get things like that." cohort 2

"I didn't even know the award existed so I was very surprised" cohort 2

"I felt shocked but happy and proud" cohort 2

"it was a nice feeling, but I felt puzzled. Why me?" Cohort 2

Cohort 1 were interviewed again after receiving the award for a second year to get a sense of whether this second award might be having the intended effect of consolidating perceptions in favour of university study.

"it made me think: if I get this award I go to university. I didn't think that before"

"in the 5th form - it still seemed a long way off, but in year 12 it really sunk in"

"it made me careful in choosing subjects - to make sure they were suitable for university"

"after I got it once I was determined to get it again"

"I did more homework to make sure I succeeded"

"I went to hospital and talked to people there about qualifications"

"I couldn't believe they would consider me - it helped my self confidence"

Effects on Students of the University Visits

They now understood the importance of working hard in year 12 and that a concentration on getting good bursary marks in year 13 was 'leaving their run late'. As one student commented, *"It (the visit) was an eye - opener about the qualifications you need to be accepted to university"*. This made them *"more inclined to study"*. Although future university study may have been in the back of their minds, the Award and visit both served to make such thoughts more definite, focussed and realistic. In the words of the parents/caregivers:

"Its encouraging for students to keep the standard up through the rest of their high school years"

"We had considered university before, but not seriously. The visit has encouraged her"

"This honour gives our daughter the chance to go to university. She may not have got the opportunity to consider this option if we were not able to receive some financial assistance"

On the visit itself the response from students and support people was most consistent over the two years of the pilot study. They appreciated the effort Massey University made and overall found it was a positive experience for them. They liked the University and its environs; in many cases they found the size a surprise and a little overwhelming.

"I enjoyed the Marae visit and the food. I was surprised at how big university is"

"People are so laid back!"

"There are so many different people there!"

"The concert at lunchtime was cool."

"There are different races there."

"Student president was so friendly, interesting and 'with-it'. She wasn't boring."

"We needed to know about the sleeping arrangements."

"So many buildings on different sites. So easy to get lost."

"People seem to sit around and eat all day"

"It looked like everyone was having fun."

The visit, however, did make the University seem a more accessible place and comments were made that they were now less worried about going. Other positive comments included that the visit "makes you think it's worth working towards" and "it was a very positive experience and that I am more happy to go now".

When asked for ways that the programme could be improved two comments came through consistently. The first was that the students wanted to meet and talk to young students who were already studying (the student association representative was one of the most popular activities). They wanted information about the programmes but they also wanted to know

about the lifestyle of a university. Similar comments came from the support people who also thought strongly that there should be an opportunity for interaction with first year students on visits. Interestingly, a survey carried out by the Palmerston North City Council about this time found that among current students, 'lifestyle' factors such as the lower rents in a small city, rather than courses themselves had been most important in selecting study at Massey University. The second area identified for improvement was the quality of the presentations given by staff. Most respondents said the presentations lacked impact and needed more 'hands-on' and less talking. They needed to be more exciting and more motivating.

The responses from students and caregivers, who had attended the visit were generally consistent. They appreciated the effort that Massey University had made and felt overall that it was a positive experience. Such things as the formal Maori powhiri or welcome, in particular, acted as signals through the hidden curriculum that the students themselves were valued and wanted.

Effects of the Scheme on Parents/Caregivers

The value of the parents/caregivers participation in the trip to Massey was evident in the quotes collected by the evaluators. The students' comments about the adults' reaction further emphasise this:

"Dad came on the trip. He convinced mum it (university study) was a really good idea. Now they won't shut up about it!" The caregivers own comments were just as revealing:

"I was very proud when 'name' told us of the award. I had hopes that he would go (to university) but I know it would be very hard for him without help"

"We come from a very remote area, so the awards and trip have made all the hard work and effort worth while"

"It gives her a chance to have what I never had"

"We are proud and pleased that his achievements are acknowledged"

"Study will be very expensive. The award will help"

Effects of the Scheme on Schools

While this is difficult to ascertain over such a short time frame, there are two avenues through which the Award scheme may influence the school. One is extrinsic and gives schools another tool for encouraging students to maintain studies into senior years. It offers a politically valuable tool for advertising schools against others that did not receive awards, but adds extra administrative duties on schools for which they receive no financial support. The last point was important from the evaluators' perspective, as they had to be sensitive to the extra burden that data collection, in particular, can place on already over committed staff.

The intrinsic effects, which should be noticeable in a change within the school culture with respect to university studies, did not appear to be happening:

"no-one knew about the award. We were really surprised."

"More information is needed before the awards are given. People didn't know what it was"

"I got surprised. I didn't know about this award."

This focuses on a potentially problematic communication gap. The ongoing issue of the award from year to year may negate the gap and ensure the success of the award, which depends on an ongoing influence of the award on the school culture itself.

Discussion

It is no surprise that these students would be particularly interested in university life as this is normally quite outside their knowledge and experience. One of the things that is likely to discourage some minority groups from university aspirations is the perception that universities are products of a different social class and culture; moreover, one that is dominant or more powerful than their own. A response to situations like this is a tendency to close down contact with the dominant group to avoid as much exposure to negative judgements from more powerful group members as possible. For the minority group member, there is always an awareness of the clash of attitudes and ways of life as they interact daily within the dominant system. While this may not be wholly conscious - more a feeling of discomfort or unease - it is intensified in settings such as universities which represent extreme symbols of elite legitimation. The desire to decrease interaction by avoiding those settings where there is strong potential for damage to self esteem, identifies one barrier to higher education access.

First year students of any social group are, of course, likely to suffer some anxiety at first. Middle class students are, however, immersed in a system where the basic structures and values mesh with those of their own meaning system and sense of self and can usually work through the feeling of newness knowing the basic rules and processes. This is not true for individuals from other groups who have to try to adapt to a system they do not fundamentally understand and have difficulty making sense of.

In selecting high school students from low decile schools and bringing them to the university we are, in fact, introducing them to an unknown world that in other circumstances they would probably avoid. In exposing them to this new world in a relatively 'safe' way, we clearly activated the curiosity characteristic of young adults of all social groups, for new and exciting experiences. This was not so much for course information at this stage as we had assumed, but for an understanding of the lifestyle of this 'alien' place. Such an understanding cannot be met in a one-off visit, which served to throw up more questions than answers for the participants. It does seem though to have

whetted the appetite and established a sense of curiosity that can be built on. Having intervened in the natural tendency to withdraw from such exposure, we hope to have interrupted one of those mechanisms, which contribute to the unequal participation of children from low decile schools.

Whether or not this hope will be fulfilled with greater numbers going on to university from these schools is yet to be determined. The first steps of a raised consciousness and a sense of anticipation in the recipients is, however, evident. The dilemma for the scheme is perhaps how an acceptance of university study can be encouraged without Award recipients having to abandon important aspects of their own meaning systems and values - and the family belonging and support this often entails.

Another explanation for the interest in learning about the lifestyle of the university can be related to the notion of 'levels of concern' (Slater, 1991) or responses that individuals exhibit when faced with an 'innovation' or unfamiliar change. This suggests that individuals go through a developmental process of addressing levels of concern when faced with an

innovation, with each level having to be resolved before the next can be tackled effectively. These levels are ordered as, 1) awareness, 2) informational, 3) personal, 4) management and 5) consequence. There are two further levels, collaborating and re-focussing, which are not relevant to this discussion.

'Awareness' might be expressed by the students as, "I don't know anything about universities" and, perhaps, "I don't care". For 'change agents' attempting to address this concern, strategies to raise awareness and spark interest, are needed. The initial Award would be an example of such a strategy as evidenced by some of the responses from both the student focus groups and caregivers.

Having met the 'awareness' concern and caught the interest of students (and as importantly, their parents), the next level of concern, the need for information, might be expressed as, "I'm aware of the possibility of university study now, but I need to know

more". Providing basic information about university life, including courses, fulfills this need, and indeed, such questions were frequently asked during the interviews. If this process is successful, the next level of concern will emerge as something like: "I feel anxious - what does this mean for me?" This is just what was being expressed in the respondents' desire for a greater understanding of university life. The fourth step, 'management' is articulated as, "I need help in organising my programme" and finally "how can I succeed at university?" gives us clues about responses that will need to be addressed at the fifth level of concern. Seventh Form visits to university organised in the last year of school where groups of students from 'contributing' schools in the district are invited to 'open days' to explore course options in their last year at school, goes some way to addressing at least some of these concerns. Without the alienation concerns raised in our earlier discussions being addressed, however, we might speculate that such visits may serve only to intensify feelings of inferiority and 'not fitting in'. In other words such visits could do more harm than good if earlier concerns remain unresolved.

However, it should be acknowledged that this is a model of the change process and as such a simplification of the real world. In practice, experience warns us that the process is seldom linear and that concerns such as ongoing anxiety and the need for new information, will need to be monitored and re-addressed. Indeed, to facilitate deep understanding of the university and the sense of belonging needed to remove access barriers, a number of trigger strategies deliberately designed to initiate, for example, the expression of informational or personal concerns, may be needed. In the process of addressing these, as follow-ups to the initial Award and visit, there will be opportunities to strengthen an expectation of university study.

Conclusion

The study suggests that raising expectations of university participation needs to be carefully targeted and timed. Certainly, children (and their parents) need to be 'reached' before the final years of high school when values and expectations are hardened and when many of the potential students have already left. Most working class children with

the ability to enter university, but who do not do so, almost invariably drop out under the influence of class-cultural exclusion processes in the fifth and sixth form. It is not want of money so much that moves them in this direction, but pregnancy, drugs and general alienation, as well as a more general desire to get a 'real' job (Nash and Harker, 1998). These psychological barriers have to be addressed early on. However, social barriers relating to feelings of exclusion and 'not belonging' also need also to be tackled with universities themselves exploring ways of removing such impediments to participation.

Essentially then, the usual mechanisms for replicating social structures, at least those that ensure that advantaged groups retain their relative advantage through the generations, have to be interrupted in some way if equality of opportunity is to be more than ideological lip-service.

In Western capitalist societies the ideological justification for success in the system has always rested on claims of superior individual achievement - a claim that is partially legitimated by less 'successful' groups who come to define their 'failure' as a personal one. Given this, we might nevertheless hypothesise that there are critical life stage periods in which interventions might break the internalisation of this legitimatisation process. In high school, before expectations of children and parents are set and then again in the first year of university study if this first hurdle is met, are probably two such periods. The Vice-Chancellor's Award scheme was therefore established as a mechanism to encourage a raising of expectations of university study in school students from under-represented groups and later to provide the necessary support mechanisms to ensure continued participation.

At the beginning of the process it is clear that the University group held a number of largely unconscious assumptions. These were revealed most obviously, in the nature of the visits organised. Among such assumptions was for example what should constitute the content of these visits. It was assumed that simply providing information about a range of courses and having university staff deliver such information in short, and it was hoped interesting, sessions would be appropriate. This drew on the tradition of 7th form

visits. By implication this latter group are already oriented to University study and are therefore likely to have some knowledge of the system. They are in fact mostly middle class students, who we know have cultural capital which advantages them in terms of access to university education. As such, they represent a different group, both in age and background, to most of the groups studied here. It was probably this difference that produced the surprises and insights from our results.

The aim of the Vice-Chancellor's Bursary Award scheme to

"enhance, encourage and support entry to university study for students from low decile schools and communities with limited previous history of participation in university degree study"

hides tension arising from a conflict inherent in Massey University's need for increasing the student roll and the need of the target group. It is very difficult to target money at the right students. There is a risk that the students that are successful in getting the Awards within the decile 1 or 2 schools, are students who would be succeeding anyway, and that the only success the Award has will be to direct the student's study to Massey University. To make the Award more meaningful it should, perhaps, be targeted to specific courses, for example, Nursing or Social Work, which would match the students' desire for a 'real job'. There is a suggestion that the group that would benefit from university assistance is those that have left school early and at the age of 20-25, wish they hadn't. Offering "second-chance" scholarships to these students would ensure at least that the right target group is reached. While emphasis on school leavers is important the consideration of lifelong learning for students from low decile schools may be just as important. Massey University has been relatively successful as the Open University of New Zealand with its extra mural programme e.g. addressing the under representation of women in the 1970,s.

In spite of the difficulties outlined in this paper, there are some suggestions that the Massey University Vice-Chancellor's Bursary Award approach has a positive influence on the

students and families of the recipients. The cooperation between the schools and the University has maximised the success at fitting the Award to the right students. The

positive feedback from students and their families is encouraging in the suggestion that information is percolating through and attitudes are changing, at least in this group. How this translates into success at university and further recruitment to tertiary studies by the school community in general, is a study for the future.

Addendum

The VC bursary awards were issued for the first time on the 15th November 2001 at two of the pilot schools. The other one will issue them on the 8th December. The evaluator for Lytton High School attended both the prize-giving ceremony and conducted interviews of the recipients the day after. At this school it became very apparent that the loop had closed for the students, as far as comprehension of what this was all about. One student who got the award was heard preaching to the 5th formers about the value of their certificate award in view of her own success. All the recipients were of the right group: All were from low income families with no tertiary connections. Three had always planned to get to university somehow, the other three had never considered it - but were planning to do polytechnic training. More significantly these last three were all Maori. The school had identified the students and targeted the students to the Massey scholarship by getting all 7th formers contemplating, or designated by teachers as a student that should contemplate, tertiary study, to fill out a form with the details required.

The school also discussed with the evaluator the level of support the students will need to be successful at university. The school had already decided that it will go on supporting the students and will make an effort to see them twice a term to start with to check on their progress and any problems they may be experiencing.

The university systems of support are being established. Each student will be met at the start and designated a mentor in the faculties where they are studying. One boy in particular will need this support. He is one of the feral kids which schools manage to put on the right track. He was going to be expelled in the fourth form, and missed the award in the 5th form for playing up, but after being spoken to by the dean and told what he had

missed, he worked well for the next two years. He did winemaking through a local polytechnic, gaining level 3 Unit Standards plus some 6th form papers and 2 bursary papers. He wants to major in chemistry eventually, but is enrolled in a bridging course in Maori language (Awatere programme) for semester 1 next year. He is bright and will do well, if he gets sufficient support. Another student who did all Unit standards level 3 through another polytechnic enrolled for a B.Sports Business Management. She was going to go to the polytechnic to complete a diploma, but changed her mind when she got the scholarship and is coming to Massey University if her qualifications are allowed for entry. This should not be a problem as the University is adapting to the NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) which is being phased in from the end of 2002 (Footnote 2)

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