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Brostolin, Marta Regina

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Professional development as seen by children's education teachers in a training-research context

Marta Regina Brostolin

Universidade Católica Dom Bosco, Av. Tamandaré, 6000, 79117-900, Jardim Seminário, Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. E-mail: brosto@ucdb.br

ABSTRACT. This article presents part of a broader research developed between July 2010 and October 2013 and proposes an analysis of the professional development of four children's education teachers participating in a training-research group. The resource used to give support to the reflections was the production of (auto) biographical narratives stimulated by mnemonic resources such as photos, films, objects, etc. The analysis reflects their formative journeys and professional development. The fragments analyzed showed the progress of the teachers, from getting to know the school as a space for learning and professional development, remembering moments of initial training, teaching initiation and, later, investing in their career by means of new courses, *lato* and *stricto sensu*. The narratives also show that the teachers are aware of their obligation and of the complexity involved in educating a child universally, and of their vulnerability, as well as of the need for constructing their specific professional life that integrates knowledge on childhood in the 21st century.

Keywords: training-research, (auto) biographical method, children's education teachers and professional development.

Desenvolvimento profissional nas vozes de professoras da educação infantil no contexto da pesquisa-formação

RESUMO. Esse artigo apresenta o recorte de uma pesquisa mais ampla desenvolvida entre julho de 2010 e outubro de 2013 e se propõe a analisar o desenvolvimento profissional de quatro professoras da Educação Infantil participantes de um grupo de pesquisa-formação. O recurso utilizado para dar sustentação às reflexões foi o da produção de narrativas (auto)biográficas estimuladas por recursos mnemônicos tais como fotos, filmes, objetos etc. A análise dos memoriais produzidos pelas professoras voltou-se para seus percursos formativos e o desenvolvimento profissional. Os fragmentos analisados evidenciam o movimento das professoras de reconhecimento da escola como um espaço de aprendizagem e desenvolvimento profissional, revivendo momentos de formação inicial, iniciação à docência e, posterior, empenho em investir na carreira por meio de novos cursos *lato* e *stricto sensu*. As narrativas demonstraram também que as professoras estão conscientes do compromisso e complexidade que envolve educar a criança em sua globalidade e vulnerabilidade, assim como a necessidade de construir uma profissionalidade específica que integre saberes sobre a infância do século XXI.

Palavras chave: pesquisa-formação, método (auto)biográfico, professoras de educação infantil e desenvolvimento profissional.

Desarrollo profesional en la perspectiva de profesoras de la educación infantil en el contexto de la investigación-formación

RESUMEN. Este artículo presenta el recorte de una investigación más amplia desarrollada entre julio de 2010 y octubre de 2013 y se propone analizar el desarrollo profesional de cuatro profesoras de la Educación Infantil participantes de un grupo de investigación-formación. El recurso utilizado para sostener las reflexiones fue el de la producción de narrativas (auto)biográficas estimuladas por recursos mnemónicos tales como fotos, películas, objetos etc. El análisis refleja sus recorridos formativos y su desarrollo profesional. Los fragmentos analizados evidencian el progreso de las profesoras de reconocimiento de la escuela como un espacio de aprendizaje y desarrollo profesional, reviviendo momentos de formación inicial, iniciación a la docencia y, posteriormente, el empeno en invertir en la carrera mediante nuevos cursos *lato* y *stricto sensu*. Las narrativas demostraron también que las profesoras están conscientes del compromiso y de la complejidad que involucra educar al niño en su totalidad y vulnerabilidad, así como la necesidad de construir una profesionalidad específica que integre conocimientos sobre la infancia del siglo XXI.

Palabras clave: investigación-formación, método (auto)biográfico, profesoras de educación infantil y desarrollo profesional.

Introduction

In the education field, the training, the professional development and the valuation of its professionals have always been somehow present in discussion agendas. However, in recent decades, international and national organs, institutions and different agents have been highlighting the question as never before in any other historical moment, especially when it comes to the education of little children.

Within the children's education context, the comprehension of childhood as a phase in life endowed with specificities concerning the constitution of the social and subjective human identity becomes more comprehensive, regarding childhood as an invention of modernity, marked in each society and time by particular aspects, which characterizes its social construction (ÁRIES, 1981).

Based on this premise, it is possible to question: what are the types of knowledge and actions, that is, theory and practice, necessary for the professional that will work with children aged between 0 and 6 years old, the age group that fits into Children's education, first stage of Basic Education? What challenges do they face in their daily work, locus in which they constitute their professionalism and professional development?

The above questions allow considering the idea of a teacher's training as a continuous and open-ended process that requires knowledge about the profession and about him or herself, obtained through initial and progressive training courses, as well as through reflections promoted by challenges of the practice at the educational institution. On the other hand, professional development is understood as being resulting from said training, which is also under the influence of the social and historical context that structures professional situations that facilitate, hinder, delimitate or push it. Such ideas are in tune with those defended by authors like Cunha (1999), Formozinho (2008), Garcia (1999), Imbernón (2011), Imbernón and Cauduro (2013); Nóvoa (2010), among others that provided theoretical support to this work.

In this scenario, the text intends to analyze the professional development of children's education teachers through their memorials – narratives resulting from an investigative process conducted by a research-training developed between July 2010 and October 2013.

Regarding the (con) text, it presents a portion of results obtained in a broader research previously mentioned and comprehends the work of a research-training group. The chosen methodology, namely, (auto)biography, has as intention to be simultaneously formative and investigative to all participants, as it

offers the possibility for them to discuss the development and modalities of the autobiographical work, building up their ability to hear and share, attentive to the considerations on training provided throughout the work (JOSSO, 2004).

The group was composed of twenty children's education beginner teachers of the Municipal Education Network of Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul State, Brazil, the same number of Pedagogy undergraduate students completing traineeship/pre-service, training/researcher professors from two public universities, the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UEMS) and the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS) and a private one, the Dom Bosco Catholic University (UCDB) located in Campo Grande, Mato Grosso do Sul State, Brazil, as well. The research is linked to Postgraduate Education programs – Master's and PhD of the UEMS and UCDB, and counted with FUNDECT (Foundation for the Support to the Development of Education, Science and Technology)/Mato Grosso do Sul State resources. The objective of the research was to build dialogues that articulated theory and practice in initial training and in professional teaching exercise through pedagogical supervision, investigation and construction/application of social technologies for teaching training.

The project operated through monthly meetings, whose agendas were planned and prepared in advance during meetings held every two weeks by the group of training/researcher professors that highlighted the theoretical frameworks that could allow for the promotion of reflection and discussion to be developed. The agendas were divided into three axes, namely: professional identity – (2) meetings; teaching job – (2 meetings), and pedagogical practice – (4) meetings. The meetings were held in the course of nine months; the first one was for introducing the project and the participants.

The resource used to support the reflections was the production of (auto) biographical narratives that were stimulated by means of mnemonic resources such as metaphors, pictures, movies, objects etc. The (auto)biographical method was chosen for not only being an instrument of investigation but also an important training tool consisting of an approach that enables a greater deepening into the investigation and into the comprehension of training processes and of the sub-processes that compose it.

From this perspective, teacher training has been one of the privileged domains for the application of the biographical method due to a quite obvious reason: we will hardly want to interfere with the training of others without, before, having sought to comprehend our own training process (NÓVOA, 2010).

Josso (2004) follows this idea stating that:

[...] the research only advances if there is, in every subject involved, an interest in learning and formulations of knowledge. Training takes place when the research opens one's eyes to discoveries about him or herself, to new perspectives, to awareness about creating themes or active dialectics, and/or when the research allows one or many types of learning consciously deepened (JOSSO, 2004, p. 215).

This text analyzed fragments from memorials written in the final stage of the research. To Bertaux (2010), memorials are complex reports that interweave aspects of social, institutional and personal spheres, that is, everything that, somehow, contributes to the constitution of the individual and his or her singular way of acting. Thereby, this work assumed that memorials by four children's education teachers participating in the research-training group are extracts from life stories and can be mobilized in order to serve the research, when the subject tells another one about an episode that expresses an experience. To André (2004), a memorial

[...] is the instrument that records discoveries, changes in one's personal and professional journey, expresses his or her emotions, successes, doubts and, thus, builds his or her professional identity (ANDRÉ 2004, p. 285).

The memorials built by the research group not only enabled the experiences and paths of the teaching career but also worked as a resource for the teachers to record and reconstruct the meaning of such profession in their lives, evidencing that professional teaching practice itself has a training character.

Thus, having briefly exposed the methodological way, this text addresses first the professional development and the professionalism of the teacher that works with little children, and then analyzes the narratives, giving voice to children's education teachers in their training path.

The professional development of teachers

The professional development of teachers is a relatively new theme in Brazil, although it is not so in other countries. There is some tendency to relate professional development to progressive training, understanding the terms as synonyms. Such comprehension hinders the analysis of the theme, because it is based on the conception that training is the only way towards the professional development of teachers (IMBERNÓN; CAUDURO, 2013).

To the authors, it is not possible to link teaching professionalization solely to cognitive, theoretical,

pedagogical or psychological aspects, disregarding working conditions that facilitate or hinder the professional development and construction of a teaching career.

Teaching professionalization develops through some elements such as the labor market and its demands, salary and professional valuation, promotion, career, materials and resources provided by the school, peers, and the atmosphere of the environment along with favorable conditions for training.

Imbernón and Cauduro (2013),

[...] defend that professional development is part of a set of factors that allow or prevent teachers from advancing in their professional life (IMBERNÓN; CAUDURO, 2013, p. 18).

To Garcia (1999, p. 137), the concept of professional development presupposes "[...] an approach in teaching training that values its contextual and organizational character oriented towards changing", presenting a form of implication and resolution of school-related problems from a perspective that goes beyond the traditionally-individualist character of enhancement activities for teachers.

Garcia points out six dimensions that involve the professional development of teacher, which are:

Pedagogical development aimed at teaching enhancement; knowledge and comprehension about oneself, which refers to a balanced image linked to self-accomplishment; cognitive development relative to the acquisition of knowledge and enhancement of strategies for information processing; theoretical development based on the teacher's reflection about his or her teaching practice; professional development supported on investigation; and, finally, career development materialized through the adoption of new teaching roles (GARCIA, 1999, p. 138).

To the author, development has an evolution and continuity connotation that seems to overcome the traditional juxtaposition between initial training and enhancement of teachers. From this perspective, professional development does not affect the teacher only but it involves the whole educative body operating within the sphere of the organization where they work.

Gatti (2003) reinforces the idea that teachers are immersed into,

[...] a life in group within which they share a culture, deriving their knowledge, values and attitudes from these relations. This is a process that is simultaneously social and inter-subjective (GATTI, 2003, p. 197).

Formozinho (2008) adds her collaboration understanding professional development as a walking with nonlinear phases that articulates itself with the different systemic contexts that the teacher experiences.

From these ideas, it is possible to apprehend that professional development is a continuous process that starts in initial training and, later on, develops in the routine of the school as well, allowing the latter to become a collective learning space for the profession in consonance with progressive training.

From this perspective, professional development needs new systems of work and new forms of learning that are required from teachers for them to carry out their profession, and from those aspects of work and of learning associated with the schools as institutions where a group of teachers work (IMBERNÓN; CAUDURO, 2013).

Once the school constitutes a collective learning place of the profession, the latter will be able to promote the development of all the staff working with it, that is, the management team, technicians, as well as employees and teachers. Thus, professional development involves personal and professional experiences mediated by contextualized situations, whether educative or not.

The professionalism of children's education teachers

Thinking about the concept of teaching professionalism has to do with a set of pieces of knowledge, attitudes and values perceived in the actual practice of teachers. According to Cunha (1999), it is greatly linked to the teacher's subjectivity from the perspective of a historical subject exercising a task or a profession.

Formozinho (2008), when referring to the teaching professionalism of childhood educators, understands it as

[...] the integrated professional action that the educator develops together with children and families based on his or her knowledge, competences and feelings, taking on the moral dimension of the profession (FORMOZINHO, 2008, p. 134).

Although the job of children's education teachers in many aspects is similar to that of distinct types of teachers, it differs in others, which will configure a singular professionalism. This specificity is established based on the characteristics of the little child. Recent centuries have produced several pieces of knowledge about childhood. The child's body constituted a focus of power and knowledge from the 18th century, and the human and social sciences (Biology, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology,

Pedagogy) have been dedicated to studies on the child and ended up establishing the periodization, classification and characterization of a child's development (BUJES, 2006).

Childhood has then become object of a scientific, moral, religious, family view in the State. Children and adults and their identities were configured from the perspective and interests of specific sectors in society. Pedagogy as an education practice, since the end of the XIX century, imbued with the pretension of becoming scientific, would have the advantage of putting at teachers' disposal a technical apparatus for them know better the child and, consequently, to adjust school experiences to his or her interests, needs and development (BUJES, 2006).

In this movement, the school has suffered some changes throughout times. One of the most important was its universalization; however, it still remains as the only and legitimate children's education model and has the characteristics of a discipline-oriented schooling.

Nevertheless, in current times, the conception of childhood has been resulting increasingly complex. The discussion revolves around several dilemmas on childhood: as a social categorical, the question is whether it can or cannot be regarded as a specific group, with common characteristics, though living in different spaces, with diversified cultures, marked by differences of rights, of duties, of access to privileges, of lack, of restrictions.

Children are already born within a culture that circumscribes the social place from which they will shape their identity, values and way to see and exist in the world. In addition to the school, children are also under the influence of the consumerist society, hence the critical role of the school, that of becoming a space and time for resistance, where all adults and children can have their turn and voice, transforming senses, deconstructing patterns and making culture (MULLER; REDIN, 2007).

In face of this scenario, the knowledge and practices required for children's education need clearer guidelines, from broader theoretical assumptions, based on the conception of a being capable of developing in and with the world, mediated by the language, by activities, by symbols and by other beings. In this context, the role of teachers is imperative, because they are in charge of the organization of the school work. They bring to the activities and to the way of planning them their conceptions of childhood, of education, of teaching, of learning and of culture.

Before this challenge of thinking over the specificities and characterizing the professional singularity of a children's education teacher, Formozinho (2008) contributed to the discussion by

presenting three dimensions of professional action: universality, vulnerability and family dependence. To the author, universality reflects the holistic form through which children learn and develop, and this requires from teachers the performance of a variety of comprehensive tasks with little defined boundaries, ranging from care to education. Vulnerability is a differentiation factor of the profession and demands a privileged attention to social and emotional aspects that constitute the necessary basis or condition for the development of other aspects in a child. The relationship with the family should be that of partnership, of constant communication, since both of them, family and school, have the same goals and interests, that is, to take care of and educate the child.

In face of these specificities, children's education requires an integration of services and professionalism from teachers, and is based on a network of interactions with parents, with other professionals and with community heads and local authorities (FORMOZINHO, 2008). In short, teaching professionalism in children's education requires an articulation of knowledge, roles, interactions and interfaces.

The professional development in the voices of the teachers within the research-training context

The professional development of children's education teachers should be constituted of a complexity of pieces of knowledge that allow the teacher to work with the child that lives in this world of changes and differences.

From this perspective, the contribution of the research-training group is relevant from the moment in which it gives voice to participating subjects, valuing their personal and professional experiences, enabling the reflection and learning about themselves and their training journey.

Among the several possible forms of working with memories, the writing of memorials proves a tool for the teacher to think about his or her personal and professional path. Therefore, based on the memorials by four children's education teachers participating in the research-training group, the next section presents the analysis of their narratives aimed at given them a voice and turn.

Resuming the idea by Formozinho (2008), who understands development professional as a walking with phases, the beginning of the works in the group happened when the participants re-experienced with their memorials the moments of initial training and teaching initiation.

I started children's education after I passed the public tender to be a recreation professional, and started to work with 2-year old children. I was a recreation professional for four years. Only after that I had the chance to complement my training, because besides Pedagogy, I attended a 3-year teaching course that did not qualify me to work with children's education, so I attended one year of teaching course at the same time and applied for a public tender for being a teacher in the municipality (T1).

I graduated at a distance-learning pedagogy course from a private institution in the city of Campo Grande in 2010, I was approved in a public examination in the same year, and in 2011 I was called to work at a Children's education Center. That was really rewarding, because I received full scholarship, worked all day as an education assistant, when I learned a lot of good things, and during the night twice a week I attended college and even had time to take care of a little kid and husband (T2).

I studied up to the secondary education, completed it at 20, then got pregnant and had one kid after the other, and made the decision that I would not work to take care of them. [...] When my youngest kid was turning 6, I started to work at a ceinf [children's education center] again. Because I had little instruction, I started as an ASD, joined the EJA [youth and adult education (Brazilian education program)] again, and because of that I was promoted to nursery school assistant. I passed the test of the UEMS, went to college to study Children Education and Initial Grades. Soon I got a job at a Municipal school to teach a pre-school class and saw that the reality is far different from that of a daycare (T3).

I knew that my academic education had taught me a lot, my traineeships and seminars gave me support for pedagogical practice, but right in the beginning of my work with little children I felt I needed to go deeper in my studies, so I went after that and was soon selected in my first year in the Municipal Education Network for a graduate course in children's education and its languages, which contributed greatly to enhance the theoretical reflection around my practice, which has been reflecting a lot on my action in the classroom (T1).

The above fragments show different training paths that crosses on-site and distant pedagogy learning, mid-level professorship and specialization courses. They evidence the ways, difficulties and personal effort of the teachers in the search for professional training.

There is a visible concern in their reports with seeking qualification, expanding pieces of knowledge that enable a good performance of their job, considering that, when dealing with the education of little children, this task expands and

requires from the children's education teacher a specific professionalism. Said professionalism involves knowledge, possibilities, ethics and a know-how that acknowledge the social universality and vulnerability of children, recognizing their social and psychological competences that manifest from an early age in initial forms of communication (FORMOZINHO, 2008).

Taking into account its importance to the teaching career, Imbernón (2011) highlights that initial training should endow teachers with a solid background in the scientific, cultural, contextual, psycho-pedagogical and personal spheres that must qualify the teacher to take on the educative task in all of its complexity.

The notion of this responsibility is shown in the narrative below.

When we have just graduated or are performing activities in Secondary Education only and enter Children's education, we find a wide world full of possibilities but also of difficulties that are proper of the work with little children. On the other hand, we see that although we have the task of teaching we end up learning a lot. We live the possible and the impossible, fantasy and reality in seconds. We have a huge responsibility in our hands, which must be reflected on every action to be developed, on every activity applied, because we have before us individuals in full development, whom we must assist in a continuous and reflexive learning process (T4).

T4, through her narrative, draws attention to the complexity involving the children universe. Working with little kids requires from teachers, in addition to specific knowledge related to taking care and educating, a sensibility and availability to be together with the children as they discover and learn about the physical, social, affective and cultural world. This is a process of discovery and learning for the kid, but it is so to the teacher as well. The perception of the teacher of going through constant training and learning is also explained by Imbernón (2011) when stating that training should be supported on the reflection of subjects about their teaching practice, in order to allow them to examine their implicit theories, their operation schemes, their attitudes, etc, thus performing a constant self-evaluation process that guides their work.

This should not be an individual but a collective work that takes place in the interaction established among teachers themselves during the practice of their profession. In this context, the school is no longer 'only a place' to become a manifestation of life in all of its complexity, a space for priority training with a collaborative paradigm between education professionals (IMBERNÓN; CAUDURO, 2013).

This conception of collaborative training is shared by the teachers when they narrate:

[...] before the challenges that we have to overcome, I was privileged for meeting colleagues that contributed in a special way in the beginning of my journey with children's education. Special people that stimulate us by offering encouragement and pedagogical assistance, who do not let us give up. Among these people I should mention my friends from the Children's Education Center (T4).

I received support from the direction, the secretary and teacher Nilvana, in everything I intended to do, and this facilitated my pedagogical actions, when I could not do what I wanted, one of them always helped me with some instruction (T2).

The above excerpts stress the support received from more experienced peers, who gave support and greater confidence to the teachers in their moments of difficulties and weaknesses lived in the first years of their professional exercise. This evidences the importance of supervising teaching during their insertion period, which makes the school a fundamental place for learning and professional development and confirms that the teaching learning process does not start or end in initial training.

Teachers learn to develop in the routine of their professional practice together with their peers and the institution. This perspective requires a change of paradigm, which is, leaving professional isolation to engage in teamwork, in collaboration with peers, towards professional growth. Learning in a collective manner involves questioning oneself, as a teacher, about the practice and expose it to colleagues in a collective and collaborative growth attempt.

This is a continuous, systematic and organized process that encompasses the entire teaching career (GARCIA, 1999). This is also the perception of the teachers, as can be noticed in the fragments below:

I believe that training should be continuous, because the professional self-indulgence that many teachers display proves to be a path towards ignorance, to a meaningless job, generating personal and professional dissatisfaction (T3).

Founding our knowledge and understanding our role inside the children's education universe will favor the valuation of our job, and the loss of meaning of the professional character to which we have been subjected for a long time will cease. It is important that teachers have this clear so they can structure their pedagogical actions with responsibility and freedom in their relationship with the children (T1).

Now I'm a special master's student, I want to keep studying so our children are more qualified people,

so they have a quality and meaningful education; that's the only way for us to contribute to our nation. I keep believing in and fighting for a better education (P4).

My story was (and is) full of constant expectations, of search for expanding my knowledge and comprehension about the pedagogical practice in children's education (T2).

The teachers, in their narratives, evidence the feeling that commit them to a constant quest for enhancement, through *lato* and *stricto sensu* courses that provided them with new types of knowledge and the development of a quality job, taking into consideration the specificities, needs and interests of the education of little children. This movement of search for professional development helps teachers to expand their knowledge, which will allow them to evaluate the potential need and the quality of the educative innovation capable of continuously changing the educative tasks, since the teaching profession is part of an ever changing society, with a high technological level and vertiginous advance of knowledge (IMBERNÓN, 2013).

In this scenario, the responsibility and role of a children's education teacher is founding, because it faces the universality and vulnerability of the child being. It is the teacher who, in the educative institution, plans and creates the curricular organization of spaces and times, selects material, participates in games and musical activities, mediates the construction of the natural and social knowledge by the child, as well as of their identity formation.

The awareness of this responsibility is perceived in the reports of the teachers when they make it clear that self-indulgence leads to a path of ignorance and that the challenges imposed by society and contemporary childhood push them towards investing in their professional development. The social and formative transformation requires the teaching profession to keep up with the new reality, more complex and able to overcome an interest that is strictly technical.

Seeing training as professional development for the education of little children means to think of a process that provides teachers with knowledge, skills and attitudes aimed at the comprehension of the vulnerability and universality of children, that is, their specificities and needs, and characterizes a singular training that should develop professionals capable of being reflexive and investigators.

Final considerations

The text sought to give voice to four female teachers starting children's education, who participated in a research-training group between

the years of 2010 and 2013. In the group, the writing of the memorial, understood as a space for (re)construction and (re)experiences, constituted according to the need and dynamics of the moment lived, enable the "[...] construction of narratives that emerged from the paradoxical confront between past and future in favor of the present questioning" (JOSSO, 2004, p. 41).

Within this context, the teaching narratives served as a tool that contributed to professional training, because, when narrating, the subject organizes different events of their training and professional journey, which are structured from experiences, tensions, conflicts, challenges and solutions found. In the case of the group participating in the research, the members lived circumstances that allowed them to reconsider their journey regarding teaching training and practice, their conception of teaching and attitude adopted with the children.

From this perspective, the work developed during the monthly meetings of the research-training group enabled the creation of a mobilizing and transforming space that led the beginner teachers to reflect about their job and the context within which they act, to analyze their own practice, to expose and find themselves in the other's experience, thus producing new pieces of knowledge.

The extracts presented in this text, fragments from memorials, evidenced that the beginner teachers have not slowed down, as many have done already; on the contrary, they show interest in and concern about carrying on their training process, considering the dynamics of the action of educating, constituted in distinct times and spaces and that mobilizes their practice itself – mobilization characterized by means of investigation and reflection. The narratives of the beginner teachers manifested a movement of search for professional development, re-experiencing moments of their initial training, teaching initiation and, later, effort to invest in progressive training and their career through new courses, *lato* and *stricto sensu*.

Thus, being the school a teaching workplace, interaction with peers, exchange of experiences and collective allows to the institution spaces for interaction and learning of the profession where the beginner teacher is an active participant of his or her training process. Investing in professional development helps the children's education teacher advance in the search for a professionalism that leads him or her to comprehend the vulnerability and universality of children, that is, their specificities and

needs, holding him or herself accountable for their care and education.

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