

## **The Role of Sport in Reducing Racism and Its Relation to Social Acceptance in the Movie *The Blind Side***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Film is the example of literary works which reflects the social issues that occur in a society. The writer is interested to analyze the social issue in *The Blind Side*. In this case, the writer intends to examine the role of sport in reducing racism that occur to an African American who lives in Tennessee, The United States of America. It also concerns his existence in the White American society in which its people have different skin colors. The writer uses two elements to analyze this thesis. They are intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The intrinsic aspect given in this thesis consists of two aspects, namely narrative aspect which includes character, setting, and conflict; cinematography aspect which includes shot size and sound. The writer uses racism and sport theory, where concept consists of stereotype, prejudice, dan discrimination. *The Blind Side* reflects the effects of racism towards an African American's existence in the mid of the white society. His struggle makes him accepted not only by his schoolmates but also by the society. Based on the explanation above, it is revealed that racism that occurs to an African American can be annihilated by his achievement in sport, in this case, *football*.

*Keywords: racism, football, social acceptance, African American*

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

As stated by Wellek and Warren, literature is a representation of life and able to represent social reality (1977:94). Sometimes a literary work appears as the reflection of social issue that is shown inside the society.

In traditional sense based on its form, literature can be divided into two categories: written and oral forms. The written form of literature covers literary works such as narrative fiction (novel and short story) and poetry, while the oral form includes drama as performance. Drama is different from narrative fiction in that drama does not have narration. Yet, the major literary aspects of drama are similar to those of narrative fictions. Some of them are character, conflict, and setting. In modern era, a different form of drama

appears in the form of motion pictures or movies. Different from other literary works, a movie informs the story through its cinematographic elements. The combination of literary elements and cinematography elements brings the motion pictures alive. Andrew claims, "the study of cinema has consequently been bound up with the theories of narrative" (1984:76). Both movies and other types of literary works are similar in that they are made by humans as a reflection of life including social problems.

An example of social problems is racism which usually happens towards minority groups in certain society. In Tennessee, the United States of America, one of the minority groups is African American, and the majority group is The White American. In social life, racism gives a gap between African American and

The White American or even rich and poor represented in *The Blind Side* movie.

*The Blind Side* is a movie based on a real life story of an African American teenager named Michael Oher who lives in Tennessee. This movie is special since it represents a condition of an African American teenager and his struggle to be accepted in society by showing his talent in sport. The acts of racism towards him can be handled by having achievements in sport. Eventually, the society can accept his presence into their group even though he comes from the minority group. To analyze further about the racism towards Michael Oher and its relation to sports and social integration in groups, communities, and social lives, the thesis is entitled “**The Role of Sport in Reducing Racism and Its Relation to Social Acceptance in the Movie *The Blind Side***”

## **1.2. Research Problems**

1. How does racism influence social acceptance of Michael Oher as an African American teenager in Tennessee through *The Blind Side* movie?
2. What is the role of sport in reducing racism towards Michael Oher in *The Blind Side* movie?
3. What is the impact of football in social acceptance of Michael Oher in *The Blind Side* movie?

## **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

1. To give a deep insight about the racism that influences the social acceptance of Michael Oher as an African American teenager in Tennessee through *The Blind Side* movie.
2. To analyze the role of sport in reducing racism towards Michael Oher in *The Blind Side* movie.
3. To analyze the impact of football in social acceptance of Michael Oher in *The Blind Side* movie.

## **1.4. Methods of the Study**

### **1.4.1. Method of Research**

Method of research in this study is library research. Semi says that library research is a research in a library or in a room that the writer employs to get some data and information from various books or other reading sources which are related to the topic chosen by the writer (1993:8). By this method, there are two kinds of data that will be used to analyze the thesis: main data and supporting data.

The main data come from a movie entitled *The Blind Side* directed by John Lee Hancock. The supporting data come from books and articles to relate the movie and the theory in this study.

### **1.4.2. Method of Approach**

As this thesis digs out a movie as literature, the sociological approach is applied to analyze social life and interaction between people in certain society in the movie. Wellek and Warren present three classifications of problems in the sociology of literature. They are the sociology of the writer, the social content of the work itself, and the influence of literature on society (1977: 96). Since this thesis has been made in order to reveal about racism, sport, and social acceptance in a movie *The Blind Side*, the second classification will be used.

## **1.5. The Organization of the Study**

### **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

It contains Background of the Study, Research Problem, Objectives of the Study, Methods of the Study, and The Organization of the Study.

### **CHAPTER 2: THE SUMMARY OF THE MOVIE**

It contains the synopsis that is reliable to the theme of the thesis. The summary also represents a film sequence, so that the readers can easily dig out the correlation between the film and content of the thesis.

### **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

It consists of the theoretical review that can support the writing of the thesis. The theories deal with definition and some explanations of character, setting, and

conflict. It will also explain some theories of cinematography elements and extrinsic aspects.

#### **CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS**

It will analyze the intrinsic aspects like narrative and cinematographic elements and the extrinsic aspects using the theories in chapter 3.

#### **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

It contains a conclusion about this thesis.

### **2. Summary of the Movie**

*The Blind Side* movie tells a true story about a phenomenal American football player named Michael Oher. In the beginning, the movie introduces Michael Oher as the major character. He is a poor and big African American student. One day, in a very cold night, Leigh Anne notices Michael Oher who walks alone in the road in the pouring rain, wearing only a T-shirt and shorts. Leigh Anne decides to invite him to her house and gives him a place to sleep on her family's couch. Leigh Anne decides to take Michael Oher as an adopted son after discussing with her husband, Sean Touhy. It makes Leigh Anne's friends wonder with what she tries to do to Michael Oher. They do not believe that Michael Oher will be a part of the Tuohys' family. When she is finally able to take Michael as a part of the Touhys, she realizes his talent in football and supports him by watching his football practice at school and his football match in the field. She also helps Michael to understand football by giving him explanation about what he needs to do on football by telling him to protect his team like a family.

One day, at Michael's tournament, SJ sends out videos of the games to coaches at the universities. The videos surprise everyone who watches them because Michael Oher is really amazing. The sport ability that he has shown at the tournament brings Michael Oher in getting scholarship to continue his study at any university that he wants.

When some coaches from various universities come to recruit Michael at the

Tuohys' house, Leigh Anne makes it clear that she likes the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) than the others because both she and her husband are the alumni. Subsequently, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) calls Michael Oher to come at their office to have investigation about the continuation of his study. The investigator tells Michael Oher that the Tuohys and Miss Sue are fervent Mississippi boosters and his high school coach will get a job at Ole Miss after Michael Oher has chosen the school.

Michael Oher believes the issue that Leigh Anne only adopts him to play football for her alma mater. Then he gets mad and goes to his birth mother's apartment.

Meanwhile, Leigh Anne looks for Michael Oher to Hurt Village. Michael finally calls her and they soon meet. Leigh Anne tells him that she will support every decision that he makes. The following day, Michael goes back to NCAA office and explains to the investigator that he chooses Ole Miss because his whole family has graduated from there.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1. Intrinsic Aspects**

##### **3.1.1. Narrative Elements**

###### **a. Character**

In *The Element of Literature*, Potter defines character as "any person who figures in a literary work, not particularly a peculiar or eccentric one" (1967: 1). Foore and Perkins also state that characters can be divided into two types which are major and minor characters, based on their role towards the storyline of a literary work (1987:47). The division about role of characters is explained further by Kennedy. "A major character is human personalities that become familiar while a minor character is as a mere passive spectator or even as a character that arrives late upon the scene and then tries to piece together what happened" (1979:18). Both major and minor characters are essential in literary works.

Another classification of character divides characters into two groups; flat and round characters. This classification depends on character's proportion to the fullness of their development. According to Perrine, "flat character only has one or two points, they may made memorable in the hand of an expert author through some individualizing detail of appearance, gesture, or speech" (1988:68). Meanwhile, "round character are complex and many sided; they might require an essay or full analysis" (Perrine, 1988:67). Further, Perrine adds that "static character is the same sort of person at the end of story as at the beginning" (1988:69). This kind of character has never changed since the beginning of the story. Meanwhile, "dynamic character undergoes a permanent change in some aspects of character, personality, or outlook" (1988:69). It shows that this character has a progress in the story.

### **b. Setting**

Setting is one of the narrative elements that need to be discussed in order to understand the whole story of the movie. The first element of setting is place. The setting of place is all about the geographical location in which the event happens. Kennedy states, "the idea of setting includes the physical environment of a story" (1987:68).

The second element is time. In Meyer's view, setting of time is related to the time when the action occurs and answers the reader's or viewer's question when the story takes place (1990:108).

The third element is social environment. It refers to social background in which the action takes place. It also influences characters in a movie. Meyer states that by setting, "we are better able to understand the behavior of characters and the significance of their actions" (1990:107).

### **c. Conflict**

Conflict is basic and essential to plot in a story. According to Perrine, "conflict is a

clash of action, desire, ideas, or goods in the plot of a story or drama" (1988: 1408). Meyer classifies conflict as internal; in moral or psychological issue which must be resolved within the protagonist (1990:46). Meyer states that the external conflict is a conflict among the character that appears between the individual and nature or society (1990:45).

### **3.1.2. Cinematographic Elements**

In their book, *Screen Media: Analysing Film and Television*, Jane Stadler and Kelly McWilliam maintain that "cinematography literally means 'moving photography' or the art of 'graphing' movement" (2009:32). In this study, the elements that will be dig out more are shot size and sound.

#### **a. Shot Size**

According to Stadler and McWilliam, "a shot is one uncut continuous recording of film, video or digital footage" (2009:34). A shot is not about taking picture in one place, but about framing the scenes to give the essential meaning of the story to the spectators. There are several shot size that can be framed in the movie.

##### **1. Extreme Long Shot**

Extreme Long Shot is "using very distant, wide framing to display setting and landscape, rather than figure expression or movement" (Stadler & McWilliam, 2009:35).

##### **2. Long Shot**

This kind shot is usually used to open a movie. The camera captures the human body from head to toe in one frame, as Stadler and McWilliam put it, "a shot scale framing the whole human body in the context of their environment" (2009:35).

##### **3. Medium Long Shot**

This shot frames "a person from the knees up" (Stadler & McWilliam, 2009:35)..

##### **4. Medium Shot**

This shot frames "a person from the middle half of their body, such as from the waist upwards" (Stadler & McWilliam, 2009:35).

##### **5. Two Shot**

Two shot is a shot of two people in one frame as Stadler and William said in the following:

“a shot depicting two people together usually tightly framed in closer proximity to each other than would be comfortable in everyday life” (2009:35).

#### 6. Medium Close Up

This is a kind of shots that shows the half part of the whole object in the frame. “A shot scale framing a person’s chest and head” (Stadler & McWilliam, 2009:35).

#### 7. Close Up

This kind of shot can enhance the emotion of the viewers because it framed any small in detail. “A shot in which a person’s head and shoulders or an object or detail of equivalent size takes up the whole screen” (Stadler & McWilliam, 2009:36).

#### 8. Extreme Close Up

In the extreme close up, the shot has a function to show “a very small detail, like a person’s eyes filling the frame” (Stadler & McWilliam, 2009:36).

### **b. Sound**

Sound can be a supporting factor to connect the story line in each scenes of the movie. Amy explains in the glossary of her book that diegetic is “all those sounds and images belong to the implied world of the film in narrative film” (2007:153). Amy also says that sound can help the viewers to interpret the meaning in the scenes of the movie (2007:49). She divides a film sound into three types: speech, music, and noise (effect).

## **3.2. Extrinsic Aspects**

### **3.2.1. Racism**

Racism refers to unequal treatment of a person or group of people based on race. Ferrante says that “the term ‘race’ refers to a group of people who possess certain distinctive physical traits related to skin color, hair texture, and the shape of their eyes, nose, and lips” (2000:290). In everyday social interaction, people usually categorize other people. Sometimes, the categorization motivates people to do

racial act towards the minority of categorization.

According to Feldman, stereotype is “generalized beliefs and expectations about social groups and their members” (2002:545). Stereotype can lead to prejudice. Feldman states that, “prejudice is the negative (or positive) evaluations of groups and their members” (2002:545). In other words, Feldman believes that prejudice is when people think something negative to other people just because they are a member of certain groups.

Stereotype is perception while discrimination is behavior. Thus, when people act on negative stereotypes, the result is discrimination. Discrimination is “negative behavior toward members of a particular group” (Feldman, 2002:545). Prejudice and discrimination occur in ethnical group such as African American who have different skin color with the White American.

### **3.2.2. Sports in Society**

According to Ferrante, “a society is a system of social interaction” (2002:20). Coakley adds the definition of society in the following:

“The term society refers to a collection of people living in a defined geographical territory and united through a political system and a shared sense of self-identification that distinguished them from other collections of people” (1998:3).

Thus, one society is different from another. Each has its cultures and ways of life. The occasions or events that involve the social relationship and collective action can be inferred as social phenomena (Coakley, 1997:2). The social phenomena have connection in the social lives of particular collections of people or in such society. Since sport related to the social and culture where the collections of people live, it includes as social phenomena that is interesting to be discussed. Coakley defines sport in the following:

“Sport are institutionalized competitive activities that involve vigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex

physical skills by individual whose participation is motivated by a combination of personal enjoyment and external rewards” (1998:19).

From the explanation above, it can be understood that sport is not only about doing physical activities, but it is a competitive to get external reward. The reward is commonly from the society.

There is a sociological theory that study about the relation between sport and society named functionalist theory. Functionalist theory believes that sport serves at least two major positive functions. The first function according to Thio is as “an integrating force for society, thereby contributing to social order and stability” (1989:505). Here, sport has a function as a social mechanism in order to unite people in the society. Thus, through sport in the United States of America, Americans of diverse racial, social, and cultural backgrounds can feel a sense of togetherness as it formed due to their common interest in a famous athlete or team.

The second function is as a source of inspiration for the best. Thio states, “due to its competitive nature, sport inspires individuals to do their utmost to win” (1989:505). It can be inferred that sport will develop skill and ability, mental alertness, and physical prowess of athletes.

### **3.2.3. Sports and Intergroup Relationship**

Hogg states, “intergroup relations refer to relations between two or more groups and their respective members” (2001:1). It means that intergroup relations frame the way people define themselves and others, the way they behave, and the way in which they treat and think about others. He also adds that:

“Intergroup relations are often characterized by prejudice attitudes, competitive orientations, discriminatory behavior, and other dark aspects of the human condition. Much of what we hear about intergroup relations focuses on conflict-on how people exploit, humiliate,

and oppress people who are not in the group, often engaging in acts of individual aggression or embarking on campaigns of systematic, collective violence” (2001:15). Relationship itself depend on the communication of each members which it means that people need to accept the background of another. Hogg also adds that the groups always influence one another and the character of group membership is based on the influence within groups (2001:267). From those statements, it can be assumed that the acceptance of people who come from a different race is able to happen and they can not resist it where it also appears in sport.

Coakley also says that intergroup relations can be improved by sports through people who control the sport teams and if he did any efforts to bring people together and lead them “to confront and challenge dominant racial ideologies”. It means that coaches have responsibility in accepting people into the teams that they coach.

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1. Analysis of Intrinsic Aspects in *The Blind Side***

#### **4.1.1. Analysis of Characters in *The Blind Side***

In *The Blind Side* movie, Michael Oher and Leigh Anne Tuohy as the major characters are round and dynamic characters. Michael Oher has a strong protective instinct. It comes from his experience as a child. Michael Oher has a miserable childhood.

Michael Oher’s dynamic character can also be seen from his appearance and performance. After he meets the Tuohys, he gets new clothes and shoes to go to school. He also becomes a famous athlete, not only in the school but also in Tennessee. The success makes Michael Oher feel confidence and comfortable in his new environment.

In the movie, it is noted that Michael Oher experiences changes in his life. At the first day he comes to the school, he

was not able to communicate to the other students. After being a famous athlete, he becomes a friendly person. That progress happens because of motivation that the Tuohys give to him. Since Michael Oher's personalities change, he is also a dynamic character. From that explanation, it can be inferred that Michael Oher has many sides of personality in *The Blind Side*. He is an honest person that is proved by his attitude in the Tuohys' house when he stayed for a night. In the very beginning at his new school, he gets hard to study lessons from the teachers, but after he lives in the Tuohys, he becomes a fast-learner and hard worker person to achieve his dream. Therefore, Michael Oher is one of round characters in *The Blind Side*.

Leigh Anne Tuohy is another major character of the movie. Her round and dynamic characteristic can be found firstly when she asks Michael Oher to sleep in her house. She plans to bring him home for only one night, but after she knows that Michael Oher has no place to stay, she asks him to stay longer. It proves that Leigh Anne is a great empathy person.

In addition to having great empathy, Leigh Anne Tuohy is also a brave woman. She drives her car alone to Hurt Village looking for Michael Oher. The dynamic of Leigh Anne is shown when she meets Michael Oher and asks him to stay at her house. She would have never gone to Hurt Village, a slum area and a dangerous place, if she had not met Michael Oher. She also dares to decide Michael Oher to be a part of her family even a lot of people in her environment do not support her decision. Thus, since she has many sides of personality, she can be classified as a round character. Great empathy, brave, gentle, caring, and hard worker are personalities that are described in *The Blind Side*.

Besides the major characters, there are minor characters that are usually flat-static characters. He is the only son of the Tuohys. SJ helps Michael Oher in sport by becoming Michael Oher's coach. SJ also

takes a role as a manager of Michael Oher when the universities come to their house in order to ask Michael Oher to get school at theirs. Another minor character in this movie is Mrs. Granger. She is an investigator that was sent by NCAA to investigate Michael Oher.

#### **4.1.2. Analysis of setting in *The Blind Side***

The story of the movie occurs between 2001–2009 where George W. Bush was being a president of the United States of America. It is proven by the photograph of Bush hanged on the wall at the immigration office. The additional information was given by the scenes taken in the field, where Michael Oher holds the cup written the year of 2005. Those scenes prove the time of the movie occurs in the 21st century.

The next setting analysis is place. Since this movie is about a life journey of an African American boy named Michael Oher who lives in Tennessee, America. Most the scenes in this movie taken place in several places in Tennessee, where the real story happened. The main setting of *The Blind Side* movie is at the Tuohy's house, but there is setting of place in Hurt Village as the comparison of life's condition between African Americans and White Americans.

The last analysis of setting is social environment. The Tuohy's house and Hurt Village are places that can describe the social life condition of people in Tennessee, America. The White American lives in a comfortable place and gets education in the best place, like in a church school. On the other hand, many African Americans live in a bad condition, in Hurt Village, where hard to access education in a church school so that the children study in a public school at the surrounding area where they live.

#### **4.1.3. Analysis of Conflict in *The Blind Side***

The internal conflict occurs in Michael Oher's character where he never has a

feeling in having a family until he becomes part of the Tuohys. Unfortunately, when NCAA asks him several questions, it makes him doubt about the meaning of family.

An internal conflict also appears on Leigh Anne's character when she decides to ask Michael Oher to sleep in their house. She discusses with her husband related to her decision. She is doubtful of her decision taking Michael Oher home, but intensely curious about Michael Oher.

In this movie, the external conflict appears between Leigh Anne and Michael Oher. The conflict occurs after the investigation of Michael Oher by Mrs. Granger who is sent by NCAA. Michael Oher believes in what the investigator's said about the Tuohys. She says that the Tuohys uses him to reach their dream that is giving a talented athlete to their alma mater. He chooses to leave and tries to calm himself by coming back to his real place, Hurt Village.

## **4.2. Analysis of Extrinsic Aspects in *The Blind Side***

### **4.2.1. Analysis of Racism in *The Blind Side***

Racism towards Michael Oher as an African American teenager in *The Blind Side* movie can be seen at the beginning of the movie when he starts his life as an African American teenager in the middle of the White American. Michael Oher studies at Wingate Christian School because the coach in that school is interested in his ability in playing balls. The coach believes that he can teach him to become a football athlete, so he recommends Michael Oher to the admissions of the school to accept him as their student, even though any other teachers refuse him because of his social background and academic grades. The students do not seem to give a warm welcome either.

Michael Oher gets the acts of racism not only in his class, but also outside the class when he greets the little girls but they avoid him. Even they are little girls, but

they have stereotype to Michael Oher as an African American.

It also results from a form of prejudice to Michael Oher when Leigh Anne told to her friends about her plan to adopt him by proposing the possibilities of Sean Tuohy losing his asset and the possibilities of Michael Oher hurting Collins Tuohy. Prejudices can lead to discrimination as it happened to Michael Oher, as can be seen in the scenes when he firstly plays for his football team's school.

One of the spectators feels that the match is unfair because an African American plays on it. The White Man also calls Michael Oher as a big old black bear. A form of discrimination appears when he yells as his form of protest because Michael Oher who has a big physical appearance and black skin plays football against his son's team.

Furthermore, stereotype can also result in discrimination as it also happens to Michael Oher. The white player that kicks Michael Oher's head. Michael Oher's coach gets angry and asks for justice, but what he got is penalty for his team. The explanation above shows the racism that was experienced by Michael Oher as an African American in *The Blind Side* movie. However, the racism can be decreased by his achievement in football. It is explained that sport has tight relationship with racism and society.

### **4.2.2. The Role of Sport in Reducing Racism in *The Blind Side***

At the very beginning when Michael Oher joins to the football team in his new school, he cannot understand the rules of the game. The coach yells at him time by time and the other players do not try to help him understand the game. Until one day, Leigh Anne watches the football's practice, and she initiates to give an explanation to Michael Oher.

After Michael Oher can play football well, he feels that the players and coach can accept his existence there. His position as a quarterback is settled to him because

of his big body. His function at the team is to protect them. Automatically the other players need to believe in him.

When people join sport, they become together in one team, automatically they have the same purpose which is to get the cup, to be a winner. This reason brings people to accept foreigners easily than in any other lines of society.

Another proof that football can reduce the racism toward Michael Oher is when coaches in many universities in United States want him to become a part of their team. It is proved that people do not see Michael Oher as only an African American teenager who is inappropriate to get a proper treatment as a human being but see him as a very talented young man. The opportunities for a better life come to Michael Oher because of his achievement in sport.

#### **4.2.3. The Impact of Football in Social Acceptance of Michael Oher in *The Blind Side***

Before joining a football team in his new school, Michael Oher is only included as a member of his class. Through his journey at that school, he finally meets the Tuohys that lead him to football so he has new football team. In team, they have the same goal to win the game, so they need to cooperate and communicate one to another. This condition makes Michael Oher easily to be accepted by people in the team because the team has no choices except accepting and integrating him.

As an example is when Michael Oher and one of the members of football team have a fight to show which one is the best. There is no racism or hostility to Michael Oher. The people who look Michael Oher's action in making his friend get falls, give applause to him. Michael Oher also helps his friend to stand up and his friend accepts Michael Oher's hand, smiling at him.

Another proof that Michael Oher can be accepted in the society after joins a football team and becomes a famous athlete is when he graduates and continues

his study at Ole Miss University, the girls at the college greet him. This condition is totally different on the first day he came to the White community. The achievement in football gives him an opportunity to get the best that he can get as a human being.

#### **5. Conclusion**

*The Blind Side* movie is based upon the real life story. The story of the movie happens in the 21th century. Those setting of place and time explain the social environment where Michael Oher used to live and where he lives after meets the Tuohys. Hurt Village and White American areas are examples of the social environment that are very different.

Different the social environments result in conflicts or unequal treatments experienced by Michael Oher as an African American who lives in the Whites American's community. He has no friends at his class. He does not able to understand the lessons that the teachers give. Almost all the teachers want to give up on him. They believe that he will fail on their class. Those are examples of racial issue shown in *The Blind Side* movie.

The racism toward Michael Oher can be reduced by sport. Since he lives in the Tuohy's house By joining a football team in his school, Michael Oher easily makes friends. A football team has a same purpose that is winning the competition. In achieving the goal, each member has to have a strong communication and trust one to another in the team.

After analyzing the movie, it can be seen that racism still exists in the 21th century particularly in Tennessee, the United States of America. The acts of racism gives bad impact toward them. It is difficult in neighborhoods, educational opportunities, or even in another challenges of life. There is another aspect that they can fight for the challenges, that is through achievements. Nevertheless, people need to continue their life regardless the worst condition that can happened, because life is something

worthy to struggle on with its problems and difficulties.

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