

# Changes in Teacher Profession in Finland during the War Years 1939-1945

Satu Uusiautti<sup>1</sup>, Merja Paksuniemi<sup>1,2</sup>, & Kaarina Määttä<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Education, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Migration, Turku, Finland

Correspondence: Satu Uusiautti, Faculty of Education, University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland. Tel: 358-484-4167. E-mail: satu@uusiautti.fi

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## Abstract

What happened in the Finnish society affected Finnish teacher training significantly. Teacher training was seen as the means and channel of influencing the whole nation. This study makes an interesting example of how macro level processes and procedures influence on a singular profession and how it was performed in practice. Simultaneously, it functions as an example of a national importance of professions. This study focused on teacher training during the war years in Finland and the change that took place in teacher training and consequently in teacher profession. This was a historical research aiming at drawing as a picture of the contemporary reality in the light of various data: archival sources and former student teachers' (N=9) interviews and memoirs who were student teachers of the teacher training college of Tornio during the Second World War. As results, a practical description of the change is described and discussed. What makes teachers' profession interesting, is that teachers were seen the professional educators of the whole nation, the future workforce, and by setting the example, they educated families, too. How the national purposes influenced teacher training and the contents of teachers' professionalism are discussed.

**Keywords:** Finland, patriotism, teacher training, teacher's profession, Second World War, education

## 1. Introduction

Since the establishment of teacher training colleges starting from the 1860s, Finnish teacher training was considered the seedbed for Christian-nationalist education. It would continue the ideology of Herbart-Zillerism adopted from Germany by Uno Cygnaeus, the father of Finnish elementary education (Cygnaeus, 1910; Halila, 1949; Herbart, 1806; Ziller, 1857; Ziller, 1876). Teachers' were considered exemplary people for the whole nation and therefore their work was not just seen something one does but adopting certain kind of a role and identity (see Rousmaniere, 1994; Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1996). The Finnish teacher training colleges were based on the educational trend of Herbart-Zillerism that emphasized the teacher's moral-Christian character and being (Halila, 1949; Heikkinen, 1995; Hyyrö 2006; Isosaari, 1961; Kuikka, 1978; Nurmi, 1964, 1979, 1995). This was the socio-cultural, historical, and institutional context that constructed teachers' professional identity (see also Korthagen, 2004; Zembylas, 2003) at the beginning of the Finnish teacher training.

In practice, teachers' suitability to act as model citizens was carefully assessed already in the student selection (Paksuniemi & Määttä, 2011a). Strict entrance tests started from sending written applications to the college teaching staff. A carefully-selected group of applicants were invited to the second step where the best applicants based on the minister's and doctor's statements were selected for the actual entrance test. In the last phase of student selection applicants had to show their skills in different school subjects and they were interviewed by teacher educators. Usually, the elementary school teacher training lasted for two years. Teacher students studied the didactics and pedagogy, regionalism, math, and health education, and arts including playing and singing, handicrafts, gymnastics, games and sports. Teaching practicums lasted about 2-3 weeks at a time and took place in the spring semester of the second study year. Teaching practicum was an important phase of studies (Paksuniemi, 2009; Paksuniemi & Määttä, 2011b).

What happened in the Finnish society affected Finnish teacher training significantly. Finland had gained independency in 1917. During the Second World War, Finland fought twice against the Soviet Union but remained an independent democracy in Western Europe (Anttonen, 1998; Satka, 1995). Teacher training was

seen as the means and channel of influencing the whole nation. Therefore, this study makes an interesting example of how macro level processes and procedures influence on a singular profession and how it is performed in practice (e.g., Evetts, 2012).

In this study, we focus on teacher training during the war years in Finland and study the theme through archival sources and former student teachers' interviews and memoirs. The basic situation was that the operation of teacher training colleges had to be temporarily closed during the war years 1939-1945, as several college buildings served as stationary war hospitals. Male student teachers were called up for defense duties while female student teachers went back to their home regions or stayed in the area of their study place doing relief work (Heikkinen, 1995; Hyyrö, 2000; Nurmi, 1989, 1995; Paksuniemi, 2009). The especial interest of this study was focused on the emphases in teacher training and how they changed during the war years. This purpose was analyzed in the light of the contemporary archival sources and relevant research on Finnish teacher training. The war changed the reality at teacher training colleges both on the ideological level and practical level, too. In this study, especially the practical level is discussed through former student teachers' memories.

## 2. Method

This was a historical research aiming at drawing a picture of the contemporary reality in the light of various data (see Paksuniemi, 2009; Kuikka, 1991, 2001; Kähkönen, 1984; Renvall, 1965). Relevant archival sources, such as The Municipal Archives of Oulu, the Archives of the College of Tornio, and the War Archival, proceedings of teachers' meetings, letter copies, curricula, and annual reports of the stationary war hospitals were dissected. The archival sources were complemented by nine women's memoirs, here referred as Anna-Liisa, Aira, Anni, Britta, Kaarina, Kerttu, Mirja, Sirkka, and Taimi, who were student teachers of the teacher training college of Tornio during the war time. Research participants were recruited via a newspaper advertisement that informed of a research on the operation of the teacher training college of Tornio during the World War II. Five of them offered their memoirs to the study and four of them were interviewed personally. These nine women had started their studies in the fall 1939 and were 17-20 years old. At the time they participated in this research the women were over 80 years old.

This was a historical research aiming at drawing a picture of the contemporary reality in the light of various data. In the micro-historical approach, the student teachers' stories illustrate the practical life during the war years. The data analysis resembles the analysis of the phases of life, both from the perspective of individual-specific developmental factors and of the societal changes and pressure. The research participants' stories are complemented with other sources, such as the relevant research literature and archival sources (Kalela, 2000; Kuikka, 2001). The purpose was to analyze the past as is with all its diversity, complexity, and dissimilarity and produce a rich description of the events and practices that took place during the target period.

Four of the participants were interviewed. In these theme interviews, they were asked to reminisce, describe, and interpret their studying at the college during the Second World War. Five of the participants had written memoirs that covered their study time during the war. All stories interview data and memoirs were analyzed from a narrator-oriented perspective. The emphasis was on the ways in which teachers themselves understood and negotiated their professional lives in the past and how they perceived the war-time happenings (Gardner & Cunningham, 1997; Passerini, 1989; Portelli, 2006). Yet, the overall analysis resembles a combination of various sources, both subjective and more objective ones, that aims at providing a multidimensional description of the situation. This approach is given recognition for example by Gardner & Cunningham (1997). Although the use of memories produced in dialogue is challenging, using such data carefully and creatively alongside documentary sources it can be possible to study histories and events in critical and inventive ways.

The purpose was to analyze the influence the war had on Finnish teacher training and how it occurred in practice. The research questions set for the study are the following:

- (1) How did the emphases in Finnish teacher training change during the Second World War according to former student teachers' memories and archival sources?
- (2) How did the change occur in teacher training practice and student teachers' lives?

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Teachers and Teacher Training Colleges Facing the Realities of War

War time affected education at teacher training colleges of Finland and the 1940 circular letter of the National Board of Education noted that only a couple of colleges could provide education during the war (Nurmi, 1989). The Teacher Training College of Tornio, like many other Finnish colleges, was turned into war hospital, and therefore, teacher training was suspended (Paksniemi, 2009; Nurmi, 1989; Nurmi, 1995; Heikkinen, 1995;

Hyvrö, 2000). However, some of the student teachers of the Tornio stayed and worked at the war hospital. They took care of patients and any general tasks assigned to them (Paksuniemi, 2009). Serving as a lotta (lottas served in a Finnish voluntary auxiliary paramilitary organization for women) was not an easy decision. Kaarina talked about her experiences as follows:

I was placed in the commissariat and the other college people served as assistants at the hospital units. Ville [the college principal] was named as the financial manager of the hospital and he seemed to handle the job. One room was reserved for Russian POWs. They were in a bad shape and several died in there. A young person like me saw life from a totally new perspective at the war hospital. The work was hard but I experienced a lot.

Teacher educators and student teachers who did not leave colleges had plenty of work. Mirja described the way college buildings were turned into hospitals:

At first, we had to put up the hospital; we carried iron beds in the classrooms.

Britta told:

I put straws within the bed bags [= pallet] and crocheted with chain stitches the logo of the stationary war hospital to all bedlinen,"Sot. S. 33."

Aira helped, too:

I sorted out gauze packets and other supplies.

Because of the war, Finnish men and women were called at front, including teachers (Rinne, 1973; Heinonen, 1995). Consequently, elementary schools had lack of teachers and unqualified people were hired as teachers (Paksuniemi, 2009). According to Nurmi (1989), the number of unqualified teachers in 1943 was 400. On the other hand, the volition to defend the country was strong among Finnish teachers and student teachers. In addition, male student teachers were of the age of conscription, and female students served as lottas. During the war years of 1939–1945, 924 Finnish teachers and 63 student teachers died in active duty (Rinne, 1973; see Heikkinen, 1995; Syväoja, 2007). Kaarina reminisced:

When education was again suspended when the Continuation War began, I stayed in Tornio. At this time, I worked at the railway station. There, we moved German freightage from the Swedish carriages to the Finnish ones because the track gauges were different. All German equipment was delivered via Sweden. I got paid for that job and that was very important to me. The streets of Tornio were downright seething with Germans, as there were really a lot of them in Northern Finland.

The National Board of Education directed teachers' and student teachers' actions. In its circular letter, the board encouraged teachers to participate in war-time tasks and do their share to conquer the hardships. In 1943, teachers were given responsibilities to supervise voluntary and other work (Nurmi, 1989). According to studies, people at the colleges acted actively and unanimously in Christian circles, temperance movements, and nationalist parties. Since the Finnish Civil War, scouting and civil guard activities were particularly popular (Paksuniemi, 2009; Paksuniemi & Määttä, 2011b; Heikkinen, 1990; Rinne, 1989).

Finnish people were encouraged to voluntary work during the war years which was very practice-oriented patriotic and civic education. The purpose of voluntary work activity was to raise moral, responsibility, and discipline in the youth and support them toward better achievements. The operation was well organized through a voluntary work board that covered widely the field of youth work. The significance for the defense showed in having also Finnish military officers as board members (Syväoja, 2007). Performances in voluntary work were graded and best performances were acknowledged with medal, all the way to the golden badge. One form of voluntary work was doing firewood: the most hard-working workers were rewarded with a badge with a picture of an axe on it (Nurmi, 1989).

Student teachers of the College of Tornio participated in doing firewood which meant that young women went in the woods to work. Student teachers did other work, too. (Ca: 3.) Anna-Liisa told that she had done firewood and harvesting potatoes-it was hard work that made workers hungry:

We did firewood, too, but they did not really like our performance. None of us did not really how to use frame saw or axe. We helped to harvest potatoes at Kulju fields. I have written in my diary that we ate a lot!

Kerttu had similar experiences of voluntary work:

We did voluntary work in woods and by digging up potatoes!

Voluntary work was not only hard but also difficult because of the lack of gear and equipment. Anni described the work as follows:

I remember how we went to work in the woods during the war time. Trees were bald, the ground was covered with snow. In the dawn, we walked in the woods and our, lady workers' gear were not that good. At that time, we had to buy all clothes with tickets. I wonder if anyone had even boots. One man directed our crew by a hooded box which turned out to contain axes and saws. The nation's energy service did not get many cubes of wood from our work but we had certainly participated!

Voluntary work did not mean only acts for the fatherland but also mass work for others. Anna-Lissa, Kertu, and Anni remembered that poor families of companions in arms and war orphans, the elderly and others in need were helped by doing various household works. Voluntary work education was supposed to develop in addition to patriotism Finns' unselfishness and prevent from materialistic tendencies. The educational significance was manifested in teaching how to be economic and diligence, and how to respect work. It also brought teachers, pupils, and homes closer together (Varjo, 1979). As elementary education during the war time was relatively scattered and irregular, teachers did not necessarily know pupils and their parents very well (Gardner & Cunnigham, 1997). Voluntary work changed it, and moreover, student teachers engagement in voluntary work was also good practice for their future work as teachers. Children and the youth did voluntary work often led and organized by their teachers (Nurmi, 1989.)

As the lack of teachers occurred already in 1942 and got worse in the following year, more applicants than usual were taken in teacher training colleges. Extra classes were set up at primary education teacher training colleges (Bb:1; Bc:1). The age limit of male student teachers was lowered from 18 to 16 years (Nurmi, 1989). In 1945, Finnish colleges did not have any entrance tests because teachers who had been transferred to other colleges during the war returned their home colleges and teachers who came back from the front returned their colleges together with student teachers (Paksuniemi, 2009). For example, the Teacher Training College of Suistamo, located on the eastern border of Finland, was closed down and students had to go to other colleges (Hyyrö, 2006). Some men's colleges had separate classes for veterans where men who came back from the front could perform the rest of their studies (Heikkinen, 1995).

### 3.2 *The Change in the Contents of Teachers' Studies*

Teacher training could be provided every now and then. During the war time, it started to have a clear emphasis on patriotism, manifested in the themes in textbooks and taught in various subjects. For example, patriotic hymns were sung in religious education, war-time experiences and patriotic themes were discussed in essays in Finnish lessons (Paksuniemi, 2009). Likewise, these very same themes appeared in textbooks for essays and spelling: "Why does detached Carelia belong to Finland?," "The patriotic significance of Civil Guard and Lotta Svärd organizations," and "Hitler and today's Germany" (Rauste, 1941).

PE lessons consisted of gymnastics, folk dance, and singing, running, ball, and game plays. During the war time, the contents of PE changed so that student teachers had to familiarize themselves with the regulations and skills of civil defense (Arto, 1941; Rautavuori & Karakoski, 1939). In addition, skiing lessons included the basics of orienteering; it was a new sport that was closely connected to defense (Ae:21; Ae:28; LVK 1939–1945). Student teachers had to learn to read a map and orienteer to the destination with and without a map (Vasara, 1997) to be able to teach the skill to their prospective pupils, too.

The war changed handicraft education, too. Due to the scarcity of material, handicraft education aimed at promoting thrifty lifestyle and skills. Student teachers learned how to darn socks or make useful pieces that one could not buy because of the hard times (Kaustinen, 1941). Because of the lack of materials, students circulated their handicrafts and introduced them as if their own. Anni told:

Due to the lack of material during the war time, the products of handicrafts lessons were a little bit of this and that. Others borrowed things from other college students; I had borrowed a bag for onions which I showed to the teacher educator. Those, who sat in the back row of the classroom, borrowed each other's works so that the same things were shown at the teacher's desk several times!

Textbooks included directions that the student teachers had to learn in order to become capable of enhancing Finnish children's healthy development. They also had to follow the insistence on moral-Christianity and teetotalism in their own lives (Paksuniemi & Määttä, 2011b; Paksuniemi, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2012). According to the text books used at teacher training colleges, student teachers were taught healthy life style that included physical exercise, teetotalism, hygiene, healthy diet, and sufficient rest. Teachers were also expected to pay attention to pupils' health, such as their sitting and writing positions (Pihkala, 1930). The text book Artturi

Salokannel's and Arvo Vartia's *Hygiene* was in use in 1934–1939, and the new text book that was introduced in the lessons of hygiene and temperance education in the fall 1946 was Vihtori Karpio's *A Temperance Text Book*. In this book, Karpio educated readers about the dangers of alcohol and the influence of drunkenness on life. According to the author, drinking alcohol has a connection with poverty, unemployment, the success of practice, the quality of rearing, the happiness of the family, social life, and the frailties of nature.

The college teachers had to punish a student if she could not follow the college rules of abstaining from going to dancing or to theatre. The rule of teetotalism was extremely rarely broken. Two students broke the college rules in the 1940s. One had visited the city hotel with her Swedish friend several times and had alcoholic beverages there. Another student, for her part, admitted she had had alcoholic beverages at the city hotel. Both of these students were expelled: the former for eleven months, and the latter permanently (Ca:3; Ca:4).

After the war years, the control decreased little by little. The spirit of the times was commonly more liberal than before the wars. The change took place also partly because in the 1940s and 1950s, some of the college students were over 30-year-old, tough veterans of war (see also Syväoja, 2004). Some of the male student teachers from the teacher training college of Kajaani had started smoking while serving at the front, and they found it extremely difficult to follow the smoking prohibition. The issue was discussed frequently with the rector of the college. He finally decided that he could allow smoking: teachers had to be understanding to student teachers' experiences at the front and its side effects (Manninen, 1990). Still, the reformed temperance education also aimed at producing more efficient employees. The thought of a civic society included the idea of the people's participation, share, encounter, and responsibility for other people and shared issues.

After the wars, Finland had to follow Soviet Union's insistence on removing some of the textbooks from schools and teacher training colleges. A commission was appointed to check the textbooks used in Finnish elementary schools and teacher training colleges. Books that had "erroneous sections" had to be revised or replaced. It meant sections that were demeaning Soviet Union, offensive comments, or right-wing extremist opinions. At least four textbook in geography, one in Finnish language, and two in history were taken out of use. Because of the depression, not all textbooks were removed but teachers had to hide sections needing revisions with paper and glue (Nurmi, 1989; Syväoja, 2007). Patriotic education that had been strong in Finland for a long time changed into civic education. The purpose was to educate Finnish citizens into solidarity so that they would join their strength to improve the country damaged in the war (Päiväsalo, 1971). Thus, a teacher's job was not just to teach in the classroom; the requirements insisted that after the school day the teachers continued their work by offering activities to the villagers as a part of the socialization purposes (Paksuniemi & Määttä, 2011b).

The war did not happen only at the front but all people fought against scarcity. A ministry of national welfare was established in 1939 in Finland and its task was to chart the food supplies in the whole country. The situation was bad. According to calculations, the nation would survive with the current stock only for half a year. Foreign trade was of no help because the situation in Europe was conflicting. The only way of guaranteeing the sufficiency of supplies was to limit citizens' food consumption (Jaatinen, 2003; Jermo, 1974). Anni described the hunger and life that hinged upon ticket. Even the smallest pleasures of eating had stuck in her mind:

Hunger was our continuous guest and that was the reality when food was regulated with tickets. Once, in a fall evening after studying hard with text books for hours, we were so hungry that we barely could read. –Say, do we have any tickets? I guess it was Lissu. –Why? –I think you are hungry because you are so quiet, and so am I. We started to ransack our belongings. I do not remember who found the precious ticket but after we did, we put on our jackets and hurried to the nearby café! It was open in the evenings. We decided to buy a French bread and cook something with it at home. We walked the bread under the arm along the central street our mouths watering when thinking about the forthcoming pleasure. We got so hungry. We noticed a dark gate in a wooden fence by the street and slipped in. We teared the packet open, broke off quite big pieces of bread and ooh, the enjoyment!

The whole Finnish nation was divided into groups along gender, age, and the physical demands of their professions. Each group had their daily, weekly, or monthly limits for food consumption. With these portions, the population remained able to work but hungry. According to estimations, a regular Finnish people lost about six kilograms (~13.2 lbs) during the war (Jaatinen, 2003).

#### 4. Discussion

The war years 1939–1945 were rough in Finland. However, post-war years were politically and economically difficult and therefore it took time before the teacher training colleges could operate fully. Although the peace was concluded, the war influenced the life in the Finnish society for a long time in many ways (Virrankoski, 1975; Jokipii, 1987).

Although teacher training was temporarily closed during the war, student teachers were expected to help during the war. This was important for such a small country like Finland: everyone had to contribute and do their share. Furthermore, the results of this study showed that the tasks and duties that were given to teachers and student teachers were carefully selected according to the contemporary principles of teacher education. During the war, the nationalist educational spirit strengthened in teacher training. Teachers were to raise children to Christianity, diligence, and sense of duty (Koski, 2001). This goal was reached by igniting the nationalist defense spirit in student teachers at the teacher training colleges. The task of the school and teachers was to turn Finns into a unitary nation in order to prevent any more disasters like the Civil War in 1918 was. Changes in the society were therefore also directed in teachers in the form of new kinds of demands (Kuikka, 2003; Rantala, 2001). Remarkably evinced by the archives and by the former student teachers' practically-oriented narratives, the education covered student teachers' mind and soul, physical shape, and leisure activities which all, because of the wars, were linked to the nationalist goals set for Finnish educational system and teacher training.

Simola, Kivinen, and Rinne (1997) remind that "when analyzing the pedagogical discourse, teacherhood and the profession of teacher educators in Finland, one has to keep in mind the strong traditional relationship between the state and the civil servants" (p. 879). Teacher education and its contents are, thus, closely tied to the societal situation and contemporary ideologies (Paksuniemi, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2012). National spirit was, indeed, emphasized in the college education (Halila, 1963; Isosaari, 1961) and it was an integral part of the teacher training college activity. According to studies, people at the colleges acted actively and unanimously in Christian circles, temperance movements, and patriotic parties (Paksuniemi, 2009; Paksuniemi & Määttä, 2011b; Paksuniemi, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2012; Halila, 1949, 1963; Hyrö, 2006; Nurmi, 1995; Rinne, 1989).

In this respect, Finland resembles the continental model of professionalization (see e.g., Evetts, 2012; cf. Jones, 1999). The state has guaranteed and legitimated the right for professional groups to carry out their work and to exercise power (Simola, Kivinen, & Rinne, 1997) although their work was strictly guided by the national pursuits (cf., Avis, 1994). Teachers were in central role "in the preservation of democracy for the future" (Cunningham & Gardner, 1999, p. 331) which was ensured by teachers controlling and cultivating children's physical and mental health (see also Fenton, 2007). Teacher training was considered the key in recognizing and enhancing the use of "national routines of everyday life where the national identity is located" (Fenton, 2007, p. 337). Indeed, war-time education was considered an important means to enhance national spirit among citizens (Cuban, 1993; Grosvenor, 1999).

In Finland, this task was to cover the whole nation. At the beginning of the 20 century, Finland was still strongly an agrarian society. Therefore, it was considered relevant to change the curricula of countryside schools, too (Isosaari, 1973). Those who graduated as teachers served in small two-teacher schools and took care of their educational task, their mission given by the state, diligently even in the most remote villages (Paksuniemi, 2009; Kilpimaa, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2012; Lakkala, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2013).

The study showed how the teacher training and teachers' tasks changed during the war years in Finland. Naturally, the emphases change all the time as the societies change. The contribution of studies like the one at hand is to augment the knowledge base relating to the service that professionals provide to society (Evans, 2008). Teachers' work will probably never be limited only to developing the cognitive skills of their pupils (see Esteve, 2000). But it was the war-time that opened eyes for the teachers' role in the development of post-war nation. Gardner and Cunningham (1999) studied British war-time teachers' work and describe this emerging understanding felicitously:

This was a recognition that it was not just their schooling, but also the welfare and well-being of children--and therefore of the future of the nation--that now rested in the hands of the teachers. Such recognition constituted a watershed for the reconstruction of teachers' professional sensibilities. It was a recognition to which we might realistically seek to trace many of the shifts in classroom life, in pedagogy and in professional culture which marked the post-war decades. (p. 336)

In Finland, this developmental process led finally to the decision of providing university-level teacher education along the emerging need for comprehensive education. Due to changes in the school system, it proposed that future teacher training should be provided at universities: the last elementary school teacher training colleges were closed in 1969 and teacher training was transferred to universities and faculties of education (KM 1969, 1975).

Teacher profession has always been respected in Finland (Jussila & Saari, 1991; Simola, 1995; Simola et al., 1997) and, especially during the war years of Finland, it was given the privilege to use its "advanced" knowledge (in a sense that Brett, 2001 describes the term) for the nation-wide purposes. By saying this, we do not want to

underestimate the significance of other professionals among which teachers and teacher educators were only one group of the important work force for the national development. However, what makes teachers' profession interesting, is that teachers were seen the professional educators of the whole nation, the future workforce, and by setting the example, they educated families too, in addition to pupils. And although the context of the study is Finland, the teachers' work during the Second World War included similar objectives in other countries too (Cunningham, 2000; Cunningham & Gardner, 1999; Foster, 1999; Giordano, 2004; Limond, 2000).

In this article, we have mainly discussed how the national purposes influenced teacher training and the contents of teachers' professionalism (see also Scribner, 1999). The educational reform that took place after the wars was a part of the national change in which teachers had a big role and yet, teachers' own experiences have often remained unspoken or unstudied (Lieberman, 1995). The viewpoint provided in this study combines student teachers' experiences with other primary sources. Remarkably, the diligence and national spirit expressed by the former students showed how the national emphases were manifested in practice and had become rooted in people's minds.

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