THE FISTE PROJECT FROM A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

One of the aims of the Socrates Comenius 2.1 action is to prepare programmes, courses, strategies or teaching material for training the staff involved in education. In this respect, in the frame of the "FISTE - A Future Way For In-Service Teacher Training Across Europe" (118766-2004-RO-COMENIUS-C21) the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training" was produced, the main product of the project that presents methods for integrating face to face and web-based learning tools. The first version of the course was designed in English, followed by 5 national versions in Romanian, Spanish, Finnish, Icelandic and Latvian. The on-line course was offered to the initial and in-service teachers by using an e-learning environment - BSCW (Basic Support for Cooperative Work) - a platform which supports asynchronous and synchronous cooperation between different partners over the Internet. Having in view that the project partnership is coming from countries with different levels of ICT introduction in their educational systems, the initial evaluation of the group offered interesting aspects which could lead to drawing a specific profile. The paper tries to summarize part of the teachers' main answers and offer an image of the teachers who are interested in participating in on-line courses related to introduction of ICT in training.

Keywords: Comenius 2.1, European Project, Profile, Initial / In-service Teacher Training.

INTRODUCTION

As a general fact, teachers involved in experimentation with ICT need a particular support from their colleagues and heads. On the one hand, both teachers and pupils need access to computers in good working condition (hardware, software and netware) - an important but not sufficient prerequisite of carrying out interesting work with ICT. On the other hand, they need technical assistance in order to be concentrated on the development of learning and teaching and not to be too much disturbed by the equipment itself. Beside those aspects, it is important to underline that all the teachers have to be open to assimilate the new teaching methods which involve the use of ICT in education and to be ready to implement these methods in their activities to motivate pupils to update their knowledge.

Trying to meet the specific needs related to the introduction of ICT in education, the "FISTE - A Future Way For In-Service Teacher Training Across Europe" (118766-2004-RO-COMENIUS-C21) project was focused on finding new ways on how teachers can learn and upgrade their knowledge and teaching methods by using ICT. This aim is well framed in the Socrates Comenius 2.1 action: to prepare programmes, courses, strategies or teaching material for training the staff involved in education.

In this sense, one of the main aspects of the project was involving the teachers as participants in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training".

The Evaluation of the Project

On the European project level the evaluation varied and had many objectives and targets: the objectives were set for the project and the outputs produced in the project. The impact of the work of a project as well as the way of doing evaluation itself was within the project. A Survival Kit for European Project Management Bienzle (2004) gave very strict and concrete advice for evaluation. 'In the context of European project work, evaluation was a process which supported the project and acted as a check on whether the targets had been met. It allowed the results to be improved based upon judgments made

about the value and quality of the project and it simplified decision making and assisted with fundamental changes in the project, should these were necessary.

An evaluation strategy agreed together within the partnership is a basis for evaluation criteria and methods of doing it. Evaluation was a methodologically diverse area using both qualitative and quantitative methods such as case studies, survey research, statistical analysis, etc. Evaluation data can be qualitative and quantitative or mixed. The structure of evaluation can be very complicated according to project objectives and targets, duration of a project and partnership.

At least the following issues should be considered when defining and organizing the evaluation of a project:

- To know where and on what to start
- To follow the work done
- To be able to learn and develop the national and European expertise
- To be able to react and continue or alter the way and content of working
- To be able to make final conclusions on the basis of ex pert evaluations
- To be able to present the work done for an external evaluator
- To assure the funding resources the quality of the project
- To be ready for future challenges and co-operation

Dillon and Åhlberg have underlined in their recent Journal article in 2006, Dillon P. & Åhlberg M. (2006) that quality in on-line learning and in-service education is associated among other things with work in real and authentic matters which are personally meaningful and professionally relevant and connect theory and practice by constructing integrating theories of participants own. This can be seen as criteria for evaluating the substance of the project. The evaluation of management presents the efforts and weaknesses that the project work has faced. The impact of the project can be analysed on the basis of the two mentioned categories by taking a selection of data into the interpretation as an internal evaluation. External evaluation is an outside analysis of the project work and results, and helps the project partners to get a different view on the work done.

The FISTE-project started in 2004. The project was aimed at developing in-service teacher education for today and especially for future on a European level. In essence, the project was aimed at finding new ways of how to teach in-service teachers in in-service teacher training and how the teachers themselves could learn and upgrade their knowledge and teaching methods by using ICT. The project tried from the very beginning to find innovative and efficient ideas by organizing national and European courses for promoting the pedagogical use of ICT Hämäläinen T. and Lindfors E.(2007). The partners of the project were universities from Finland, Romania, Latvia, Iceland and an in-service teacher training centre from Spain. This means seven partners from five European countries, the old members of EU and the newcomers worked together and gained experience from different levels and stages of the project Lindfors E. (2007).

Table 1 presents details of how the partnership made the evaluation. There was an evaluation group organised as a sub-group of the project. Basically the evaluation was the responsibility of the group which designed, planned and fulfilled the evaluation. The group made detailed plans on how to evaluate and assess the whole project and decided what tools to use. The project work was divided into monitoring and evaluation levels as the Creation stage, the testing stage and the Dissemination stage. This helped to plan the timing followed the project work and in evaluation.

Table 1 shows the huge evaluation work made in the project. Because of the importance of the evaluation, it was kept in mind from the beginning of the project, and specific monitoring and evaluation dimensions were agreed in the application formula. The application formula (2004) of the project were defined. These were:

- The organization of the project in order to achieve the objectives on National and European levels.
- The starting level and development of in-service teachers during the project.

The Topic of Evaluation	Level of Evaluation	The Target of Evaluation	The Method	Times in the Project			
				1st year	2nd year	3rd year	Total
I. The objectives of the project: 1) Evaluation dimensions agreed in the project application 2) Outputs 3) Dissemination	Institutional / National / European	on-line course, national	On-line questionnaire	-	1	1	2
		On-line course, European	On-line questionnaire	-	-	1	1
		Database	Qualitative and quantitative evaluation		1	1	2
		Teaching materials	Qualitative evaluation			1	1
		Assessment tools	Qualitative evaluation	1	1	1	3
		Project's Web-site	Qualitative evaluation		1	1	2
		Dissemination seminar	Questionnaires: Fixed and open ended questions			1	1
		Research results and articles	Classification of the publishing journal			1	1
		Additional materials	Qualitative evaluation			1	1
		School network	Qualitative and quantitative evaluation			1	1
		Students' final products national	Qualitative expert evaluation		1	-	1
		Best practices guide	Qualitative expert evaluation			1	1
		Students' final products European	Qualitative expert evaluation	-	-	1	1
		Implementation feedback	Qualitative expert evaluation			1	1
II. The management of the project	Institutional	Project meeting	Questionnaires: Fixed and open ended questions	2	2	3	7
		Project work	Fixed and open ended questions	1	1	1	3
		Project meeting summary	Qualitative summary	2	2	3	7
	European	Project work summary	Qualitative summary	1	1	1	3
		Project management Final	Qualitative summary	-	-	1	1
III. The impact of the project	Internal evaluation	Logs and stats	Quantitative data and summaries from every year: the use of technologies and participating				
		Evaluation dimensions					
	External evaluation	The final evaluation on the basis of internal report	Qualitative collections of specified data Expert evaluation	-	-	1	1

Table 1. The Evaluation made in the FISTE- Project Detailed Table.

- The experiences and expertise developing in all participating institutions.
- The advantages and disadvantages of developing the face-web-method (blended learning) from the future perspective.

The evaluation is presented in Table 1. There are three different perspectives: (i). the evaluation of gaining the objectives, (ii); The evaluation of the project management and project work in order to reach the set objectives and (iii); The evaluation of impacts of the project as a whole.

The Distribution of the participants enrolled in the on-line course

The on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training" as a main output of the project presents methods for integrating face to face and web-based learning tools. It was designed by the partnership in English and translated and adapted in 5 different versions: Romanian, Spanish, Finnish, Icelandic and Latvian. Two core units were created for emphasizing the importance of the unit pedagogy / technology in the educational context:

- Unit 3: "Pedagogical Use of ICT in Teaching and Learning" was designed as the learning material that

supports teachers' pedagogical use of ICT in their teaching practice and tried to offer new ideas on how to organize teaching as learner-learner oriented, emphasizing social interaction, particularly cooperative and collaborative learning.

- Unit 4: "Using Technology" was designed to present new ICT techniques that can be used in the teaching process as alternatives to the traditional teaching methods.

The on-line course was offered to the initial / in-service teachers by using the BSCW (Basic Support for Cooperative Work) e-learning environment, an electronic platform that supports asynchronous and synchronous cooperation between different partners over the Internet (Gorghiu et al., 2006).

245 initial and in-service teachers from the partner countries were enrolled in the on-line course and started its activities through the BSCW platform. In the beginning of the course, the participants were required to fill the initial evaluation. The results of the initial evaluation gave a possibility to design a specific profile of the teacher interested in participating in European on-line courses in relation to the use of ICT.

The target groups were allocated to be trained in the partner institutions and the distribution of the participants is presented in Figure 1.

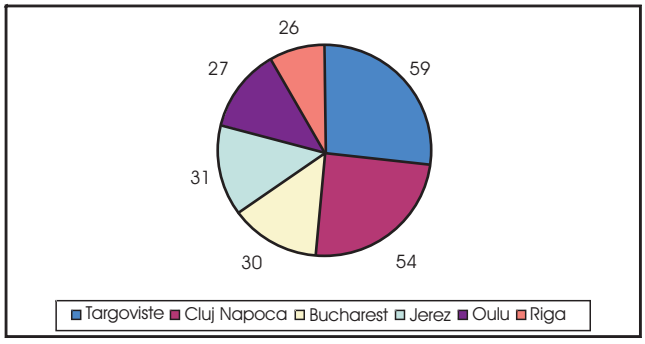

Figure 1. The distribution of the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

Results and Discussion

First of all, the teacher's profile takes into account the participation in previous ICT courses (Figure 2) and Pedagogical use of ICT courses (Figure 3). It is important to mention that almost 50% of the participants have never

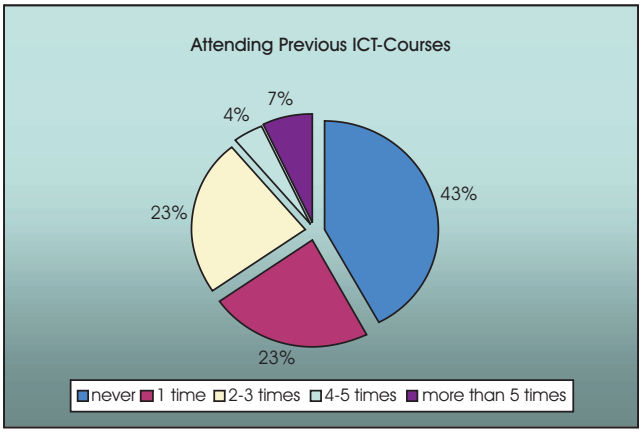

Figure 2. Statistics on attending previous ICT courses by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

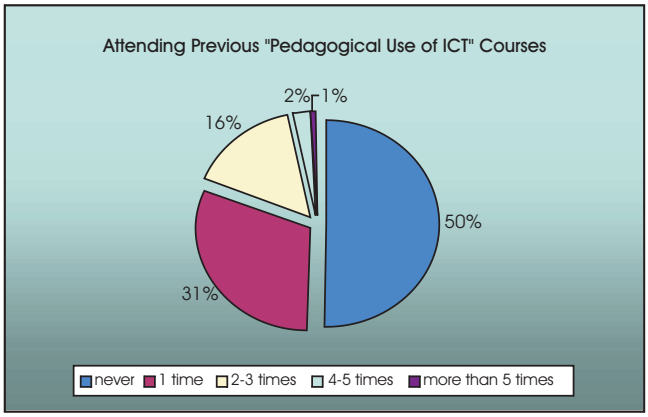

Figure 3. Statistics on attending previous Pedagogical Use of ICT courses by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

been involved in courses oriented on the use of ICT in education (Thorsteinsson and Page, 2007a).

School ICT facilities are playing an important role on the development of learning and teaching based on new teaching methods which involve using ICT in education. Unfortunately, working with a computer at school (Figure 4) and having the Internet access at school (Figure 5) is still under discussion for almost 50% of the participants.

In addition, using a computer (Figure 6) or Internet (Figure 7) for preparing lessons and materials for pupils is another weak point for the participants. However, the computers and the Internet became common to be used in lesson preparation for over 50% of the participants(Thorsteinsson and Page, 2007b).

Concerning the implementation of ICT tools in the classrooms (Figure 8), an important number of teachers

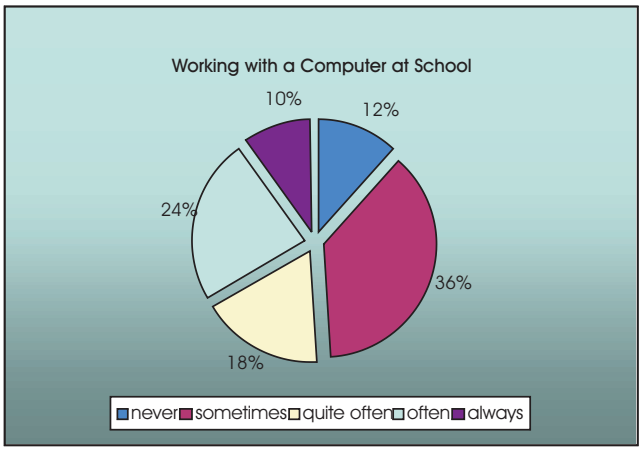

Figure 4. Statistics on working with a computer at school expressed by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

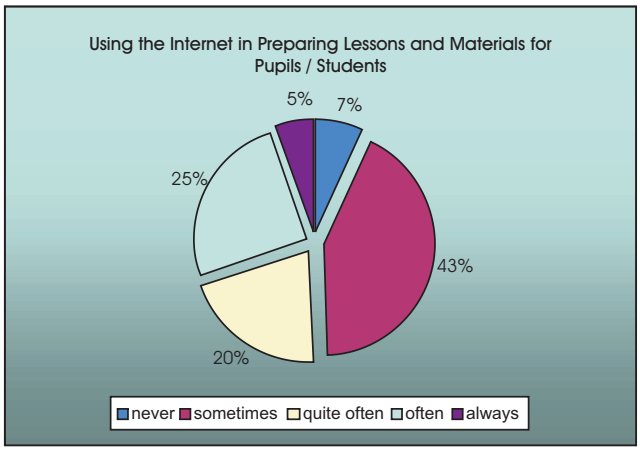

Figure 7. Statistics on using the Internet in preparing lessons and materials by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

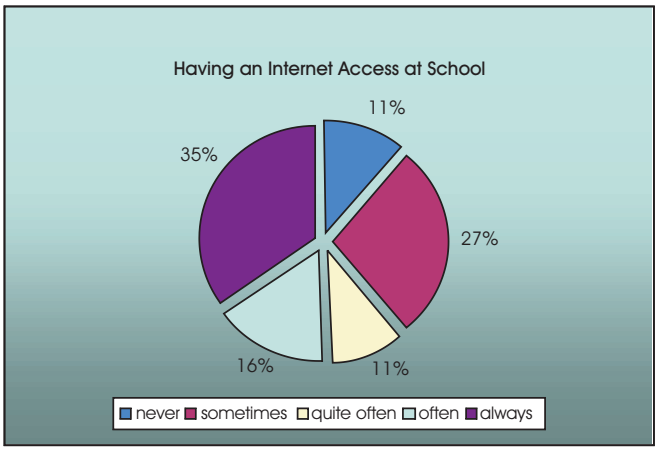

Figure 5. Statistics on having an Internet access at school expressed by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

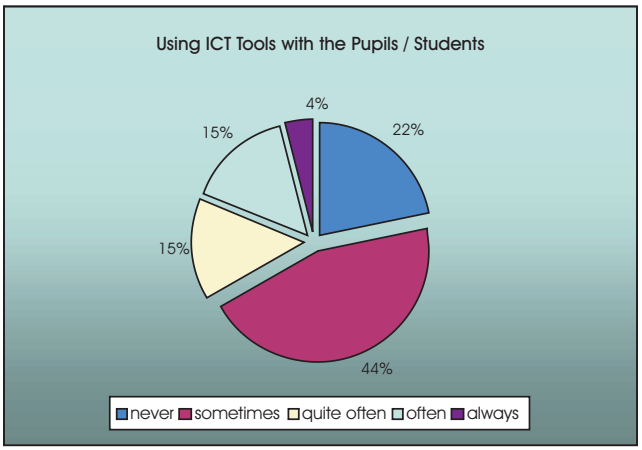

Figure 8. Statistics on using ICT tools with the pupils by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

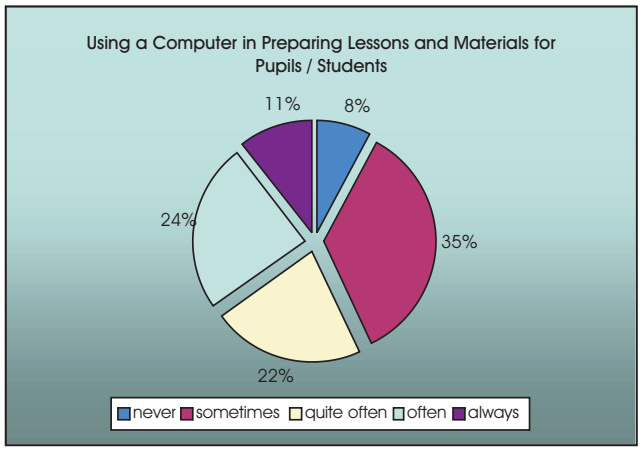

Figure 6. Statistics on using a computer in preparing lessons and materials by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

(22%) declared that they did not use these tools before the participation in the on-line course. At the same time, 69% of the participants have never introduced Internet platforms in their lessons (Figure 9).

The participants expressed some reasons for joining the European on-line course (Figure 10). According to their answers, 47% of them expected to learn to use ICT and 46% defined a clear reason related to educational purposes (Thorsteinsson and Page, 2007c).

Finally, the participants mentioned the main aim to achieve after attending the on-line course (Figure 11). In this case, their principal specification was directed on how to apply ICT with pupils (25%) (Thorsteinsson and Page, 2007d).

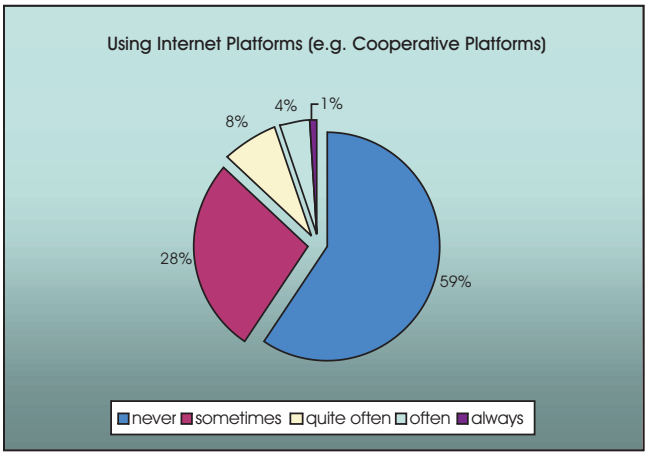

Figure 9. Statistics on using Internet platforms in classrooms by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

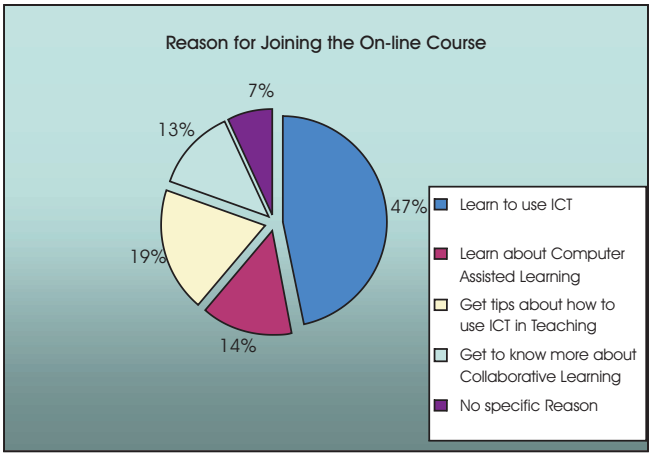

Figure 10. Statistics on the reasons for joining the course expressed by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

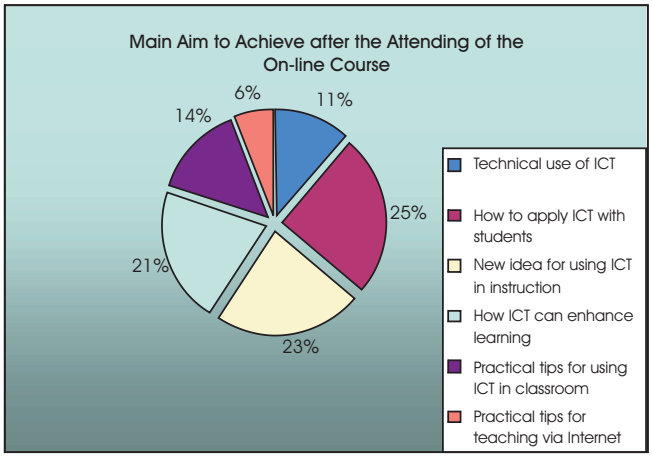

Figure 11. Statistics on the main aim to achieve after the attending of the course expressed by the participants enrolled in the on-line course "Integrating ICT in Traditional Training"

Implication and Recommendation

Teachers have to prepare themselves for a changing world to develop their skills and talents so that they can influence the direction of change. In-service teacher trainers can take advantage of rapid communication and networking with time, data, people, and contacts. The potential that computer technology has for the roles, responsibilities, and effectiveness of school counsellor's has only begun to be explored.

Change in in-service teacher education and training include the delivery of relevant multidisciplinary technology for schools used by educators that provide exposure to real life cases. Active preparation to work with students depends on wide-ranging preparation in multi disciplinary discussion. Further information's for educators who want to start using ICT and ODL in their profession can be gained from the Fiste projects official website http://fiste.ssai.valahia.ro/.

Following are recommendations to teacher trainers who plan to re-educate using the opportunities for ICT and ODL in their profession:

- A stable server that will allow for continuous communication is necessary to the success of the collaboration. Students need to be able to access the server any time of the day or night.
- It is important that the technical skills needed to participate can be learned in a short period of time. Otherwise, the class focus shifts from multi disciplinary collaboration to learning sophisticated technology.
- Arranging for technical support for students, who experience difficulty, furthers the likelihood for success and replication by students in their professional lives.
- If you are prepared to provide information to students about free Internet resources you can provide a much needed service for students who lack technology in their homes.
- Mentally walk through your guidelines to students several times. Directions need to be specific and succinct. Providing a vocabulary list for some

students reduces the need to repeatedly explain Internet language.

- Try to determine both the benefits and barriers of having students interact via the Internet.
- Consider if this form of interaction and problem-solving meet your course objectives.
- Before meeting with students, it is helpful if all instructors go through several trial-runs in which they work through examples of each type of assignment that will be expected of the students.
- It is vital that you and/or the co-teacher have adequate skills to demonstrate the use of the technology.
- It generally takes at least one and a half hours to adequately demonstrate to students how this form of communication works. Repetition is necessary and each individual student needs to have access to a computer to walk through the process.
- Allowing students to demonstrate their skills to fellow students, helps ensure learning.
- Know what prerequisite skills are needed for effectively participating with this form of communication.
- Evaluate if this is just a gimmicky idea, or are the skills and techniques valuable in professional preparation and development.
- Students need to understand the rules and roles for communicating via the Internet.

Conclusions

Taking into account the profile presented above, some important aspects have to be mentioned: (a) Most of the teachers were interested in ICT and its pedagogical aspects in the teaching / learning process, independent of their knowledge concerning ICT or their direct access to the computers; (b) ICT became a real challenge for Eastern European teachers - many requests were expressed for subscribing to the on-line courses.

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