

# Community-Oriented PDS Programs: Professionalizing Teachers, Supporting Learners, and Reshaping Discourses Around Teaching

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**ABSTRACT:** The teacher shortage calls for innovative recruitment, development, and retention practices. This qualitative inquiry highlights the Academy for Future Teachers (AFT), a teacher-cadet program for high-schoolers interested in teaching. We endeavored to understand how the varied participants' in AFT (high schoolers, teacher residents, and master teachers) perceived and experienced development and cultivation of their practiced identities of teacher through participation in this PDS program. Stakeholders in three different roles (high school participants, preservice teacher-residents; and master teachers/AFT faculty) offered perspectives on the role of AFT in their respective teaching trajectories through interviews and written reflections. Through *invivo* and pattern coding within participant groups, participants indicated AFT supported prospective, preservice, and current educators alike while serving learners in our community. Such community-oriented partnerships can create mutually developing opportunities that affirm faculty across university/P-12 settings, serve learners and communities well, and elevate our vocation.

*NAPDS Essentials: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8*

Professional Development School (PDS) networks are mutual and reciprocal commitments between university and P-12 partner schools to integrate the preparation and support of teacher candidates and in-service teacher development through simultaneous renewal of faculty across P-20 contexts and shared inquiry focused on increasing student achievement (Fisher & Many, 2014; NCATE, 2001; Neapolitan & Tunks, 2009). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine one long-standing PDS initiative, a community-embedded teacher recruitment and development summer camp, which we found to be a quintessential representation of a PDS networks' commitment to mutual and reciprocal development of in-service and preservice educators. We centered this inquiry on the question, "How do the varied participants' in the Academy for Future Teachers (high schoolers, teacher residents, and master teachers) perceive and experience development and cultivation of their practiced identities of teacher?" By identifying ways that each group of participants' in our PDS-sponsored community-

embedded teacher recruitment initiative (high schoolers, teacher residents, and master teachers) developed and supported their teacher identities nested within this multifaceted PDS initiative, we hoped to uncover meaningful ways to recruit and develop possible teachers, provide enriching community-based summer programming, and retaining and reinvigorating practicing teachers. In the sections that follow, we provide a brief overview of the issues necessitating this inquiry, including teacher shortages, the lack of summer opportunities for P-12 students, and current teacher-cadet programs. We continue by introducing the teacher-recruitment program analyzed in this study, the Academy for Future Teachers (AFT). We follow with a discussion of Communities as Practice (CoP) as the primary theoretical lens by which to understand how AFT creates new spaces to foster teacher recruitment, development, and retention especially in terms of achieving a more diverse teaching force.

## The U.S. Teacher Shortage

The United States is entering into what many believe is a teacher shortage crisis. Between the years of 2009 and 2013, there was a 31% decrease in the number of students who chose to enroll in teacher preparation programs, representing a loss of almost 225,000 future educators (Heiser, 2015). The United States Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education

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has reported increased numbers of states experiencing teacher shortages during the past 25 years, with our state experiencing an accelerated shortage within the past 15 years (Clement, 2015). Strauss (2015) further analyzed this DOE report and wrote that in many states' teacher shortages are often in the areas of middle-level education, special education, mathematics, general science, art, reading, foreign languages, and teachers in English as a Second Language and Bilingual education classrooms. Similarly, Voke (2003) noted that certain geographic regions of the United States had significant shortages in specializations such as bilingual education, science, and special education. However, (Voke, 2003) argued that the teacher shortage was not simply a question of the number of qualified educators, but was a disparity in the distribution of qualified and willing teachers for both rural and urban schools, and noting that this shortage particularly impacted schools serving a significant number of students of color or who are economically disadvantaged. Similarly, Yaffe (2016) noted that shortages have been historically common in both isolated rural communities as well as urban communities. Yaffe argued that these shortages likely reflected a range of factors, both macro issues such as the national economy and the climate and culture of each individual school. To address these economic realities, Yaffe (2016) recommended that superintendents and school leaders work to mitigate this shortage by helping candidates complete certification and credentialing, recruiting and hiring earlier and from a broader constituency, and offering signing bonuses and perks to encourage individuals taking up teaching in their districts and local schools.

### Limited Access to Safe and Meaningful Summer Opportunities for P-12 Students

A complex social and economic consideration which strains many families and communities is the dearth of meaningful, enriching, and engaging summer activities for P-12 students during the summer months when public schools are not in session. Dell'Antonia (2016) reported that in 2011, the Center for American Progress found 22 states which compiled waiting lists of families who requested childcare assistance. In these states, less than 1 in seven children who qualified for state or community direct child care subsidies actually received this necessary support, evidencing that the need for childcare assistance and meaningful and safe spaces for P-12 students significantly outpaced the resources available. Many families struggle to find and access supportive and meaningful childcare during the summer months. Dell'Antonia (2016) stated about one in four families in the US have a non-working parent available to care for children during these months. In 2013, just over half of the surveyed parents expressed their desire for their children to participate in an affordable and meaningful summer program. Dell'Antonia (2016) found that in 2014, parents surveyed planned an average of \$958 on summer expenses per child and those families for whom the cost for summer learning and camps was prohibitive either had to leave their children at

home alone or piece together support and care from their support system of friends and family. Access to childcare remains a significant barrier for many families not only during the academic year, but also and especially during the summer vacation and other days when schools are not in session.

One university in our community constructed a list of neighboring colleges and universities that have offered summer enrichment programs serving learners from grades P-12 in the past few years (Atlanta Academic Enrichment Programs, 2014). While the list included seven local colleges and universities, and some of these programs do offer STEM-related programming, many of them would pose financial difficulties for families, as participation ranges in cost from free (such as the program we offer to possible teachers) to \$5,000.

Only our program, AFT is explicitly focused on both STEM and teaching. Additionally, our program seems to be the only one associated with a college or department of education. Our program is also intentional about making sure it is accessible to the community by supporting the financial needs of high-school participants. Not only is there no fee for participating, as it is underwritten by grants and university support, but the additional financial needs of the participants are a priority. High School students engaged in AFT are given meal cards to purchase meals on campus, a month of transportation on our city bus/rail system, and are also provided a stipend for their participation.

*Recruitment initiatives: Teacher-cadet programs.* There are several models for teacher cadet/recruitment programs across the US and understanding them individually and collectively provides insights for the possibility of this model as a recruitment strategy for educators. The South Carolina Cadet Program has a model for curriculum that several other states have adopted in their efforts to address this need for teacher recruitment. This model, frequently partnered with local colleges and built to encourage academically talented high school students to pursue teaching as a career, integrates into high school curriculums, with courses offered during one or two semesters of high school. This model provides opportunities for "cadets" to earn college credit as high school students while experiencing and considering four themes: learning, the profession of teaching, the classroom, and more generally, experiencing education. Berry et. al (1988) found that, in addition to being a meaningful recruitment strategy, those who participated in the SC cadet program benefitted in other ways as they learned about children, parenting, schooling, teaching and preparing for college, whether or not they decided to choose teaching as a vocation.

Much more contemporary cadet programs are also helpful models. In New Jersey, The Center for Future Educators at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) implemented several initiatives to recruit middle and high school students of diverse backgrounds to consider a career in teaching, specifically in hard to staff and least-well-served schools and districts and content areas of shortage. One of these programs, The Urban Teacher Academy (UTA) at TCNJ is an intensive two-week summer experience in teaching in urban centers specifically for recruiting potential

Table 1. Description of Groups and Roles in AFT

Role	Number of Individuals in that Role	Description of Role	Number Participating in Research Study
Master teachers	6	Professional teachers in K-12 or university settings, recognized for the excellence of their pedagogy and serving as mentors and models to the high-school students engaged in AFT.	6
Teacher residents	7	Post-Baccalaureate teacher candidates working towards initial teacher licensure.	7
High school students engaged in AFT	52	High school students engaged in the urban context of AFT summer program and interested in future careers in education.	34
Middle school learners	Volunteers from a university-sponsored initiative	Middle school students participating in [university-based] or partner summer enrichment programs, receiving instruction from the high-school students engaged in AFT.	0
Preschool learners	Children enrolled in our on-campus child development center	Preschool students at [university]-sponsored daycare, receiving instruction from high-school students engaged in AFT during their week on Early Childhood Education	0

teachers of diverse backgrounds. During the Urban Teacher Academy, TCNJ professors and experienced teachers join potential teacher candidates in taking field trips to local schools, educational institutions, and community-based educational programs. At the end of the two weeks, high school students engaged in UTA work with elementary level students enrolled in a summer camp, trying on a possible teacher identity as they teach math, science, and physical education lessons to the elementary students. New York created high schools as training spaces for future teachers, including the Future Teachers Academy and the Educators Rising Clubs (Viega, 2017).

*Our teacher recruitment/cadet program: The Academy for Future Teachers.* The Academy for Future Teachers (AFT) is a three-week summer program for local high-school students held on our university campus. AFT is a project of the Collaboration and Resources for Encouraging and Supporting Transformations in Education (CREST-Ed) partnership, a collection of projects funded by a \$7.5 million Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. AFT provides teaching and learning opportunities for individuals interested in teaching, particularly in math or science, or a career in STEM. High-school students engaged in AFT review math and science content, participate in workshops and fields trips, and develop tutoring and teaching skills and an initial understanding of pedagogy. This culminates in teaching lessons to pre-school and middle school aged students. Master teachers (university faculty and veteran P-12 teachers from the community) and PDS teacher residents collaborate and offer innovative learning and teaching opportunities to AFT high-schoolers.

### Theoretical Perspectives: Identity Formation in Sociocultural Contexts Embedded Within Communities of Practice

AFT is a socioculturally situated community of practice where individuals with a range of experiences and expertise are

developed and supported in the role of “Teacher” and ushered in to meaningful participation within that community and identity. These theoretical perspectives are described below.

*Identity formation in non-neutral spaces and sociocultural contexts.* Identity is often theorized as improvised, in process, and continuously authored as we inhabit multiple social and relational contexts (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Norton, 2000). As individuals interact with others, they begin to imagine new possibilities for their lives individually and/or collectively, constructing different identities within social contexts. Considering ‘identity in practice’ (Holland et al., 1998) as fluid and constructed nested in communities helps us understand how individuals try out and engage in behaviors that display particular identities, mediating and making meaning from their social experiences connecting to their own prior experiences, choices and behaviors, language and tools (Hawkins, 2004).

The construct of Communities of Practice (CoP), theorized by Lave and Wenger (1990) specifically illuminates the complexity and mutuality of our community-oriented teacher recruitment program, AFT. Communities of Practice, like concentric circles, consist of members who are central in the community due to the experience and expertise in the craft/domain that brings the community together (in this case teaching). As individuals who are new or novice to the community, they may try out and try on the actions of ‘teacher’ through taking up the social practices, language, and tools of teaching and interact with others as they improve their craft. Lave and Wenger postulated that novice members of the community of practice engage in legitimate peripheral participation and are scaffolded by more central members of the community toward increased expertise, becoming increasingly more central to the community (moving from peripheral participation toward more core involvement). CoP situates a practice (such as teaching) in the complex sociocultural spaces of mutual relationships.

*Situating AFT as a Community of Practice.* AFT is intended to foster meaningful participation and formation and support of “teacherly” identities in this shared sociocultural context in which master narratives about teaching and teachers are not always generous or supportive. Our cadet program, AFT, is a complex set of social spaces and a community of practice wherein high schoolers, who are considering teaching or STEM vocationally, have an opportunity to engage in scaffolded social practices that affirm learning and teaching across university/P-12/community spaces. AFT is an effort to elevate our vocation and to connect with the strengths and needs of all in the community of practice and our communities at large to support meaningful learning and student success. Each group of participants in AFT were varied in their roles in ways that reflected their positions in the Community of Practice and Identity of ‘Teacher.’ Through AFT, these groups and individuals interacted in complex ways fostering deepening connection to ‘teacher’ identities and toward more central participation in the role of teacher through engagement in this sociocultural community.

## Methods

This manuscript presents data from a qualitative study conducted during summer 2017 at AFT aimed at understanding participant perspectives and experiences through analyzing interviews and written reflections. The research question that guided this research was “How do the varied participants’ in the CoP of AFT (high schoolers, teacher residents, and master teachers) perceive and experience development and cultivation of their practiced identities of teacher?” We are hopeful that these perspectives can further inform our program and similar programs aimed at teacher recruitment while helping develop broader strategies for elevating our vocation and the discourses around teaching.

## Participants & Data Sources

Out of the 52 high-school students (sophomores through recently graduated seniors) participating in the urban AFT, 34 agreed to participate and were interviewed using a structured-interview protocol about their experiences with the program, their perceptions of teaching, and their perceptions of STEM. The majority of high school students engaged in AFT were girls (78%) and identified as Black or African American (90%). Six faculty (one African American male, one White male, two African American females and one White female) were interviewed using a structured interview protocol to illuminate their experiences and reasons for participating in AFT year after year. The faculty years in teaching at the P-12 level ranged from six years to 35 years. Seven teacher residents (three who were finishing their certification and residency year: one White female, one African American female, and one African American male; and four who were beginning their certification and residency year: three White males and one White

female). These teacher residents also wrote reflections daily and weekly and throughout the AFT program, noting the lessons and insights they had gained from participating and from supporting learners. As mediational spaces (Golombek & Johnson, 2004), these reflections created opportunities for teacher residents to consider their experiences and collaborations in AFT in light of their developing theoretical and pedagogical understandings. While there are three AFT sites across the state (rural, urban, and coastal) all high schoolers and teacher resident perspectives were from the urban context—a well-established program in its thirteenth year of operation. Master teacher perspectives from P-12 and the university context represented all three sites. To protect participant identity, no names or identifying information are used in explicating the findings. Further, participant data is presented as an aggregate for each category of the CoP to further protect participant identity.

## Data Analysis

First, researching faculty and GRAs categorized the data based on type of participant (the 34 students interviewed, the six teachers interviewed, and written reflections from the seven teacher residents). We combined the data across each group of participants in order to understand how each category of individuals involved in AFT experienced their involvement. Analyzing data within each category of participants as an aggregate allowed us to focus on the characteristics of that component of the CoP to understand how the AFT experience impacted their teaching identity. Analyzing data from all of the teachers, teacher-residents, and the majority of the high-school students was an effort to ensure that the analytic process and resultant themes reflected representativeness of those engaged with AFT (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013). Next, we used in vivo coding to categorize using verbatim words and phrases from the data in order to extract general ideas and convergent perspectives noted by participants within groups. According to Saldaña (2009), in vivo coding “honors participant’s voice” and is especially useful when research includes youth participants, as their voices are at risk of marginalization and “coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult’s understanding of their cultures and worldview” (p. 74). Then, within each of the participant categories, we returned to the in vivo codes and utilized pattern coding (Saldaña, 2009) to synthesize resultant concepts and to reveal themes capturing the essence of participants’ perspectives about AFT as a multi-faceted teacher recruitment/development strategy. To consider and minimize the effect of researcher bias during the analytic process, pattern codes were discussed amongst the researching faculty and GRAs (some of whom were also participants in the role of teacher-residents) to ensure consensus during the secondary coding process that the themes identified reflected participants’ perspectives, as classified by initial in vivo codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

## Findings

Perspectives from the different participant groups at AFT indicated that this PDS initiative had positive implications for prospective, preservice, and current educators alike while serving and supporting learners in our community. The findings are presented by category of participants and the in vivo and pattern coding which emerged through analysis of their interviews and reflections.

### High-School Students Engaged in AFT: Perspectives of Participants on the Contributions of AFT

High school students engaged in AFT revealed that their participation in AFT provided them with opportunities to re-view the vocation of teaching by re-viewing the teaching vocation by (a) professionalizing and complexifying the “role of the teacher;” (b) feeling the impact teachers make on students and society; and (c) trying on the identity of teacher.

*Re-viewing vocation: Professionalizing and complexifying the “role of the teacher.”* High school students engaged in AFT indicated that their experience trying on and taking up practices of ‘teacher’ as they planned, taught, and reflected on lessons in STEM for preschool and middle school learners offered them an inside perspective which helped them re-view the vocation of teaching. One explained how their three-week experience as a participant in AFT, and particularly the collaboration with learners of different ages was perspective changing, saying: “I just really think that AFT really changes your aspect on education and it really gives you an inside look on what teachers do every day, even though it’s just a 15-day camp.”

The inside look and experiences with teaching as a vocation made apparent to some participants the complexity of the role of teacher and the effort and intention that the role requires. This participant shared: “The program has taught me that teachers have way more on their plate than I thought they had.” Many teachers would agree with this sentiment of it being “way more on their plate” than those outside of the vocation would expect and the idea that teaching is “a lot” of responsibility and work. Another participant gained perspective into the complexity of planning and preparation in order to differentiate and meet the needs of each learner, stating: “But now that I actually got to teach, it just showed me. . .how prepared you have to be for the students, ’cause a whole bunch of scenarios will pop up.”

Shifting participant perspectives came from “an inside look” at the role of teaching that participants gained during AFT. They reported that these insights helped them have a more nuanced perspective that professionalized their teachers and complexified the vocation. One participant acknowledged the ways that their understanding of teaching and teachers had become more complex through their participation in AFT, saying: “Not everyone gets an opportunity like this to learn how to connect with your students and how to teach. People think teaching is just giving information. I learned something different here, and I want to apply it.” This participant particularly began

to see teaching as more than just offering information to students, but came to view connecting to students as a primary and crucial component of teaching. As participants shifted their thinking about the teaching profession, they came to note that teaching is an effortful and intentional vocation wherein educators respond to the needs of individual learners. High school students engaged in AFT noted the ways that their understanding of teaching and teachers became more complex through their participation and hoped to apply this complexity, responsiveness, and ingenuity of teaching that they had discovered through their engagement in this community of practice. They also began to note the significant impact of the role of teaching.

*Re-viewing vocation: Feeling the impact teachers make on students and society.* Participants noted that one of the most critical opportunities afforded to participants as they collaborated with younger learners in AFT was an acknowledgement of the type of impact on others and on society that teaching offered. One participant explained:

Even though I was here last summer, it’s been a full complete year, some of the children still remembered my face. They were like, “Hey, you were here last year. I remember this and this.” So, it’s just really interesting to see how, even though I’m 17, not that much older than middle schoolers, they still remember and they still see some of the impact that my lesson plans had on them. So, that just solidified, Oh, my gosh. Being a teacher is just so amazing because you get to see your influence and impact on students.

A second participant came to see the role of teacher as one which helped facilitate the goals and growth of learners so that they could become “anything they want,” and noted the ripples of impact of the role across time, saying:

Teaching is not about how much fun it is, but you’re actually helping somebody. Whether they want to be a teacher or not, they can be anything they want, but you’re still helping them reach their goal, like teachers before—the ones who helped you— did.

Another participant who noted that teaching had always been a vocational option explained that the possibility of contributing to the lives of others in significant ways was an important draw to teaching, stating:

I like to cater to the paths of people who don’t have other options. I like to push ’em towards the right track. Or, with teaching, you can help a kid find something they’re passionate about or something they wanna do with the future. And to be able to help somebody find a purpose, or find a goal that they wanna reach . . . And doing anything you can to help ’em reach that goal, I think, is just really a great thing. For you and for that next generation. That’s your hand

at making this world a better place. And in the end, that's really all you can do or ask for when you're gone.

This articulation of vocation as a path of contribution to the lives of others and the world was important to many, even though they noted that the vocation itself was not as respected as it should be. One participant explained this tension, saying "I feel like teachers are kind of underappreciated but teachers, you need them because no one would be where they are now without teachers." This participant reported being able to see themselves choose this vocation despite the social context, stating, "You see how much of an impact teachers have and I would like to see myself impact students like me." After participating in AFT, high schoolers felt that contributing to the lives of others in meaningful and lasting ways was an important draw to the teaching vocation.

*Re-viewing self and vocation: Trying on the identity of teacher.* Viewing themselves as possible teachers by trying on the identity alongside younger learners was critically important to many of the high-school participants. AFT offered the opportunity to see teaching as something that they could do and could imagine choosing since they had explored that identity through these initial teaching experiences.

One participant who had already intended to become a teacher shared the impact of having the opportunity to try on the role with real learners, stating:

This actually made me want to become a teacher more by completing this program, because. . . [I] actually got hands-on things to do, and I was able to teach kids, and I wasn't able to do that at my school.

Another shared the ways that focusing on engagement and understanding while working to meet the learning needs of students reinforced what had been an initial interest in teaching as a vocation, explaining:

Before [AFT] I already had the idea of being a teacher, but after coming, I do really want to be a teacher now. 'Cause I think before, I just thought of teaching students, but this taught me the different strategies. . . Teaching middle school and elementary, it gives me a different idea of how to keep your kids engaged and how the main goal is just to get them to understand what you want them to learn. And so I think that really helps me and makes me want to become a teacher even more.

Another explained she did not have any intentions to be a teacher before AFT, stating, "I have no teaching aspect before whatsoever before coming here. Then all of a sudden when I came here I'm like "Oh, I can teach!" This participant reported that they particularly appreciated this opportunity to try on the identity of teacher at AFT "because, it not only teaches you how to be a teacher, it teaches you how to be a better teacher."

Planning for and teaching learners across the developmental trajectory created opportunities for high school students engaged in AFT to imagine themselves teaching learners across a range of contexts and content, expanding their vision of the possible. Another participant articulated the ways that experiencing these age groups clarified their desire to teach older learners, saying:

The experiences really showed me what exactly I want to teach, which is math, and who exactly I want to teach. . . I do not want to teach early childhood and I definitely don't want to teach middle school. My focus was to be high school and AFT helped me decide that.

Additionally, their teaching opportunities integrated science and math in early childhood education but offered them experience with planning and teaching math and science content individually with middle school students.

Another participant noted that even if teaching was not the vocation that they decided upon, their experiences in the program had offered them perspectives into the more informal and out-of-school opportunities they might seek for teaching. This participant explained: "Last year, I really didn't want to [teach]. I didn't like teaching at all, but this year, I kind of have a new perspective on it. It's kind of encouraged me to definitely give it a stronger thought."

Some participants seemed surprised by how much joy and connection they experienced when given the opportunity to try on the identity of teacher, even in very small ways. They noted that they found teaching and engaging with learners exciting and fun. One stated, "With the kids at the early childhood [center] I did some science activities and it was really fun. They were engaged and it was just making me excited that they were excited to learn what I was pitching to them."

Experiences such as AFT hold promise in elevating how the teaching vocation is viewed not only by those who eventually choose teaching as a vocation, but also in shaping the perceptions of teachers in positive ways in those who eventually become involved members of their local school community as stakeholders in other capacities. The new ways that the high schoolers envisioned and experienced teaching within this short summer program are particularly important as they indicate that experiences such as AFT hold promise in elevating the way that the vocation is viewed and understood by the general public.

### Teacher Residents: Perspectives of Preservice Teachers on the Promise of AFT

A central focus of our PDS initiative is our PDS Teacher Resident program, which supports pre-service teacher residents in our MAT programs. Teacher residents work in a single school alongside of mentor teachers across an academic year while simultaneously engaging in university-based certification coursework. Some of these teacher residents were hired as GRAs to support and engage in AFT alongside of the master teachers and high-school participants. The perspectives of these pre-service

teachers who are transitioning into their vocational role through effortful development and practice is important. Teacher residents' reflections on the AFT program as a teacher-recruitment initiative are particularly insightful as each of them are career-changers and/or whose undergraduate degree is not in education, because it was not initially the vocation in which they imagined themselves working.

Across the 7 teacher residents, several significant themes emerged as participants noted the role of AFT and its community of practice in their own experiences and development and the opportunities they observed that were offered to the high school students who participated. As described below in detail, themes from the teacher residents noted that programs such as AFT (a) enabled individuals to find their way to teaching sooner and more directly; (b) created a scaffolded and supportive process of "easing in" to the vocation to see how it might feel; and (c) offered a vision of teaching as a vocation that is creative, exciting, innovative, playful, and connected in ways that would draw talented and inspired individuals. They felt that these identity developing opportunities might enable those individuals who had not previously imagined 'teaching as vocation' to see ways that it could align with their hopes and strengths. Teacher residents believed that AFT and community of practice based programs like it created opportunities to meaningfully elevate public discourses around teaching as a vocational choice. They also felt that it was encouraging to those who would not choose the role of teacher vocationally in that they became more able to see possibilities and promise in connecting to and supporting schooling networks (formal and informal) in their local communities.

*"Finding their way" sooner.* Teacher residents noted how AFT or other teacher cadet programs might have facilitated their own journey toward teaching. One teacher resident explained, "If I would have been a part of a program like AFT when I was in high school, I probably would have found my path to teaching much sooner." Another teacher resident stated:

AFT could improve the recruitment of teachers through early exposure to what it really means to be a teacher. It's important to expose individuals to innovative and fun ways to teach as they are exploring their career options. It's important for this exposure to happen before students have begun their college course work . . . I can attest to this, because I feel that a program like AFT would have helped me know that I wanted to be a special education teacher much earlier . . . All I had ever heard was that teachers are underpaid, and I didn't see it as a particularly exciting or rewarding career.

A third teacher resident noted:

AFT provides early exposure to teaching. It gets the high school students thinking about innovative and exciting ways to teach, then provides the opportunity to experience the rewards of engaging with and teaching

students. To me, it seemed that AFT was showing these students a different, more exciting, perspective on teaching than I ever saw.

Relatedly, one teacher resident spoke of her initial reticence to consider teaching due to prior experiences with teachers, and how AFT teachers' modeling supported a more positive mindset:

I was hesitant to enter the teaching profession because I had interacted with teachers who were not enthused with the profession. AFT teachers were enthusiastic and excited about teaching. They were promoting the profession and devoting precious time in their summer break to continue teaching and encourage young people to enter the profession. This is something that changed my view, and got me even more excited about becoming a teacher. It was a great experience for me to be exposed to this attitude both before and after my residency. Before my residency, it helped me to feel excited about entering the classroom. After my residency, being around this positive attitude was reinvigorating in a way, because I did experience a lot of negativity about teaching from some of the teachers in my school. The teachers in AFT have already spent quite a few years teaching, and are still genuinely devoted to being lifelong educators.

Teacher residents generally found that the AFT experience leads participants to view teaching as a more appealing option early on, before they began their undergraduate work, which they felt would increase the likelihood of individuals seeing the vocation of teaching as a viable and attractive option, as this teacher resident explained:

If I had participated in the AFT program as a high school student, I believe I would have been further along in my career as an educator at this point in my life. I would have continued my education with a different perspective on teaching, and been more observant of my teachers as a student. I would have started to learn to teach long before being taught how to teach in my graduate program.

This teacher resident noted that even if students were not interested in teaching as a vocation, this type of engagement alongside younger learners could foster an opportunity to have a more developed, nuanced, and sophisticated understanding of learning and teaching through the intentional observation of and participation in the process. This was not an experience in which potential candidates were "thrown in" to the experience without support. Rather, teacher residents found the structured scaffolds to be an important introductory process for potential teachers to experience the practice and be moved toward participation in 'teacher' identities by core members of the community.

*Scaffolding teaching opportunities: “Easing their way in.”* Teacher residents noted that one of the significant advantages of AFT was the opportunity for both high school participants and for themselves as novice teacher to be aided by collaborations and structures of support so that they experienced confidence, efficacy, and success as they tried on the role of teacher alongside of younger learners, their peers, and their teachers. One teacher resident shared:

The AFT program gives participants exposure to teaching in a way that mitigates the intimidation of teaching in front of a full classroom. The participants work in teams to teach small groups of students. They are able to test their creativity and bolster their self-esteem as teachers. They’re able to, in other words, ease their way in, and in doing so, to build both their skill sets and self-confidence.

In the same way, teacher residents just beginning their program (who had entered only that semester) were able to work with teams of expert master teachers as they took up more teacherly roles during AFT. These experiences developed their confidence and skills as teachers even before they began formal residencies and internship work in their certification program. The teacher residents who were returning after they completed their residency year at the end of their certification program were preparing for entering their own classroom at the end of the summer as a teacher of record. They too found that they took up more significant teaching and participating opportunities in their second year, as they were more deeply connected in the CoP of teaching. They also were able to see how their identities had shifted as they continued to “ease their way in” to their work as practicing educators across AFT, their residency and coursework, and their return to AFT the second year.

Through meaningful initial participation in the role and practice of teacher, both high school students and teacher residents who engaged in AFT were supported in meaningful identity development and peripheral/transitional participation within the community while being coached by those more central members of the community.

Another teacher resident said that having exposure to a range of excellent educators who espoused and enacted a variety of teaching philosophies and epistemologies offered opportunities for potential teachers to imagine and connect, (re)considering their own beliefs and ideals as they engaged alongside of learners. She shared:

The AFT program gave the high school students the opportunity to view education through the lens of a variety of educators and learners, which helped them to start forming their own teaching styles and philosophies early on.

Taken together, it is clear that the teacher residents valued the opportunities high school students and they themselves had

to learn from and alongside of others, trying on the identities of teacher in supported contexts, and considering ways that their own pedagogical choices might reflect their priorities, personalities, and ideologies.

*Viewing teaching as playful, creative, innovative, exciting and connected.* A particularly critical theme noted by several teacher residents was the opportunity to view and to model teaching as a playful, creative, agentive, innovative, and exciting vocation marked by meaningful connections to others. One teacher resident explained:

Another important idea is introducing students to innovative teaching practices. In today’s professional world there are so many different types of stimulating jobs, and we need to show young people that they can use these exciting and innovative practices in teaching. It’s also important to show what it means to be a teacher. As I stated before, I didn’t get this perspective until after college, at which point I realized there was way more to the profession than I ever realized.

Another teacher resident stated this expressly, noting that teaching is often motivated by a love of subject matter and a playful and creative grappling. She explained:

Many people pursue a career teaching because they are enthusiasts of the particular disciplines that they are going to teach. To that extent, I think AFT constitutes a very effective approach because it allows students to play with the subjects in new and creative ways and to interact with superb teachers. Through this interaction, they come to realize that precisely this type of play is what highly effective teaching actually is. In other words, students are able to experience the profession as a prolonged creative grappling with how to conceptualize and use the subject that they are really in love with.

The use of the word “love” in the quote above is particularly notable. The idea of being in love with the subject matter as a means for fostering playful and passionate vocational opportunities was salient for this teacher resident. These teacher residents benefitted significantly from their participation as they saw the playful creativity and productive grappling of the role made evident by the master teachers of AFT and how that was, at times, taken up by the high school students engaged in AFT. This made it increasingly possible for them to imagine and plan for more playful, creative, and non-traditional approaches to teaching that, at times, varied significantly from what they saw in classrooms and schools during their own educational experience and during their residency. The teacher residents and high schoolers alike worked to engage creatively, responsively, and passionately as they gained more independence and practiced the role and identity of teacher. Noting the ways that master teachers, as core members of the community of practice,

supported enlivened, creative, and joyful ways of acting out their roles and vocation was a powerfully cultivating experience for both the teacher residents and for high school students who engaged in AFT.

*Elevating public views of the profession and creating community allies for teachers and schools.* An important theme noted by several teacher residents was the idea that teaching, as a vocation in the U.S., is not currently one with much social capital, as political and social discourses are often discouraging and at other times disparaging to the vocation as a whole. Teacher residents felt that the practices of AFT provided opportunities and experiences for learners to reframe and push back against those negative discourses in ways that had long-term value, whether or not participants chose to be teachers vocationally. One teacher resident shared:

A frequently made point is that there is not enough prestige conferred upon teachers in the United States, and that is part of the reason that less talent is drawn to education, especially in comparison to other countries where education is much more prestigious (Sweden, South Korea). I think that AFT did a very good job of creating an environment where students were exposed to a lot of talented, well-positioned, and well-respected people, including peers, who were all involved in education. By showing so many outstanding examples of future colleagues, I found it very inspiring to imagine myself among their company.

Another teacher resident simply noted, “Often times teaching is not viewed as a profession, and we need to work to change this misconstrued perception.” Teacher residents believed that AFT served that larger goal of supporting the vocation and professionalizing it within schools and in communities and dominate narratives.

*Connecting to education in local communities: Schooling as collaborative networks.* Teacher residents noted that programs such as AFT that provide a deeper and more complex understanding of the role of teacher and the interconnectedness to stakeholders across local communities held promise for a larger social network of investment in schools and schooling, and in teachers and teaching. This has positive implications for the vocation long-term, even if participants ultimately decide, as one AFT participant noted previously, to participate in education in informal and community-centered spaces. One teacher resident noted the inspiring characteristics of network building this type of community-oriented program that connects so many different individuals invested in teaching and learning, saying:

AFT networks students with local representatives, ambassadors, and leaders in education, all of whom constitute valuable sources of inspiration, as well as future professional liaisons. I think meeting these people, knowing who they would be working with and for, seeing the professional support they would have-

could be very helpful in facilitating students’ future involvement in local education.

Expanding upon this networked view of ‘community as educational context and sharing responsibility for the learning and teaching of others,’ this teacher resident explained that their own engagement in this program had supported their professional identity development and construct of the community of practice saying, saying:

Participating in AFT enforced the idea that it takes a community of educators to teach, and that that community is more enriched when it consists of people from a variety of educational and professional backgrounds and ages. The participants of AFT learned from each other and built off one another’s ideas, which led to more creative and enhanced learning environments.

This type of mutual sharing and responsibility in a community of practice runs counter to many narratives of ‘teacher as lone individual’ and to the high-stakes accountability framework that places one teacher fully responsible for learners without fostering and supporting deep community and school-based collaborations and mutual accountability and support. The long-term construct of collaboration with learners and other teachers as a professionalizing and re-energizing community and practice is expanded upon by the master teachers who fostered opportunities for teacher residents and high school students engaged in AFT. Master teachers orchestrated and supported learning opportunities in the AFT program and their perspectives are critically vital if we are to create long-term, community-embedded, and collaborative development opportunities for the cultivation of practiced identities which can lead to shifts in dominant narratives of teachers, teaching, and schooling.

### **Master Teachers: Perspectives of Public School-based Veteran Teachers on the Promise of AFT**

The master teachers who were involved as instructors for AFT and mentors to those considering teaching as their vocation were core members of the teacher community of practice. They had chosen not only to remain in teaching for decades, but also often chose to continue to participate in the specific community of practice fostered by AFT year after year. The perspectives included here draw from instructors at each of the three AFT sites across rural/urban/ and coastal contexts. Most of the master teachers noted how their experiences as an instructor/master teacher at AFT taught them, further cultivated their practice, and rejuvenated their commitment to their own development.

One instructor who was teaching part-time in her retirement at a nearby university explained that her connection at the coastal oriented AFT was an opportunity she “jumped at” as it provided her an opportunity to return to her interests

teaching environmental education in the field. Another retired P-12 educator who worked in this coastal AFT expressed that the summer PDS initiative with high-school learners:

was a great opportunity to combine the things I enjoy doing, working with kids, working with the scientists, and working with folks here at the aquarium. And doing all these various things that I've done over the years, every time I've had an opportunity. . . So it was an opportunity for me to once again step into this realm, and be able to just take part in what's going on for the future.

This opportunity to return to work they believe in and for which there is little opportunity, not only fit the interests and experiences of these veteran/retired educators, but also was a part of the legacy they wanted to leave to the field and the world. It is notable that this sentiment echoes many of the perspectives of the high-school participants who noted the long-term personal and social impact that was possible through the practiced identities of teaching.

### Rural/urban/coastal Master Teachers: Perspectives of University-based Veteran Teachers on the Promise of AFT

University faculty across AFT contexts had similar insights about the value of their participation for their own professionalization and development. Namely through AFT these master teachers noted (a) learning more about and staying connected to high-school students coming from a range of schooling contexts, and (b) becoming a better teacher in general due to their collaborations with other educators who bring unique strengths and perspectives to bear. A faculty member explained:

[AFT] gives me a chance to learn a little more about high schoolers. I've taught college for a long time. I have not taught high school. I have learned how to handle high schoolers. They are. . .completely different.

Another faculty member noted that AFT was:

a valuable experience. Gives me a chance to constantly reexamine where [High Schoolers] are, not just concepts, but college preparation, majors to explore. It keeps me connected to that age group, different learning environments [like] home schools, religious schools, public school. [AFT] reminds me of the dynamic ways the profession changes [and] makes me a better teacher in general.

This connection to others teaching in P-12 contexts and to the learners themselves strengthened these veteran university-based educators in ways they felt augmented their practice at the university level.

Another master teacher who is accustomed to working with high school students noted that AFT helps her remember and keep in mind how much her learners are capable of accomplishing on their own. She explained, "I find myself hovering over them because they're young and at the end of the day I do try to step back and let me see what it is they can do and they can do so much." A different master teacher celebrated the ways that AFT provided her with opportunities

to see different types of students from different places all come together. . . with the same type of goal. The majority of people were there because they were interested in either math and they were also interested in teaching. I feel like from different [high schools and communities in our city] sometimes that might be hard to mix together. But it was great for me to see how much they tried, the different challenges that they came across, but then how the majority of them got past them all very well and got something good from [their collaborations].

This master teacher particularly celebrated the ways that AFT brought people from our wider community together with her and with each other in ways that were meaningful and mutually enriching. These core members of the community of practice were challenged and cultivated through their experiences with participants, with the curriculum, and with each other through AFT.

Another faculty member noted the ways that her involvement in the Community of Practice of AFT promoted her own development as she collaborated with learners across the public-school trajectory (P-12<sup>th</sup> grade) and simultaneously developed her own practice as she learned with and alongside her coteacher who was also a master teacher. She explained:

AFT is a great opportunity to keep in touch with P-12 students in that arena. I really learned a lot from the teacher I teach with. She has different strengths than I do. She is tech savvy. I struggle. I want to be up with things.

This master teacher found that the collaboration she had with other faculty at AFT improved her professional practice and supported her learning as she engaged with her coteacher (a P-12 professional) who was using novel-to-her instructional technologies.

The personally rewarding nature of working with learners at AFT was a significant benefit that master teachers expressed. One shared,

for me is just a rewarding feeling to know that this is our future and our future is capable of doing it. I am a small, minute factor in them progressing on to achieve their hopes, their dreams, and their aspirations. That's just extremely rewarding to me, I love to see that. I love to see the light bulbs go off. I love to see them actually

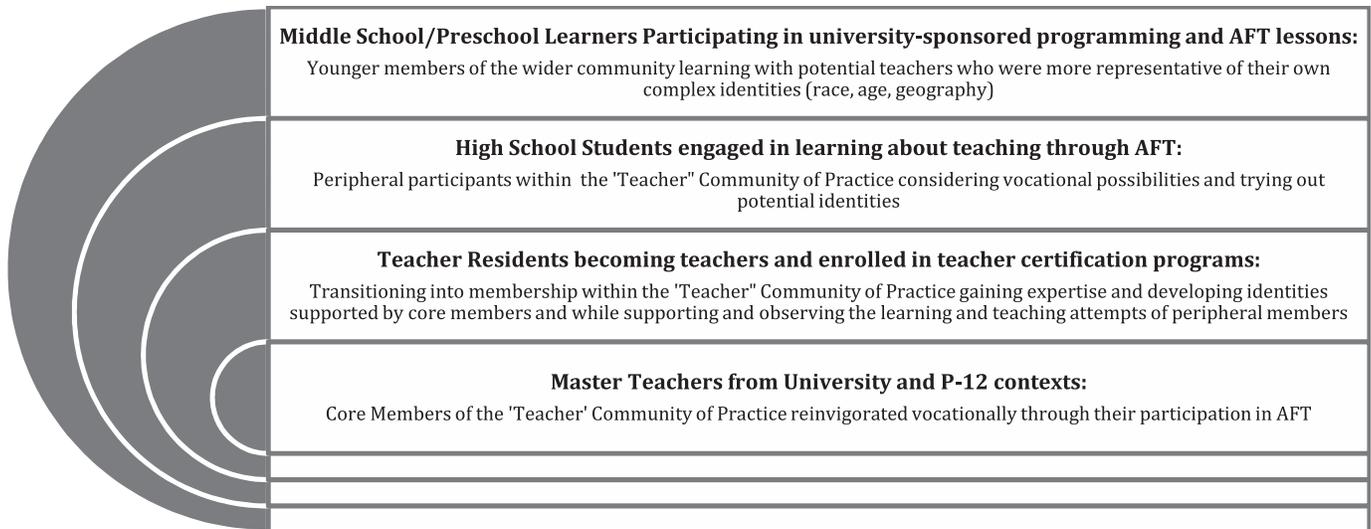


Figure 1. Participants Located and Supported Within the "Teacher" Community of Practice

say and leave and come to me to say "Thank you, you did this, you made it fun, it was interesting."

The gratifying and renewing experience of working with learners in such meaningful and collaborative ways brought joy and connection to these master teachers who often chose to return year after year to this work in AFT in addition to their work as practicing teachers. Simply put, in the words of one master teacher, "It was awesome!"

Taken together, it is important to note that even the most experienced teachers (at the university and P-12 level) found this engaging and inquiry-oriented learning/teaching context to be reinvigorating, professionalizing, and personally and vocationally fulfilling. This is particularly important as retaining, developing, and celebrating excellent teachers is a critical component of addressing the teacher shortage that has received far too little attention. Considering the roles of communities of practice in the context of professional development school programming provides opportunities for meaningful, reciprocal, and mutual development as individuals take up practices and newly claimed aspects of their identities as 'teacher.'

### Discussion: Communities of Practice Revealed Across Participant Identity Development and Experience

The 'identities in practice' evidenced across participant groups in AFT were shaped and supported as individuals were socialized within Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1990).

According to participants across roles and identities as "teacher," AFT served as a meaningful, long-term, and community embedded community of practice benefits and supports the teacher identity development of multiple and

varied members of the community. Middle School/Preschool Learners participating in university-sponsored programming and AFT lessons as members of local community learn alongside potential teachers who are often representative of their own complex identities (race, age, community membership). High School Students engaged in learning about teaching through AFT take up peripheral participation within the "Teacher" Community of Practice considering vocational possibilities and trying out potential identities as teacher. Teacher residents who are enrolled in certification programs and in the process of becoming teachers are in the process of transitioning into membership within the "Teacher" Community of Practice. They are gaining expertise and developing teacherly identities supported by core members and the more peripheral members of the Community of Practice, the high schoolers engaged in AFT. Finally, master teachers from University and P-12 contexts who are, by vocation, experience, and expertise, core members of the "Teacher" Community of Practice found themselves reinvigorated vocationally through their participation in AFT and reconnected to each other and to the meaningful nature of their professional identities through AFT year after year.

The insights from these master teachers who were far along in their vocation provides insights into the ways that each member of the Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1990)- from the youngest or most inchoate members to the most experienced and core members of the learning and teaching community-all benefit from their shared experiences with meaningful learning and teaching. This process of mutuality inherently and naturally incorporates the age-old elder/mentor/apprentice model of community-oriented teaching and learning which positions all members of the community (from the littlest to the most experienced) with things to teach and things to learn and is an exemplary manifestation of a Community of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1990).

Apparent from the perspectives of participants was the value of initiatives such as AFT in reframing dominant narratives of “teacher” and elevating the profession. In the case of this community of practice, prospective, preservice, novice and veteran teachers simultaneously were positioned as learners and teachers (Freire, 1970) with much to contribute not only to their own learning, but to the learning, growth, and development of others in the community. This type of apprenticeship, community-oriented initiative is worthy of the time and resources of young learners, high school students, preservice educators, and veteran teachers as well as community members and funders who might be committed to investing in transformative educational collaborations. It is particularly meaningful for families and learners during summer months when a need for meaningful and affordable programming is most acute (Atlanta Academic Enrichment Programs, 2014; Dell’Antonia, 2016).

Another evident strength of AFT serves to address the teacher shortage (Heiser, 2015; Strauss, 2015; Voke, 2003) by elevating the profession of teaching while supporting learners, positioning community of practice participants in ways where each experiences and values the impact and creativity inherent in teaching and the impact of the vocation to both individuals and to society. AFT and other cadet programs like it create a recruitment pipeline into teaching while also developing and reinvigorating teachers to keep them in the classroom and alongside of learners, another critical consideration and priority if we are to keep excellent teachers both inspired by their work and learners and help them remain in the vocation. Opportunities for a range of individuals to understand the complexity or the role of teacher elevates discourses around the profession while simultaneously building capacity and commitment for those who do not choose teaching as a vocation to support their local and community schools and teachers and schooling more generally.

From both perspectives of high schoolers and veteran/master teachers engaged in the program, experiences like AFT which evidence and enact meaningful and supportive communities of practice have potential to develop relationships of understanding and mutuality between teachers and students. These mutual learning/teaching spaces provide opportunities for teacher/learners and learner/teachers to each come to have a clearer understanding of the complexity of identity. These shared classroom spaces and collaborative participation across a Community of Practice has implications not only for relationships fostered and forged at AFT, but also those relationships participants and master teachers craft in their own classrooms and collaborations during the academic year.

## Conclusion and Implications

Community-oriented and embedded initiatives—where learning, teaching, and development are not done in isolation but in a supportive and committed community of practice—are meaningful and professionalizing for everyone engaged in the practice.

This collaborative and mutual community of growth is key to making teaching an appealing vocational decision. Seeing promise and ongoing connections in this vocation enables individuals across the prospective, preservice, novice, veteran continuum an opportunity to envision and re-envision themselves in this role, try on new and hoped-for identities and ways of interacting with others and with content, and build meaningful relationships and networks of support and mutual contribution. Community-oriented and embedded learning and teaching spaces create complex webs of support and connection, contribution, and opportunities for support. In addition to addressing the need for meaningful and safe learning opportunities for P-12 students during the summer (Dell’Antonia, 2016), these communities of practice nurtured participation in practices of vocational identity that enable those considering teaching to take up the roles through meaningful peripheral participation. These communities simultaneously remind those who have taken it up this vocation long ago to reinvigorate themselves and renew the sense of joy and hope and connections teaching affords. This is especially critical in times of disparaging social narratives and a range of very real social and structural concerns that make it difficult for so many teachers to stay in the vocation long-term. Communities that are meaningful and mutual can create spaces where individuals can see themselves and then work to join and develop connections to continue their commitment to their vocational choices and to those in their communities.

Communities of practice such as these simultaneously address and call for: (a) increased initiative and energy around promoting the vocation of teaching in public discourses; (b) exposing potential teachers to the possibilities and promise of the vocation; (c) developing preservice and novice teachers; and (d) professionalizing, challenging, and reinvigorating veteran teachers. Each of these are critical if we are to address the teacher shortage (Heiser, 2015; Strauss, 2015; Voke, 2003) in the U.S. Future research on experiences of the rural and costal high school participants of the communities of practice embedded in those AFT initiatives would provide needed insight into addressing teacher shortages frequent in rural communities (Voke, 2003; Yaffe, 2016) through programming such as AFT which can inspire, connect, and support individuals choosing to work in these less-well-served communities.

Creating Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1990) through community-oriented opportunities for mutual growth, professionalization, and developing is particularly important if we are to recruit, prepare and retain teachers who are committed to equitable education in our urban and rural communities which are far too often both historically and currently understaffed and underserved. Additionally, individuals involved in networks which are authentic professionalizing communities of practice are also connected with a range of other communities and identities, providing opportunities for permeating boundaries between learning spaces and geographic and ideological communities which can be mutual, relational, and ethical as they become more culturally responsive and

connected (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas and Lucas, 2002; González, Moll & Amanti, 2005). There is great potential for this type of responsivity within this type of Community of Practice. This work must be an important priority for our field, for professional development school networks, and for all of us committed to equitable and responsive public education.

Several of the nine essentials of PDS partnerships (<https://napds.org/nine-essentials/>) are inherently embedded in this work. AFT exists as an effort to broaden outreach and scope beyond the mission of any single partner through efforts that further the education profession and advance equity both in schools and the broader community (Essential 1). AFT simultaneously prepares future educators through active engagement (Essential 2) while providing “ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need” (Essential 3). Participants across varied roles engage in innovative and reflective practice (Essential 4) and collaboration as they work within and across formal roles in P-20 settings (Essential 8) taking up learning and teaching reciprocally in this shared space of AFT. Through this manuscript, we endeavor to publicly share one deliberate investigation into the practices of our partnerships (Essential 5). AFT has been and remains a meaningful community-oriented opportunity to actualize many of the essential characteristics and commitments of professional development school work.

PDS based and community-oriented recruitment initiatives such as AFT hold promise for creating the types of mutual, authentic, and responsive partnerships that can only be fostered in authentic communities of practice. These types of collaborative partnerships meaningfully support learners while offering potential and current teachers opportunities to find, remember, and honor the meaning and challenge of this vocation. Experiences such as AFT support teachers in their learning, teaching, and commitment are critical if we are to work toward more just and engaging educative opportunities for all learners in order to create schools where they are served equitably and well. <sup>SUP</sup>

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