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## MUSIC STUDENT TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE PRACTICE OF PEER ASSESSMENT

Nurtug Bariseri Ahmethan  
Necmettin Erbakan University, Ahmet Kelesoglu Education Faculty

Omer Beyhan  
Konya NE.University, A.K. Education Faculty

**Abstract:** Forming an effective learning atmosphere in the classrooms can only be possible with active participation of students. Assessment and evaluation procedures are part of students' learning and students need to be active assessor and evaluator for their own learning. Peer assessment is one of the frequently used alternative evaluation technique. The purpose of this research is to understand final year music students' views about peer assessment practices during music teaching methods course. In the scope of this study two dimensions are discussed: i) music students' evaluation of peer assessment, ii) music students' opinions about the difficulties experienced through this process. This is a case study in qualitative research paradigm and was conducted during 2014-2015 autumn semester with twenty music students in Fine Arts Department of Music Education (Necmettin Erbakan University, Education Faculty). In order to get in-depth understanding about the perceptions of the music students, a semi structured interview technique was used in the data collecting process and data were analysed by descriptive analysis method.

**Keywords:** Music student teachers, peer assessment, teacher education

### Introduction

Preparing music teachers is considered one of the most important topics in music education (Campbell, 2007; Conway, 2002). Prospective music teachers are expected to have knowledge of music domain and skills in performing music, creating music, listening to music, thinking of music and understanding music and they have to expand their knowledge in music teaching methods relating to how to plan and organise music lessons. Moreover, they learn some educational subjects such as measurement and assessing methods, counselling and special needs education, in order to effectively convey the educational issues with music learning. Finally, at end of their training, music students start their teaching practice in order to implement their musical knowledge and teaching skills at schools.

Assessment and evaluation methods are important at the teacher training institutes whether the knowledge and behaviours are intended to be gained in the above-mentioned areas at the expected level in order to determine effectiveness of music teacher training programmes and quality of prospective music teachers. While the music student teachers are constantly assessed during their four-year of their education, they also have to learn how to evaluate and assess for their future professional life. Assessment is one of the leading issues of concern to all educators. The importance of assessment practices in student learning is generally acknowledged, but it is believed not well understood in music teacher education in terms of implementing different types of assessment and evaluation techniques. Students learning in music is a component of teacher evaluation. Evaluation of music learning at all ages depends on valid and reliable measurement and efficient and effective assessment practices. Yayla (2004) has specified the approached used in assessing musical performance as follows:

1) *Ticking method*; determining only the existence or absence of measurable behaviours 2) Likert-type; scale showing degrees of performance, 3) Using antonymous adjectives to show the differences; like beautiful and ugly. 4) Thurstone scale which is used to measure people's attitude towards a fairly clear and unidimensional

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\*Corresponding author: Nurtug Bariseri AhmethanE-Mail: nahmethan@konya.edu.tr

concept, using a number of statements that vary in how they express a positive or negative opinion about the main concept. 5) Rubrics; is a guideline for rating student performance. The guidelines specify what a performance is like at various levels (superior, excellent, good, poor) and, usually, on various musical attributes (tone, intonation, balance, technique, etc.). The key elements of a rubric are the descriptors for what a performance is like within the full range of possible performance levels. <http://research.franklin.uga.edu/assessment/content/definition>. As Yayla (2004) acknowledged that Turkish music instructors were using standard scales to assess the musical performances of student teachers. However, it was found that, even though those standard performance scales were prepared by instructors, they were partly used during the exams. Music instructors admitted that the musical behaviours were not matched what was written in the standard scales, they could partly evaluate objectively and partly assessed the behaviours. They stated that the tools used to assess the students' performance partly allow them to overcome the learning deficiencies of students and correct their mistakes. In general the final performance is measured to evaluate the achievement of music student, and the individual achievement results are expressed relative to group achievement. The most important shortcoming of this system is that there is either insufficient information or none at all and no documents that would help the individual to assess his or her own standing and development. Foley (2013) argues that summative assessment normally comes at the end of the process of learning and does not improve learning as its primary goal. It is believed that traditional method of evaluation, which focuses on measuring the competencies of students in terms of application, knowledge and comprehension, fails to measure higher order competencies.

Wendell, (2007) claims that instrumental music programs focus on assessing either content or character. Content refers to the mastery of musical skills, and character refers to the student's contribution within the classroom community and the personal growth of the student. Gaines, Holsberg, Tornatore, (2009) argued that these domains are rarely combined into a coherent assessment strategy that displays a more comprehensive and clearly defined portrait of student growth and achievement. Cavitt (2008) states that the musical assessments need to provide useful specific information to music students about performance, progress and remediation in real time and assessment should teach and change musical behaviours.

Music student teachers whether for instrument performance or for their knowledge of music theory or methods should be offered different method of learning and insight into the process of their own musical development through alternative assessment techniques. Students must be more engaged with assessment process and taking more responsibility for their own learning (Kordes et al.,2014).Liu and Carless (2006) mention two common purposes of assessment: a certification (summative) and a learning (formative). Summative assessment is to evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard such as ; a midterm exam, a final project, a paper, a senior recital. Formative assessment is to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors to improve their teaching and by students to improve their learning. It typically involves qualitative feedback rather than scores.

- help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work
- help faculty recognize where students are struggling and address problems immediately

Assessment for learning (Daniel, 2004) attributes a great importance. Bloom and Poole (2004) pointed out that if students are allowed to involve in the assessment process, they developed their learning skills, critical thinking, evaluation skills, improved their self-confidence and their understanding of assessment procedures. Assessment was no longer something mysterious, alienated, something that others arrange for them. Also, their wish to participate and assume responsibility for their learning increased, while the quality of their feedback kept improving. Moreover, alternative assessment procedures have a positive effect on the development of pre-service teachers' own assessment skills (Sluijsmans et al.\2002). Kılıç, (2016) suggest that if pre-service teachers can critically evaluate themselves and the performances of their peers accurately and objectively, they will be better prepared to demonstrate objective attitudes in their future professional career.

Peer Assessment considered by many teachers to be a valuable formative assessment tool. Peer assessment as the process whereby groups of individuals rate their peers, make judgements about the work or the performance. *"Peer-assessment is an arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners"* (Topping, 2009, p. 20).

Whilst peer assessment involving grading, peer feedback is a communication process through which learners enter into dialogues related to performance and standards. Peer feedback provides rich detailed comments without formal grades (Liu and Carless, 2006:280). Furthermore, students develop objectivity in relation to standards which can transferred to their work and enables students to better self-assess themselves (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Cavitt (2008) emphasized that music students need to observe the performances in a critique manner and they should provide specified individualized feedback frequently. According to her, peer assessments shift the students' role from passive recipients to more self-directed, independent learners and

students become more aware of their individual performance responsibilities and behaviours. Furthermore, in music education peer assessment allows teachers to work with individuals while keeping the entire classes involved and active.

Black et al. (2004) argues the value of incorporation of self- and peer-assessment in the educational context which gives opportunity to pre-service teachers examining their pedagogical development. However, Strijbos et al., (2010) argues that feedback from a person with a high level of expertise is assumed to be more positive than from a person with low expertise.

Peer Assessment studies, which were cited by Kilic, (2016) are important to mention for this study. Orsmond, Merry and Reiling (1996) revealed that students were pleased with performing the peer assessment task and thought that it was contributing to their learning. Results of another research showed that both the teachers and the students had mostly positive experiences of the assessment processes (Lindblom-Ylänne, Pihlajamäki, & Kotkas, 2006). On the other hand students found that criticising their friends was difficult and some students hesitate to grade their classmates and they do not feel comfortable when evaluating a fellow student. Students found grading to each other risky and unfair, and they also doubt the objectivity of peer assessment (Sluijsmans et al., Brand-Gruwel, & van Merriënboer, 2002).

The validity and reliability of peer-assessment is not explicit as social togetherness of peers influence the accuracy of the assessment procedures. Topping (2009) specifies that bond of friendship, sympathy or antipathy, or popularity of individuals can be effective on peer assessment. Another reason is seen as student tolerance for preserving friendships and not to give rise to a conflict (Friedman, Cox, & Maher, 2008). It is believed that peer assessment can be regarded as the learning exercises for music students in order to develop understanding the criteria of learning how to teach a music and analysing the work of peers which can lead to an improved awareness of the quality of one's own work. The aim of this research is to introduce the effects of peer assessment in preparing students to teaching profession and to state students' view about this implementation.

For this purpose we seek an answer for following questions;  
What are the views of music students about peer assessment?  
What difficulties were encountered in the process of assessment?

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

The sample consisted of twenty (20) fourth-year music students of Fine Arts Music Education Department at Education Faculty in Turkey. (11 female, 9 male). These students were enrolled in Music Teaching Method Course in the autumn semester of 2015. Music students initially had some theoretical knowledge about alternative assessment procedures as they had completed the Assessment and Evaluation Course a year ago. Students didn't have any practical experience of peer assessment.

### **Procedure**

In the Autumn term 20 music students had joined in Music Teaching Methods Course II. In the first two weeks of the course, eight hours were allocated to introduce the Primary Music Curriculum and students practiced on how to write music lesson plans. Consequently, music students were asked to work as a group of four and to create their own music lessons for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Each individual in a group had to prepare one lesson plan according to one of the achievement targets of music curriculum such as; 'Musical Knowledge and Perceptions', 'Listening, playing, singing', 'Musical creativity' and 'Music Culture'. Starting from the third week of the course, students were asked to share their lesson plans with other groups through presentations. Music lesson plans were decided to assess according to its technical success such as; entry of the lesson has five and content structure. At the end of each presentation music students were asked to assess their peers and score sheet was handled to the lecturer. Students were informed that %20 of their score of their peers would affect their exam results.

### **Data Collection and Analyse**

At the end of all presentations and assessments, semi-structured interview was made to determine students' views about peer assessment procedure. For this purpose students were asked. 1) what was their opinions about peer assessment 2) what difficulties they experienced about peer assessment process, 3) what was their opinions

about implementations and suggestions for the peer assessment. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Data was carefully reviewed for the goals which help to organise the data. Coloured dots were used in order to find the categories in this process. Descriptive analyse was used in the process of data analysis. The purpose of descriptive analysis is to submit the data in an organized and interpreted way to readers. Afterwards; these descriptions is explained and interpreted, cause effect relationship is studied and some conclusions are drawn (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2005).

## Findings

### Value Of Peer Assessment

Music students, in the Special Teaching Methods II course, appreciated the peer assessment which was categorised under four headings. 1) Effectiveness for group working 2) Usefulness for professional development 3) Necessities at teachers training departments. 4) Usefulness for individual instrument courses. The students' opinions on this issue were given below.

### Peer Assessment was Effective for Group Working

It was seen that most of the music students (n=15) wished to be part of the assessment process when it comes to evaluation of group work and take more responsibilities. The music students thought that group working is a continuum and could only be objectively assessed by the member of groups rather than instructors. They acknowledged that the assessment and evaluation of the course would be more reliable if the instructor took this peer assessment into consideration in terms of ascertain whether the individuals within the group were taking the necessary responsibilities effectively in accomplishing the task.

*“I think it is quite fair to take the opinion of each individual about the others. Especially, group study process and the contributions of students can be controlled in this way. I think it is fairer for the persons who know about the process to give a mark than only one person to do so; since both those who work and those who do not in the group receive a shared group mark. Sometimes, I complain about this, but I could not say anything since they are my friends. I think it is fair that I can also give my opinion about those persons through such assessment” (Mustafa).*

*“I think such an assessment would shed light on the teacher to give realistic and objective mark in group studies’ (Tuba).*

### Peer Assessment was Useful to Develop Music Teaching Skills

Music students so far had many exams in their courses but rarely used alternative assessment methods. Music Teaching Methods II course provided music students to give their feedbacks during the presentations of their peers. This group of students who enrolled ‘Music Teaching Methods I’ course previously, had already had some experience on peer assessment where students were encouraged to give feedbacks and motivated to feel the importance of the feedback. Music students (n= 12) who enrolled at Music Teaching Methods II course thought that peer assessment contributed their music teaching skills in terms of the movement, dance, rhythmic and creative activities. Peer interaction led to enhanced understandings on creative activities and improved learning Feedback had a major role for this development.

*“Peer assessment study actually made me understand how to improve my music teaching skills. My friends’ and my lecturer’s feedbacks were very helpful to make things better. Such as; I wasn’t good at planning dance and movement activities for my classroom but now I feel more confident. Moreover, when I was giving feedback to my friends I was also correcting my own thinking and behaviour. Feedback practices enabled me to learn others’ perspectives about my behaviour. I think we need to give more feedbacks during assessments in music education. Generally result-oriented assessments are used in our department, but in this course we learnt many skills through assessing the process” (Volkan).*

*“I feel this was a very useful study for the future. No matter how much a music teacher is knowledgeable, still he can learn from others. Feedbacks from my friends on my music lesson plans helped me to organize my own thinking. On the other hand, I had to think more intensely when I was giving feedback to them. I was always thinking on how to make lesson plans better and better. All the time one level above .... gets harder. Honestly, I saw, in this study process, how hard the job of a teacher, from planning a lesson to assessing” (Ferhat).*

### **Peer Assessment was Seen Necessary at Teachers Training.**

Students (n= 10) also gave their opinions stating that this practice needs to be done more often in the training institutions. At the third year of their training music students took Assessment and Evaluation Course. However, they stated that theoretical information on marking, grading, measuring or ranking were not helping them on how to become an assessor. They claim that they should be part of the process on defining learning outcomes and the criteria for assessing those outcomes. Engaging learners in thinking about achieving outcomes to certain agreed standards is a learning process however, giving marks or grades is only part of that process.

*“Assessment and Evaluation course needs to be more practical than theory in the teacher training institutions. As a music teacher we should learn more on evaluation rather than ”(Melisa)*

*“We learnt to assess and evaluate in detail during our course (Assessment and Evaluation) last year which stressed that, the important part of teaching and learning depends on the assessment and evaluation. However, we did not have the opportunity to implement these issues in any courses we took. However, after we practiced peer assessment I had clearer ideas about evaluation and feedback. I believe every prospective teacher should have some practical experience of assessment before starting their actual teaching job” (Ugur).*

Moreover, it was seen that peer assessment process increased the attention of music student in the class. One student claimed that in order to follow the criteria in the assessment sheet while observing her peers` presentations, increased her attention and listening skills.

*“...I think, while giving a mark, our responsibility for the course increases during the assessment. This is because I constantly need to think about the criteria you have given. That is, the active learning that you have mentioned always continues and I feel like I need to be alerted and careful( Tuba).*

### **Peer Assessment was Seen as a Useful Method in Instrument Learning**

The most significant aspect of music education programmes is instrument education and performance. Music students take the instrument courses individually and generally their exams are evaluated individually. In this case, it is not possible for the students to compare themselves during the courses and exams, so the feedbacks of their instrument teachers are unknown. Music students (n=3) stated that they needed to be educated about noticing the errors in the performance of their peers and how to give the necessary feedback to their friends. They thought that noticing the errors and looking for ways to correct them could improve their own performance.

*“I think we also need to use such an assessment in the instrument exams. Of course, it will be hard for us since we do not have as much knowledge and experience as our teachers. However, I think it is still important in terms of understanding our own position and our level, noticing the errors that are made, and it maybe be easier to correct our own errors when we see others doing them.” ( Ada).*

### **Difficulties In The Process Of Peer Assessment**

Music students also gave their opinions for the difficulties in peer assessment alongside the positive ones. The negative opinions collected under five items are the following: 1) Friendship and relations affect the assessment. 2) Understanding the assessment criteria for related behaviour. 3) Lack of knowledge and expertise to make an assessment. 4) Other types of assessment 5) Factor of culture. The difficulties in the process of peer assessment are given below.

#### ***Friendship and Relations Affect the Assessment***

Music students gave their opinions that their friendship relationships, social environment, emotional attachments within the group have an influence while making an assessment; and therefore, the marks given cannot be fair. However, the fact that friendship factor intervenes with their assessment and decision making was difficult on what is right or wrong. Some of them felt guilty and placed in a difficult position.

*“The most difficult part of making an assessment was how to know which marks to give to and how to increase and decrease the difference between the marks of my friends who really put their heart and soul in doing this homework and my friends who again did their best but gave less efforts than others. With regards to conscience, I saw that each of my friends made an effort in their homework, and all their effort, even if small, made me happy. So, I wanted to give the highest score to everyone”(Cansu).*

*“I could not be fully objective in the assessment of my best friends”(Emrah).*

*“I had difficulties to assess myself and my friends. I experienced moments where ambition gave way to conscience”(Volkan).*

*"I don't find such an assessment very fair. It is because I think that my friends give marks not only for the study during this practice, but also for the overall situation" (Sureyya).*

### **Understanding the assessment criteria Correctly**

A music student also showed his worries about if assessment criteria were understood correctly, in a same way by his friends. He stated that if the criteria's were assessed by one person (instructor), then everyone would be equally assessed and results would be more objective.

*"I don't know how correctly my friends understand the assessment criteria. At least, the teacher would assess everyone equally according to the criteria. We are 20 persons, and I don't know how these 20 people perceive these criteria (Yasin).*

### **Insufficient knowledge to make an assessment**

Some music students state that making an assessment requires knowledge and experience, and the assessment should only be made by the teacher.

*We are not equipped with necessary knowledge yet anyway. I prefer the teacher giving my marks, since the teacher has a lot of knowledge and experience" (Sureyya).*

*"One needs to specialise in an area in order to make an assessment in that area, we are not even teachers yet"(Segah).*

### **Different from Other Assessment Types**

When music students compared alternative assessment with other result-oriented assessments, they stated that this is different for them and they are not used to such assessments. It was seen that such assessments are not performed often in their own education processes. Students revealed that peer assessment was not a familiar assessment form and would not be fair.

*"All through my education I have never been assessed in this way, I am not used to this technique, I don't think it is fully democratic" (Hatice).*

*"Compare to other assessment which we are used to, peer assessment is a little confusing for me. Emotionally I didn't feel well. Formal assessments are more comfortable, I don't get involve and I am not responsible from the results. But emotional, social factors are big obstacles"(Anil).*

### **Creating a Culture**

One student thought that working together, taking responsibility within the group is not yet developed in our society. Whatever role is given within the group, it should be carried out willingly and people should look positively at the feedbacks given during classes and be open to criticism.

*"Eventually, I don't think this assessment is exactly objective. In order for everyone to do their part, firstly, group consciousness and sense of responsibility should be built on a solid ground on the people. They should do their part willingly, instead of participating just to pass the class. Everyone should do their job not because they have to, but by seeing the things that brings to them. People should be open to criticism. I think, as a society, we could not yet put the culture of working together, and taking responsibility into our lives. That's why, I think we are very open to interpreting such assessments as we like"(Mustafa).*

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study aimed to understand music students' perceptions about peer assessment which was implemented in Special Teaching Methods II course. Peer Assessment considered by many teachers to be a valuable formative assessment tool. Music students' perceptions and experiences with peer assessment have been little reported in the literature. Although constructive, active learning theories have been included almost in each level of music teaching programs, assessment for learning has not been researched yet deeply in music education. In this research music students were experienced with Peer Assessment procedure and they were interviewed about their ideas on such assessment approach. Collected data showed that students had two views about peer assessment. Some of them valued the peer assessment procedure but on the other hand more than half indicated some difficulties and biases in the assessment. The literature results also support these two opposite views.

While, some research, Orsmond, Merry and Reiling, (1996), Lindblom-Ylänne, Pihlajamäki, & Kotkas, 2006 revealed that students were pleased with performing the peer assessment task, the other studies, Sluijsmans et al., Brand-Gruwel, & van Merriënboer, (2002) and White, (2009) showed that students had doubt about peer assessment procedure. Group-work sometimes are used as teaching method and as a vehicle for learning. However there are numbers of concerns about group work such as some group members may not do their share of the work but still reap the benefits due to other members of the group having contributed more than their fair share (Mello, 1993; cited in Walker , 2001: 28). In this study some music students thought that peer assessment procedure was valuable for group work evaluation. According to them, group working is a continuum and could only be objectively assessed by the member of groups rather than instructors. This result was similar to those of previous studies, Davis and Inamdar, (1988); Boud, (1986); and Falchikov, (1986), which was cited in Walker's (2001) research, where peer assessment was seen as a fairer means of assessing group work compare to instructor award the grades. Results showed that, peer assessment provided music students' valuable experience in terms of learning how to be a teacher and assessor. As mentioned earlier, peer assessment has a value in students' learning as they take the roles of teachers and examiners of each other. Black et al. (2003) claim that aim of the peer assessment is not about giving grades to each other. It is more about identification of learning needs and the means of improvement. Topping (1998, p.254) called 'learning by assessing'. It is understood that peer assessment implementation is effective in preparing students to teaching profession. Because practise is essential in peer assessment approach, and using this approach in teacher training brings to mind that it will be a compatible way of learning with the nature of teaching profession (Lyons, 2006).The results of this study revealed that peer assessment was effective in the professional development of teachers for their future teaching practice.

Some music students felt assessment procedures has to be more practiced in the teacher training institutions. They stated that learning the theory of assessment and evaluation techniques was not enough to understand the procedures. Furthermore taking the responsibility of the assessment process increased the attention of music students in the class. Following the assessment criteria, observing their peers and giving feedback had increased their attention and listening skills. This results have been supported by earlier research of Weaver and Cottrell (1986) who claimed that use of peer assessment could promote students' involvement, responsibility, focus attention on skills and learning and provide increased feedback.Yayla (2004) stated that instructors in the department of music education use standard test to assess the musical performances of student teachers. In this study, music students thought peer assessment can be useful in individual instrument courses. Particularly feedback has a great value in instrument learning. Music students' suggestions were supported by Cavitt's (2008) who commented about using peer assessment in individual instrument training. According to her, peer assessments shift the students' role from passive recipients to more self-directed, independent learners and students become more aware of their individual performance responsibilities and behaviours.Music students also gave their opinions for the difficulties in peer assessment alongside the positive ones. According to results music students thought that friendship and relations affected the assessment. This result was supported by previous studies. Falchikov's (1995) and Foley (2013) research findings showed that social relationships are more likely to affect the implementation of peer assessment in smaller groups. Foley (2013) suggest that anonymous peer assessment can be more beneficial for objective outcomes.They had difficulty in relating assessment criteria to behaviour and they thought that they did not have sufficient knowledge to make an assessment. Similar result has been reported in Cheng and Warren, (1997) in their research some of the students felt unqualified and pointed out that it was not their position to assess their peers and lack of training and prior experience was seen as problematic.

They think that they are more inclined to other types of assessment. However, Bastürk (2008) claims that the role of the students in the performance assessment process is changed from being passive learners to active participants. He notes that this approach allows instruction and assessment come together and more traditional approaches will fail to accomplish.

Music students were asked to critically assess the presentations they have followed about lesson plans in special teaching methods courses. However, students stated that the culture needed for critical thinking, and thus for making an assessment has not been created yet.

Battal (2008) defines critical thinkers as individuals who have the ability to empathise, are open to change, keep the truth above all else, separate the reality from rumour and prejudice, research about the truth in different opinions and are aware that the opinions of those who do not think like themselves can be as valuable as theirs. Battal also explains situations that restrict critical thought as blind obedience to a belief, ideology, or authority without question; prejudgements and prejudices that develop over time with the influence of the environment, desire for being right, egocentric or socio-centric, conformist personality, superficiality of the curricula, focus on transfer of information in teaching, testing system, excessive number of students etc. Critical-thinking skill should be added in all periods of life as a part of culture and encouraged to be developed. We can create this pattern of behaviour, which is gained in the course of time, by creating an environment where all children can

freely express their opinions. Including group study, critical-thinking and peer assessment among the courses given by the faculties of education is important in the creation of such culture. Overall, music students' feedback may be viewed neither positive nor negative. But many of them expressed satisfaction about their inclusion to the assessment procedure. From researchers point there was a well amount of learning during the evaluation and feedback of the lesson.

## Suggestions

Teacher training courses should use more formative assessment techniques in order to provide prospective teachers more experience about learning and feedback procedures.

Peer assessment can be a part of the instrument teaching.

Self-assessment – peer assessment and tutor's assessment can be used for summative assessment

More comparative research is needed related to traditional assessment models versus alternative assessment models in music learning.

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