



POSITION PAPER

THE MOBILE LABORATORY PROJECT (MEL)

About the MEL project

In our **Laboratory MEL** we aim to develop a toolbox, that can be used by educators in all fields of education, and which promotes innovation, experience sharing and know-how between us in the partnership.

The **aim of our project** is to develop intellectual outputs by which educators can generate a new way of teaching and thinking about their own role as a teacher. This way of teaching is based on exposure models and methods. Both the models and methods **aim to promote the professional satisfaction among educators and their robustness.**

Furthermore, the methods and models aim to create a space for social inclusion and aim to minimize the dropout rate of students; this includes reducing the feeling of loneliness and alienation among the students. We want to invest and exchange our knowledge, skills and competences in this project of capacity building. In this way **our project MEL will benefit individuals, institutions, organizations and society as a whole by contributing to growth and ensuring equity, well-being and social inclusion in Europe and beyond.**

Our project MEL will develop and produce a toolbox, which contains a guideline explaining what MEL is all about, a book of methodologies and a collection of instruction cards with thematic assignments on one side and the theoretical frame on the other site.



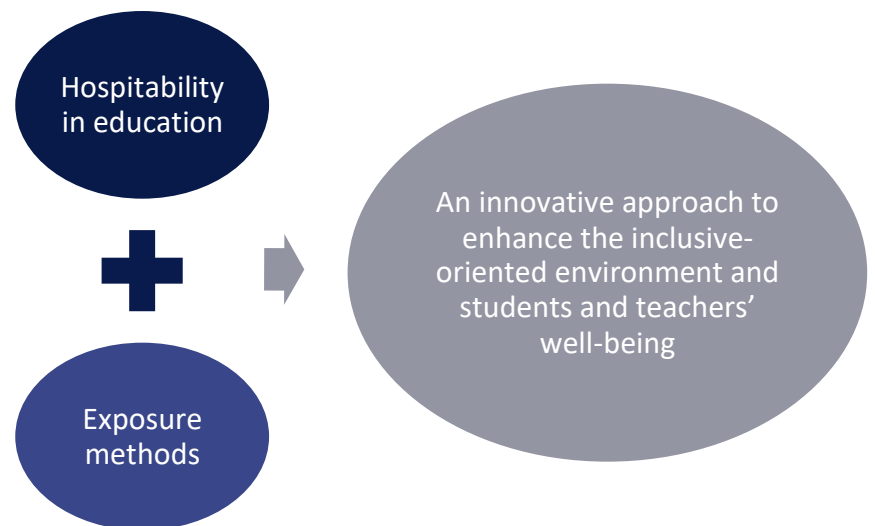
MEL project was run
between September 2019-
April 2022



MEL WEBPAGE
<https://en.via.dk/global-partnerships/erasmusplus-projects/global-hospitality>

Identifying key issues for the inclusive-oriented environment and students and teachers' well-being

While trying to have a comprehensive overview of what really means the inclusive oriented environment within school, we focused our attention on mapping the common understanding on two major issues, such as: what are the most common emerging kinds *of creative and innovative exposure methods* used by educators at all levels and what are its links to pedagogy and establishing a *common understanding on the concept of hospitality in education*.



Hospitality in education

When talking about *hospitable pedagogy* we generally focus on discussing *strategies that help us, teachers, make the classroom and by extension the whole school a more hospitable place for students*. As Marmon, 2008 and Jones, 2007 presents, a “good host” has to value the students and the perspective they bring to the classroom by being attentive and listening. In this role of “host” the professor is charged with the task of opening students up to the idea that they have something to offer—that they are not just the recipients of knowledge but makers of it (Marmon, 2008). This requires courage on the part of the relation between teacher and students and a new way of looking at the classroom and our students.

Hospitality is a practice that builds community.

In the MEL project we see hospitality as a sum of several socio-emotional skills (flexibility, adaptability, empathy, care, friendship, communication, etc.), which from our perspective are an important part in training a person to be a teacher. We believe that with these skills developed you can build in a school, a classroom a safe space where everyone feels welcome and safe, feelings that underlie the increased motivation for work and learning of both students and teachers.

We all know that in a space where you feel accepted you allow yourself to be yourself with your limits and resources, you allow yourself to explore without fear of consequences, which facilitates the process of natural exploration, which underlies learning.

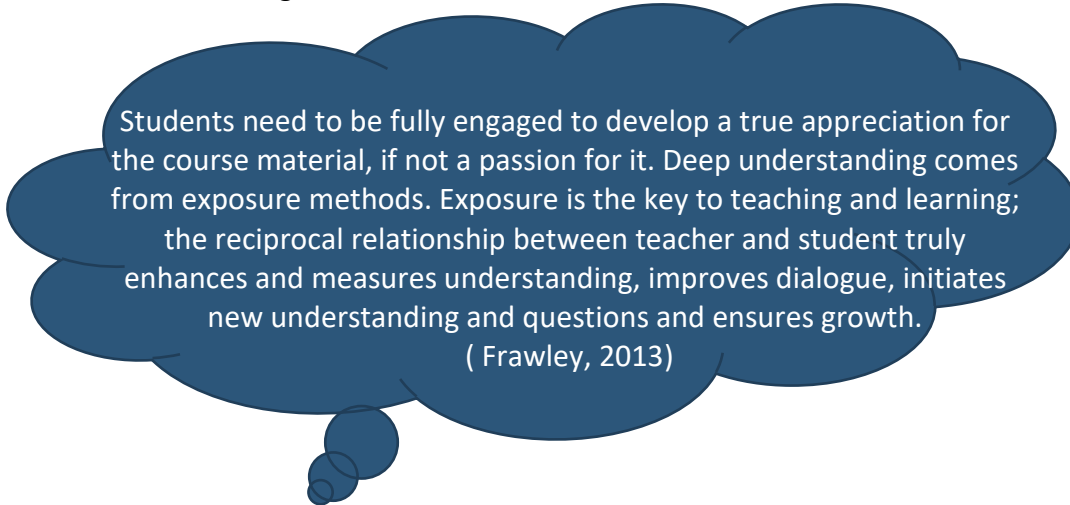
Hospitality means you are hospitable to everyone, not only for the teachers or students you know and care about, but also for the unknown persons or students you are less in touch with. **Hospitality is unconditional and reciprocally** in the sense that—in the mystery of hospitality lays in the fact that we have to have a mutual respect amongst partners/equals. The principal of the school and teachers welcome students and their parents at school, teachers welcome students with open arms in the class or vice versa and every time they have to find a way to answer different demands and expectations. This ‘laws of hospitality’ refer to agreements that teachers and student makes with each other to makes it work, such as a student charter or school regulations.

Hospitality doesn't mean there aren't any rules or agreements, but there are shaped in relation to space, resources, relationships, roles, commitments and identity (Pohl, 1999).

Exposure methods

While talking about exposure methods, research shows us that we generally refer to activities such as role-play, simulation, narrative writing and understanding, experience with metaphor or theater and student/teachers' presentations. The general aim is to develop aesthetical understanding, to reflect on identity and how one defines "oneself" and to engage on the development of relationship between teacher and student in the process of exposure and not on the exposure itself.

That is why role-play and simulation can improve the competences and it is also important to reflect upon the participants. It seems as if the involved role-players need to be strangers to maximize the outcome. When Role-plays comes alive might implicate that participants are touched and moved emotionally and with their feelings. Studies show that the impact of Role-play are significant and participants express, that even though they feel uncomfortable with the role-play form, they feel the change in themselves.



Students need to be fully engaged to develop a true appreciation for the course material, if not a passion for it. Deep understanding comes from exposure methods. Exposure is the key to teaching and learning; the reciprocal relationship between teacher and student truly enhances and measures understanding, improves dialogue, initiates new understanding and questions and ensures growth.
(Frawley, 2013)

IO3

Case Study 1: The inclusive-oriented

An aim during this project consists of trying to provide a comprehensive overview of relevant research regarding the emergence of different kind of creative and innovative exposure methods used by educators at all levels – and the links to including pedagogy. That is why we developed a series of case studies in order to help us in exploration of a phenomenon of hospitality in schools through a variety of lenses in order to reveal multiple facets of what does really mean to be hospitable and how can school introduce and enhance this practice in their everyday school life. The MEL project took a serious approach on designing and implementing a series of

environment. How to feel at Home

activities that aim at developing wellbeing in the school through the lenses of hospitality. A series of best practices, in the form of case studies was developed and implemented during the project. Such examples implemented by Ferdinand School in Romania is the activity called "Morning Greeting/Hello". Based on the fact that it is very important how we start our day, we consider that a greeting, that small gesture, but with an immense significance for the one who offers it, but also for the one who receives it. How can a greeting turn a place into an area of harmony, comfort and wellbeing? How can a simple greeting make our day beautiful and give us the energy we need for the whole day's work? How could a greeting connect people in a hospitable atmosphere and make them feel at HOME?

It is on the one hand, a method of exposure, of practicing hospitality starting from empathy, smiles, openness in relation to those around, collaboration and good mood, and on the other hand, a creative method by the way it was applied.

To further investigate the true meaning of this method we asked some questions during a semi-structured interview (to teachers, students, parents, administrative staff) about the welcoming ceremony in the morning: *'What does the `salut` (hello) in the morning represent to you?/ What did you feel/ How was it for you to be greeted every morning in different styles?/ In your opinion what kind of effects did have every greeting style about you and about the others?/ How do you want to be greet in the future when you arrive at school?'*

The results show us that this method ~~is~~ helps at creating that sense of belonging amongst teachers and pupils. This is mostly emphasized through the voice of a respondent that agreed that:

'It is a great pleasure for me to welcome and greet my colleagues every morning at the entrance of the school. I come earlier just to finish preparing the materials for the day. It is a pleasant way to socialize with your colleagues, but also with students. It's a great start of the day! It has become a habit!'

The input of this method was positive and research showed that the **'Morning Greeting' method has significantly contributed to the development of hospitality in school.** Trusted relationships have been developed and strengthened between teachers and pupils, teacher-parents but also parents-pupils as found in this statement:

'The joy of the children who come to hug you, to greet you, to share the pretzel they have with you, to admire your nails or how you are dressed. It is the moment when only he or she matters, but also the moment when he or she is listened to. It is our moment, of the teachers, when we can talk about ourselves. It is our moment of respite. It is my moment when I am charged with energy and love. It is our peaceful moment when it is only us and no one else! It is the part of the day when we share what we have done or what we will do.'

All in all, hospitality thought about how beautiful it must be for everyone in a school to be smiling and friendly, to share ideas and feelings as in a large family, to support each other and to live in a connection that determines personal and professional development of each of them!

Changes also appeared in the relations between the teachers and the administrative part of the school, we started to communicate more, we realized that we are important in school and in the relationship with children, as a teacher replied:

'The anticipation of entering the school with the thought of the grumpy or very personal greeting that I was going to receive and offer caused me a euphoric state so strong that I started to smile and felt my face light up. Sometimes when I was late knocking on the door at the entrance to the school hall, I remembered the greeting and stopped in the outer rush of my body and knew that everything was 'in its place'.

(Silvioara- History teacher)

IO4

Case study 2: The hospitable environment. "How

During this case study the project focused on trying to understand what does a hospitable environment mean and how to keep an open mindset while meeting other people. Trying to get as many answers as we can to the question *"How to meet the other as the other"* a series of activities were developed by RHIZO School in Belgium. The aim of the activities was to gather as much data on hospitality by inviting

to meet the other as the other"

teachers to reflect upon this phenomenon. After this inquiry process a series of ideas emerged and are related to some guidelines every teacher must follow in order to foster an inclusive school environment where meeting new people is seen as a moment of joy and curiosity in discovering, accepting and understanding that we are all different but equal in rights.

Therefore, the MEL project puts an emphasis on the following recommendations:

- ❖ No intrusiveness, no obligatory dance because not everyone likes that.
- ❖ A neutral first day of school
- ❖ Place name cards so that the students know they are expected.
- ❖ Speed dates in the classroom so that everyone knows something about each other by the end of the first day of school.
- ❖ Randomize the groups. Not the first 2 hours, but this way the students who don't know anyone in advance can also make contacts more easily.
- ❖ Hold a class day after one month. Everyone knows each other a little better and the hesitation is gone. In this way different things come up than on the first day of school/week.
- ❖ Play the 'cross the line' game during the first days of school but with 'easier' choices (eg chips and candy).
- ❖ Ask 'circle' questions. You all sit in a circle and if you don't want to answer, you put yourself back a little, so it's clear to everyone that you don't want to answer or speak. As a class mentor you can come back to this individually with the student afterwards.
- ❖ Ask the question "What do you expect from a first day of school?" on the registration form.
- ❖ Clarity about where the students should be on the first day of school.
- ❖ Continue to show interest in the students, also during the school year.
- ❖ If there is no click with both the student and the teacher, they can also accept this.
- ❖ As a student you have the right to behave differently in different situations.
- ❖ Holding up the mirror to yourself as a teacher, is it just me?
- ❖ Ask the class if there is something wrong if you have the feeling that it is not working.
- ❖ Hospitality is not the same as giving everyone their way.
- ❖ Hospitality is trying to reach everyone (classroom hours are experienced as very useful).
- ❖ Are we sometimes not going too deep? Don't we sometimes think too much/too far? There used to be less dropout because less attention was paid to everything.
- ❖ As a teacher you can also create a bond with the students by telling something about yourself, within your own defined boundaries.

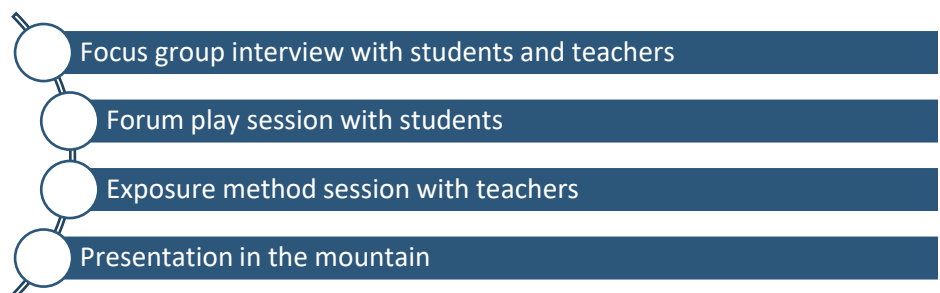
A method used in the project was the Bargna Card Game that is considered an exposure method. The goal is that within the safe confines of the game to evoke feelings that are experienced as when someone enters a strange environment and no longer understands it all so well. The method consists of dividing the teachers into groups. Each group is dealt a deck and plays the same game. The game is explained group by group and played for 10 minutes. After this, there is a change in the composition of the group. During the game, however, no speech is allowed, only non-verbal communication is allowed. The most important step was to reflect on their feeling using triggering questions such as: 'What problems did you encounter during the game and how did you solve them?/ How did you feel about that?/ Did you work in good in group? How was your input? / Did you observe the others well and what did you discover? / On what values did you pay attention to in this situation? In other words: What made it important to you / what made the difference for you?'

IO5

Case study 3: The inclusive-oriented environment. How to establish study-groups.

The aim of this case study is to capture the essence of study groups and what roles does it play in developing a more inclusive oriented school environment. During the roleplaying sessions we will try to pinpoint the mechanisms that occur in the forming of and working in study-groups. This experience will give them a first-hand experience in the mechanisms at play and thereby increase the possibilities for the educators to intervene in a more fruitful way.

The time line for the case study consists on the following steps:



The results showed us that shorter time in study group equals a better management of including unproductive members. Moreover, being in different study groups provides a better chance of getting to know and work with more people and therefore gain new knowledge of oneself. Other recommendations target the fact that teachers should challenge students to choose new people to work with and the fact that groups

for exams should be student made by interest in subject, while groups for themes or study products can be student made or teacher made.

When it comes to the ideal group making process several options appear as being more productive and they are made: by a machine in the beginning; by wishes – would like to be with – not to be with; by interest in different subjects; by level of ambition; by the teachers' knowledge of students' compatibility or by challenging set groups to spit or accept new members.

**Representative
Video showing
how hospitable
attitudes appear
in the meeting
with " the other
as the other"**

The video focuses on methods and approaches in order to make children to feel at Home and emphasizes on good practices that could make a difference and could be implemented in other school environments. The aim of the video is to showcase how during the **MEL project** different interactive methods were used to enhance hospitality with emphasis on cooperation between children and teachers and presenting ways of developing their creativity, through activities such as: drama, photo, film, sports, dancing, science, gardening and so on. The methods used will encourage students to work together, to answer adequate to different challenges and to express their emotions and ideas in non-formal activities.

Within the **MEL project** the notion of **hospitality means creating a place where they can feel easily as if it is their own place, that is why we struggle that, from the moment they step in our yard, we create a warm space for each of them.**

The objects that we make, the dancing and theatre show, are just means through which we guide each child to understand and accept the new emotions they face along with this new experience.

The film will focus on the things that we learnt during the MEL project in order of what do we have to do as teachers so that the children feel at Home.

The videos are available at: <https://en.via.dk/global-partnerships/erasmusplus-projects/global-hospitality>

Tool box for the Mobile Laboratory

The Tool Box contains a flyer/handout/guideline which explains the idea of the MEL, a methodology handbook and a sampling of Topic cards with instructions on one side and the theoretical frame on the other side.

All elements in the Tool Box offer a guide and a methodology for establishing a hospitable and inclusive environment and it will be available to be used by everyone who is interested in the topic of hospitality in education.

Case study 4: Shift in Arenas. How to start the Semester

In case Study 4 - Shift in areas. How to start the semester we interviewed students, before and after the test period, about what characterize the good semester start and what can be done to make you feel at home in a classroom.

The elements of innovation are the element of educators from different educations who will spar with each other on the focus points that are common e.g., the ability to make students feel at home and safe in the classroom and therefor will see known problems in a new setting, which will allow them to reflect on their own actions and stimulate and challenge the actions of the other.

The impact we expect is an awareness in the educators that will make them better and more comfortable in the situation of meeting new people. The Transferability potential consists of using both the exposure methods in other settings e.g. other higher educations, secondary and high school, as at training tool for teachers and educators, but also the results of the exposure: the awareness risen about the feelings and defense mechanisms that might occur in the educator when meeting new people. The data collection process consists of classroom-observations, interviews with students and interviews with teachers in the start of the first semester. Case study 4 focuses on educators' ability to mentalize when welcoming new students at the start of the semester.

The aim of the case study is to invent/produce/generate an exposure method, which can make educators aware of and able to reflect on the feelings and defence mechanisms that might occur in the interaction between educators and new students. The case study is performed in cooperation between educators at the school of social education, and the school of nursing. In an iterative process, data is collected via observational studies and interviews, and analyzed over six months.

Sharing our vision with different stakeholders

During this project we developed several multiplier events. The first event was at Durău, Romania, during 23-25 October 2020. The purpose of the conference was to present The Erasmus+ Project “The Mobile Ethical Laboratory” to the 60 Romanian teachers from all over our country. By carrying out this project we wanted to create a set of instruments which will serve as innovative ways of teaching. The main goals of these activities were to bring out and increase the importance of hospitality in our teachers’ room, classrooms and school community and also to create an environment where everyone feels welcome. After the presentation, we took part in a workshop where teachers had the opportunity to participate, in groups of 25 members. During the workshop we discussed and put into practice methods of greeting everyone who enters the school: children, parents and visitors. Each of the teachers in our school gave examples of different and innovative ways of greeting and activities which can serve as means of creating a welcoming and harmonious community.

It was interesting to notice that *our teachers felt the need to describe the feelings and emotions they had by practicing these greeting methods and also the ways they overcame their own prejudices in this way.* Finally, everyone came to the conclusion that ***being exposed and vulnerable in front of other people (either children, parents or other members of our school community) is not an easy task and not many people can do it. It requires a lot of fortitude in order to normalize and carry out these new customs so that you turn them into a daily routine.***

Moreover, our teachers put into discussion the idea that it ***is not always easy to be hospitable, energized and to always have a smile on your face in front of your students or your coworkers. There are days in our lives when we have worries and problems at home, but even in those situations it is important to speak honestly and try to normalize talking about these issues with others. These situations help us understand that we are all human beings facing all sorts of challenges every day.***

Our workshop participants understood the importance of creating a safe environment where children are involved and motivated to learn. When the children are welcomed with good energy, enthusiasm, love and open arms, they feel safe and accepted and they know that they are in a place where they can make mistakes and try again, they can grow and express themselves freely. This will also help them when changing schools because then they will feel very vulnerable and fragile. Thus, being part of a harmonious environment, the children will get the aid they need to achieve emotional growth.



There was also an important aspect we discussed during the workshop, which is building a cohesive community of teachers, a welcoming teachers' room, where every teacher (beginner or experienced) feels confident to express their thoughts without the fear of being judged and also to make the mistakes, which will help them later develop in their professional career. The participants took some of the ideas presented in the workshop, which were adapted to the specific situations in their own schools. It is important to mention the fact that online teaching didn't discourage us because we are trying our best to create a friendly, welcoming and fun environment for our children and colleagues. We experienced a lot of new methods of greeting and warm ups and we tried to make them as relaxing as possible.

The participants began to understand that the change comes from within and the first thing we all need to make is being willing to take the first step and create a much friendlier workspace. Accepting the flaws and qualities of others, being involved in maintaining a safe work environment in the staff room and being active in all the educational activities will lead to healthy changes in every teachers' room. Once they take this step, the teachers will feel better, work better, share their thoughts and experiences and their cooperation will also help them handle the hardships of solving difficult situations on their own. This friendly atmosphere in the teachers' room should also be found in the principal's office, the nurse's office, the administration and, of course, in the classroom with the children and their parents. In this way we can create a compatible community, which is ready to respect the differences between people and also a magic place where everyone is seen and heard, where everyone feels appreciated and feels like home.



We believe that sharing these examples of good practice is not only beneficial for our project, but also for us because in this way, we can understand if our activities can be made possible or not in other schools. The experience we had at ArtEd brought together beautiful people who are preoccupied by their schools' environment growth. Some brilliant ideas came to light in this project, which made the teachers understand that they are the guiding light that is needed in their schools.



The second multiplier event took place in Durău, Iași on the 19 of March 2022. The aim of this meeting was on putting into practice the

exposure methods developed during Case study 2: The hospitable environment "How to meet the other as the other" and Case study 4: Shift in Arenas. How to start the Semester. and how those methods can promote inclusion. During the workshops, around 80 teachers all across Romanian have gained insight on how they can use the developed tools in this project to reflect at their educational practices. The feedback received form the participants, on the second fay of the multiplier event was an extremely positive one, suggesting all the activities were relevant for the participants in their everyday activities, but also for their continuous personal development. They agreed that the cards can be used both for working with teachers, but also adapted to working with kids.

The main aspect that the trainers of this workshop tried to emphasize was the fact that those activities and the card developed in this project can be seen as an invitation to reflect upon emotions as teachers that prepare their classrooms to welcome pupils. Moreover, the cards reflect the school realities that applies both in Romanian schools and Danish schools, so this input makes us believe that educational reality is similar across Europe. But not at least, a strong suggestion was made by the teachers participating in the multiplier event and it was related to the fact that it is extremely important to focus on parents as well, because school does not only have to be welcoming and hospitable for pupils, but for parents as well.



RECCOMANDATIONS

The world of education is changing. There is more focus on learning inter-personal skills, on being flexible and ready to deal with situations and problems. As the world changes, we need to adapt the way we promote and advocate for proper education for all and to make our schools friendlier and more hospitable for all pupils. Innovative ways to improve wellbeing and social inclusion are urgently required, as the growing demands on educators exceed capacity.

Through the MEL project we would like to raise awareness to the several aspects that we believe are crucial to **support personal growth among educators, where self-reflection and mentalizing will promote courage and robustness**. Firstly, educators must develop empathy, creativity, effective communication and active listening in order to establish a hospitable environment in the class. ***A hospitable attitude will promote the students 'feeling at home' which is the first step in creating a space for social inclusion and reducing the feeling of loneliness and alienation among the pupils.***

Secondly, ***educators need to investigate their own role in teaching and we believe, that they/we need support to find new innovative methods, that implicates creativity and fantasy*** and relate to, what we call exposure methods and models belonging to the field of art. Supporting educators to apply creative methods based on drama, role play and literature, will facilitate an awareness of the individual's own values, enables mentalization and personal growth and focus on the educator role.

MEL Project sustains that:



innovative tools, exposure methods and a kind of instruction guideline for educators, can be a necessary and effective way to meet the European requirements for inclusion, equality and humanity

exposure methods developed and tested on students can be transferred to educators of all areas of expertise

feeling at home is connected to inclusion and that a hospitable atmosphere promotes wellbeing and learning

innovative methods contribute to diversity and integrated approaches and gives ownership of common values such as equality between men and women, non-discrimination and social inclusion

it is necessary for educators to find out how to economize on the resources available

exposure methods promote mentalization, which bring awareness of the educators' own values about, what is good and what is not good teaching

MEL PARTNERS



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