

Bridging Disciplines, Building Communities: An Interdisciplinary Model of Service-Learning

Interdisciplinary Pathways: Engaging Learners and Creating Opportunities



Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching Conference,
Edinburgh, April 16, 2026 – Eva Van Moer

Community Service Learning: An added value for interdisciplinary learning

1. How interdisciplinarity and Service-Learning **reinforce** one another
2. The **value** for different stakeholders
3. **Competences** developed by students
4. Strategies for **implementing** an interdisciplinary service-learning trajectory



1. How interdisciplinarity and Service-Learning reinforce one another?



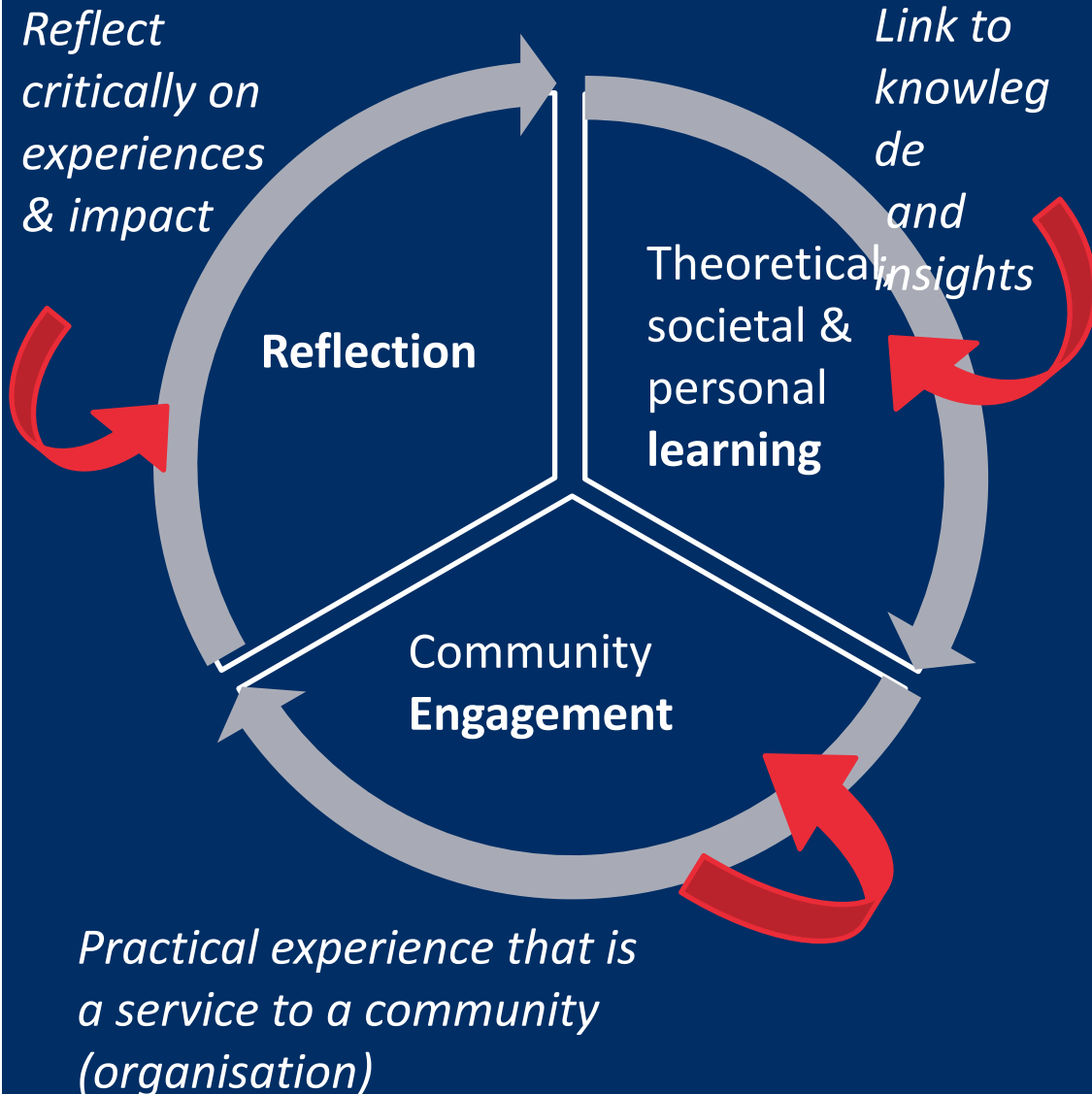
Why interdisciplinary service-learning matters?

- Societal engagement rising in higher education
- Universities want socially relevant research and education
- Communities become essential partners
- Complex challenges require integrated viewpoints

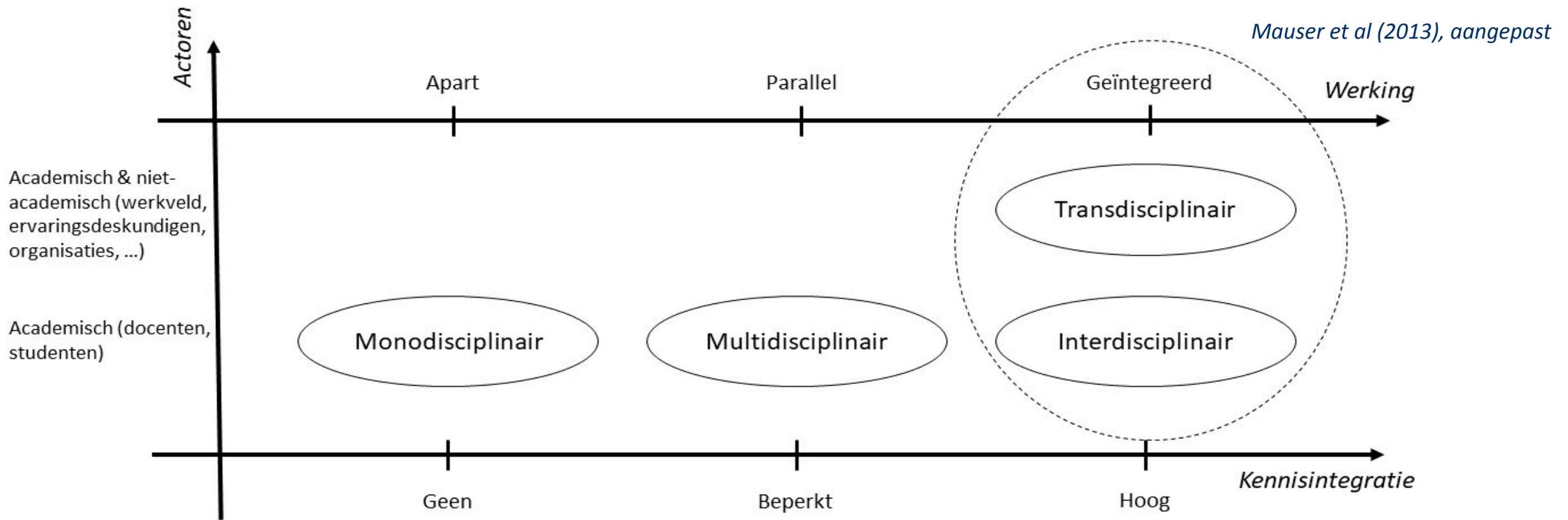
What is Service-Learning?

- Academic learning through community engagement
- Combines **theory- practice - reflection**
- Benefits both students and communities
- Focus on **real needs** and **reciprocal collaboration**

*“Service-learning in higher education is an experiential educational method in which students **engage** in community service, **reflect** critically on this experience, and **learn** from it personally, socially and academically. The activities address human, social and environmental needs from the perspective of social justice and sustainable development, and aim at enriching learning in higher education, fostering **civic responsibility** and **strengthening communities**. Service-learning is always recognized with **ECTS**.” (European Association of Service-Learning, EASLHE)*



Mono, multi, inter & transdisciplinarity



- **Monodisciplinary:** one field, one lens
- **Multidisciplinary:** disciplines work in parallel
- **Interdisciplinary:** knowledge is integrated
- **Transdisciplinary:** boundaries dissolve; co-creation with societal partners



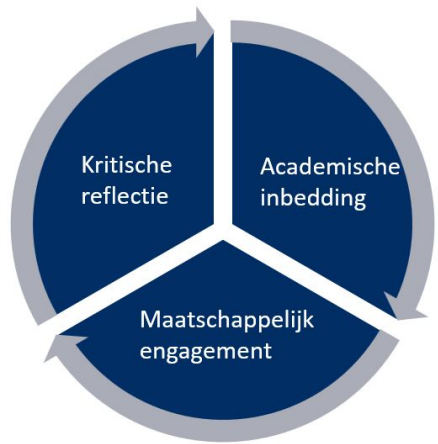
2. Design and competencies



Case Study: Community Service Learning @ University of Antwerp



Community Service Learning
= service to a community in **co-creation** with the community partner



- Bottom-up, rooted in a real-life, societal **need** (=starting point)
- Learning **from, with** and **for** society
 - Academic competencies
 - Transversal/generic competencies
 - **Civic competencies**
- Core: sharing and building knowledge, collaboration on an equal and **reciprocal** basis

”

How can JRS Belgium organise and incorporate peer support between undocumented families and previously undocumented families? **JRS Belgium**

How can the accessibility and inclusivity of people with visual impairments in theatre performances be enhanced in order to improve their participation and enjoyment? **Toneelhuis**

Hoe can we increase health literacy and active participation in het Health Kiok in an accessible way (among people with a lower socio-economic background)? **Gezondheidskiosk (Health Kiok)**

To what extent does participation in a Shared Reading project contribute to the quality of life of adults with multiple disabilities? **Heder**

 **Universiteit
Antwerpen**

Interdisciplinary CSL (Gerlinde Verbist & Eva Van Moer)

- Students from **all faculties**
- **Interdisciplinary** groups (Horn et al., 2023)
 - Student-driven
 - Question-driven
- Work with **local** organisations (new & recurring partners)

Learning activities

Seminars
Feedback (formative assessment)
Practical experiences (40h)
Reflection (video diaries & supervision)
Presentations (celebration)

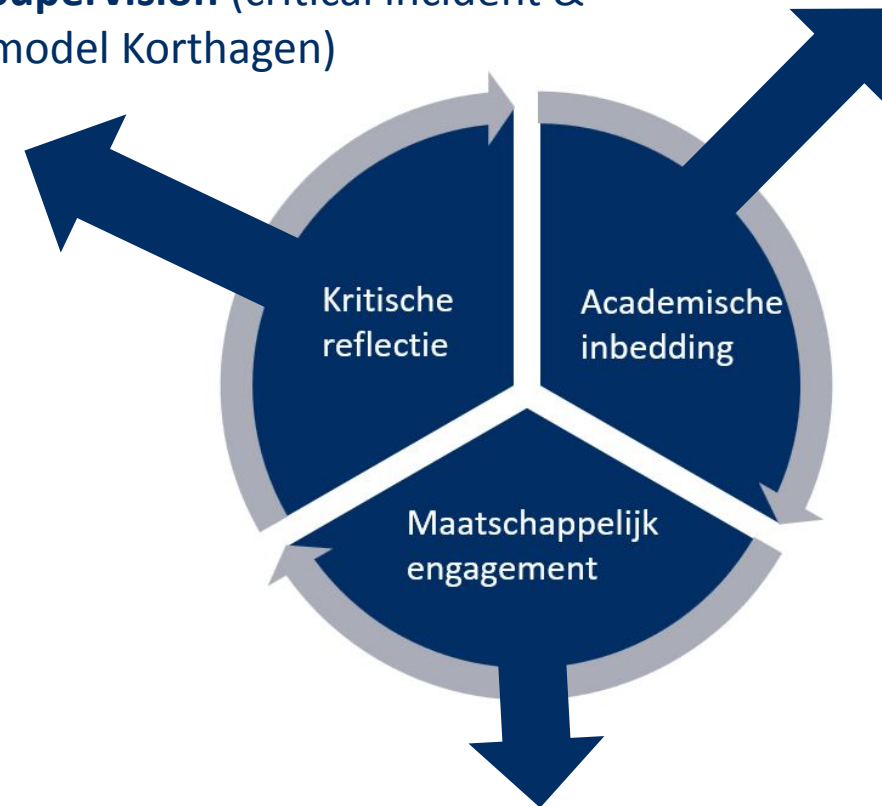
Evaluation

Paper (practice-based research)
Portfolio

- **Small groups** (max. 3 students, with different backgrounds)

- **Video diaries** (about practical experience)
- **Supervision** (critical incident & model Korthagen)

(field)research:
answering the need
academically



Practical experience (40h):
activities with target group

Evaluation

Continuous assessment (resulting in final grade)

Practical
experience

P/F

40%

Focus:
contact/engaging with
target group

Paper

30%

Answering the need
(research question) -
(short) paper

Portfolio

60%

Personal Development
portfolio
own learning process
and reflection
assignments

Presentatio
n

10%

Jury assessment and
presentations during
seminars

Growing into interdisciplinarity...

	Multi, inter or trans-disciplinary	Academic, social & personal learning	Engagement	Reflection
First years (Year 1 -2)	Multi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice-based research (often in mixed groups) Supervision 	Practical experience (if allowed)	Mixed groups
		↔	↔	
After covid (Year 3 – 6)	Inter- & transdisciplinair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive seminars Peerassessment Explicit focus on 'interdisciplinary learning and collaborating with partners' during seminars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborating and co-creating Practical experience 	Mixed groups

- Interim deadlines (milestones)
- (Optional) feedback
- Intake interview

Competences Community Service Learning

Academic/theoretical learning	Societal learning	Personal learning
Linking the academic component to experiential learning in practice and developing a critical analysis accordingly	Developing empathy and social responsibility , being able to engage with social and cultural diversity, and understanding the potential impact of societal engagement .	Using complex information and personal experience to form an opinion , and demonstrate the willingness to question and revise stereotypical images and assumptions .
Developing the ability to describe, analyze, and understand the complexity and multiple dimensions of a societal phenomenon (systems thinking).	Interacting with a social organisation, collaborate positively and constructively with others, and be aware of group dynamics .	Engaging in dialogue and critically reflect on societal themes form their own frame of reference .
To be aware of one's own political, cultural, philosophical, or scientific frame of reference and to actively engage with a diversity of perspectives , approaches, and underlying assumptions (active pluralism).	Analysing societal phenomena, developments, and challenges from a multi-, inter- or transdisciplinary perspective.	Articulate their personal strengths , acknowledge areas for further development, and thus actively guide their own learning process .
		Learn to identify, clarify, and weigh values, principles, and goals (normative thinking).



3. Value for different stakeholders



Value and benefits

‘Double’ *boundary crossing* (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011):

- Students confront unfamiliar perspectives
- Leads to awareness of their own assumptions
- Encourages creativity and openness
- Prepares them for real-world complexity

Benefits:

- Motivation increases
- Self-efficacy grows
- Knowledge deepens

Dual benefit:

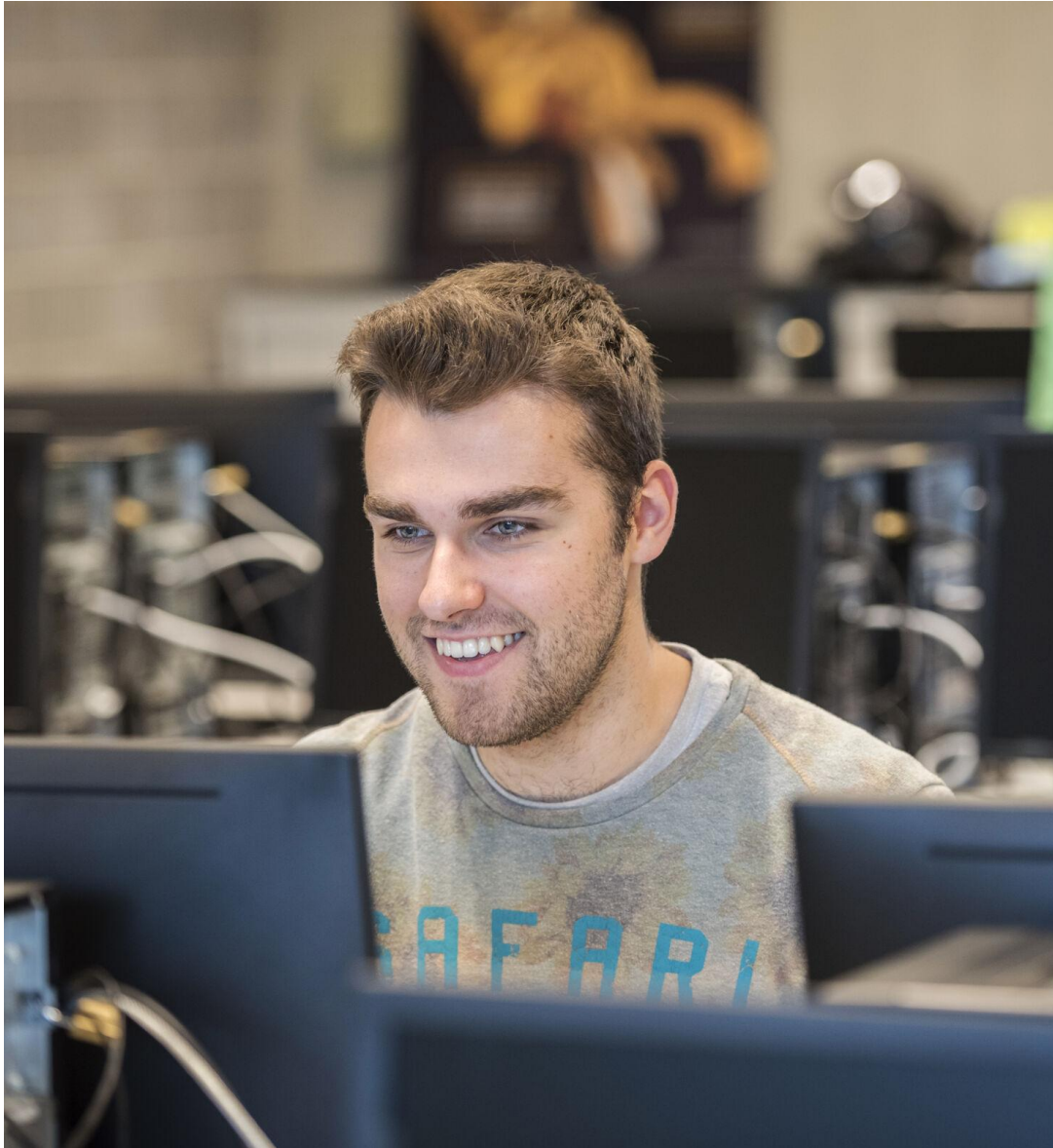
Students learn

Communities gain insights



Challenges

- Stepping outside the comfort zone
- Group collaboration difficulties
- Different terminologies and methods
- Emotional and cognitive complexity
- Invest in a good 'match':
 - Between students: need for careful group composition
 - With the local partner (requires a preparatory trajectory)



4. Strategies for implementing an interdisciplinary Service-Learning trajectory (design)

Tips for implementing interdisciplinary service-learning

Role of the instructor:

Effective supports includes:

- ✓ Scaffolding
- ✓ Feedback and facilitation
- ✓ Creating space for reflection
- ✓ Balancing structure and autonomy

Evaluation:

- ✓ Combine S-L goals with interdisciplinary competencies
- ✓ Use matrices and rubrics
- ✓ Evaluate cognitive, interpersonal and societal impact
- ✓ Involve multiple perspectives: instructors, peers, partners



5. Learn more?

Handbook (in Dutch):

Somers, K., Standaert, N. & Mottart, M. (Eds.)(2025). *Service-Learning in Hoger Onderwijs. De Samenleving als Krachtige Leeromgeving*. Gent: Owl-Press.

Chapter: Service Learning & inter/transdisciplinariteit – Bram Pynoo, Jan-Peter Sandler, Eva Van Moer & Gerlinde Verbist.

Website Flemish Network Service-Learning:
<https://www.servicelearningvlaanderen.be/>

Website European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education(EASLHE):
<https://www.easlhe.eu/>

Website CSL UAntwerpen
<https://www.uantwerpen.be/nl/projecten/community-service-learning>
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Thanks for listening!

Questions?

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