Community-Based Pedagogies: An approach to Reconceptualize Education in Rural Areas

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes national and international research related to Community-Based Pedagogies (CBP), its implications, and contributions to rural education. These pedagogies do not see learners as isolated individuals, but their experiences and realities are taken as a starting point for both the educational process and the creation of a curriculum linked with outside school practices. The type of research used was the qualitative approach to analyze 69 papers found through electronic research. The results show that CBP are not only suitable to break down educational paradigms regarding English teaching and learning, but also to value the local knowledge and make connections between teachers, students, and curriculum. The research concluded that CBP in schools can bring many benefits since it leads educators to enrich their teaching practice and design curricula connected with social issues embedded in the community.

Keywords: *community-based pedagogies; english language teaching; rural education.*

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Pedagogías Basadas en la Comunidad: un Enfoque para Reconceptualizar la Educación en Áreas Rurales

RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza investigaciones nacionales e internacionales acerca de las pedagogías basadas en la comunidad (PBC), sus implicaciones y contribuciones a la educación rural. Estas pedagogías no ven a los aprendices como individuos aislados, sino que sus experiencias y realidades son tomadas como punto de partida para el proceso educativo y para crear un currículo conectado con prácticas fuera de la escuela. El tipo de investigación utilizada fue el enfoque cualitativo para analizar 69 artículos encontrados a través de una investigación electrónica. Los resultados muestran que las PBC no solo son adecuadas para romper paradigmas educativos sobre la enseñanza y el aprendizaje del inglés, sino también para valorar el conocimiento local y hacer conexiones entre profesores, estudiantes y currículo. La investigación concluyó que las PBC en los colegios pueden traer muchos beneficios, ya que lleva a los educadores a enriquecer su práctica docente y diseñar un plan de estudios relacionado con los problemas sociales incorporados en la comunidad.

Palabras claves: *pedagogías basadas en la comunidad; enseñanza de la lengua inglesa; educación rural.*

INTRODUCTION

Our experience as language educators in rural areas and all the insights gained throughout our personal and professional growth have led us to realize that the educational process in these places demands to be reconceptualized since most educators keep the old-fashioned way of teaching. Besides, students do not feel motivated to learn English because the educational process is not connected to their lives (Holguin & Morales, 2016); language teaching is seen as a process where students just acquire skills related to the language and their community does not participate in this process, in other words, "knowledge at school seems not to be constructed" (Camacho, 2017, p. 90). In spite of that, Samacá (2020) states in her study that English is considered one of the most important languages in Colombia and other Latin American countries; however, when it comes to the teaching-learning process, Gutiérrez (2015) explains that the teaching-learning process "[...] has often been reduced to the mastery of language structures, disregarding the vast number of possibilities that language teaching provides to involve students in the discussion and analysis of issues that affect their everyday life" (p. 179).

In pursuit of an educational reconceptualization not only in rural areas but also in urban schools, language educators must understand that teaching and learning English goes beyond the four walls of the classroom; that is to say, teachers, through the reading of the context, must create a curriculum connected with communities' reality in order to plan activities that respond to students' needs and encourage them to be critical with the social issues embedded in their surroundings. In the study developed by Sharkey (2012), she witnessed, at a conference held in Medellín, that there is a disconnection between teachers, students, and curriculum. In this sense, Theobald & Nachtigal (1995) affirms that using the community as a bridge to create a curriculum not only contributes to fostering community identity, but it also helps realize true school renewal by making learning meaningful.

In this sense, community-based pedagogies (CBP hereafter) turn into a relevant approach through which language educators can change and break the paradigms of education and reconstruct their teaching practice; therefore, this allows community to be placed at the center of the English teaching and learning instead of leaving it behind in this process. In terms of CBP, Lastra et al.

(2018) affirm that "communities are seen as spaces that offer rich sources to connect syllabus and programs with the social, cultural, and economic areas that are part of the life of students and at the same time linked to language development" (p. 210). This leads us to say that CBP do not see learners as isolated individuals from society but their experiences and realities are taken as a starting point, not only for the educational process but also to create a curriculum linked with outside school practices. It is pertinent to mention that when teachers are involved in an interaction with the social context of their students and allow the participation of the community, the learning process is more meaningful (Contreras & Chapetón, 2016; Holguín & Morales, 2016; Nieto, 2018).

Consequently, the main objective of this paper is to analyze, from the perspective of rural language educators, the benefits of implementing CBP in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL). Besides, this review article is developed to provide both pre- and in-service teachers some insights related to this approach and its implications.

Review Question

English teachers sometimes have the misconception that the learning process is only developed into the four walls of a classroom, and it is addressed on educating grammar structures to train competent students on English skills. Although this somehow has an impact on students, educators disregard that community is a key asset to carry out a meaningful teaching and learning process at schools. Based on the aforementioned, the following question was formulated: How does Community-Based Pedagogies lead educators to value community's assets from a context in order to reconceptualize educational processes?

METHODOLOGY

This paper relies on the qualitative approach to analyze and describe national and international research conducted in terms of the review topic. Chalhoub-Deville and Deville (as cited in Rahmanl, 2020), argued that "qualitative approaches are employed to achieve deeper insights into issues related to designing, administering, and interpreting language assessment" (p. 104). Five databases were helpful to collect the 69 articles studied in the present review paper, such as JSTOR, SAGE, Google Scholar, ERIC, and SciELO, and the descriptors for the online research

included: Community-Based Pedagogies, Agency, Rural education, English language teaching, Critical pedagogy, Language policies. After reading the articles found, the authors made an annotated bibliography to synthesize the key aspects and involve them into this paper.

It is worth noticing that, throughout the process posed previously, the authors identified that CBP are nurtured by different elements which will be studied along this text; hence, this paper reviews studies on Community-Based Pedagogy (Sharkey, 2012; Rincon & Clavijo, 2016; Lastra, Durán & Acosta, 2018; Bolaños, Flórez, Gómez, Ramírez & Tello, 2018; Clavijo-Olarte, 2012; Vargas, 2019; Bonilla-Salazar, 2019), Critical Literacy (Gutiérrez, 2015; Medina-Riveros et al, 2015, La, 2012), Agency Development (Hernández & Gutiérrez, 2019; Birhan, 2019; Guofang Li, 2020; Campbell, 2012), and Community Teacher (Lastra et al, 2018). These approaches nurture and help educators to construct a strong identity inside the educational community and learners become agents of social transformation.

Community-Based Pedagogies

CBP are defined by Rincón & Clavijo (2016) as "outside school practices, life experiences, and assets that learners and teachers bring into the classroom in order to enlighten class dynamics and curriculum constructs" (p. 69). In this pedagogy, educators are not limited to follow national or international standards established by either schools or national policies, but they have the chance of reading the context to involve the communities' experiences in the teaching and learning EFL and thus enrich their teaching practices and institutional syllabuses. In the same line of thoughts, Vargas (2019) argues that "communities offer a range of resources, knowledge, costumes, etc. through which learners could be more conscious about their real-life conditions having a critical point of view about their relationships inside the community" (p. 27). That is to say, these pedagogies break the educational paradigms since educators, learners, and communities are taken into account in the educational process. Besides, learners are not seen as knowledge "receivers"; this means that teaching practices do not enact a banking education (Bergman-Ramos, 1993), but their experiences are the starting point for the knowledge construction instead.

"Community-based pedagogies are curriculum and practices that reflect knowledge and appreciation of the communities in which schools are located and students and their families

inhabit" (Sharkey, 2012, p. 11). In the same line of thoughts, Gómez and Cortés-Jaramillo (2019) coincided in affirming that CBP are educational practices where community members play an important role in the teaching and learning process of English. In view of that, these pedagogies are suitable for any context due to the fact that they require teachers to involve the community in teaching EFL. This goes in accordance with some studies developed in rural schools (Bolaños et al, 2018; Bonilla & Cruz-Arcila, 2019; Arango & Rodríguez, 2016; Ortiz, 2017), urban schools (Vargas, 2019; González et al., 1995) and universities (Lastra et al, 2018; Ariza, 2007), which led educators to learn, relearn, and unlearn about their teaching practices. Educators from rural areas can take advantage of these pedagogies in different ways, given that communities from these contexts have some great richness of assets, whether they be tangible or intangible resources of a community (Berkowitz and Wadud 2003; Kerka, 2003), and experiences [background, work practices, festival, etc.] that can be connected with the school curriculum. Furthermore, connections between teachers and community raise awareness of local resources which trigger the improvement of employment, fellowship, and living conditions (Starrett et al., 2021).

These methodologies help learners to change their perception about English learning since most students have the misconception that English is a difficult language to acquire. However, CBP catch students' attention because they are connected with their real lives and therefore learners feel motivated and have a better attitude towards English language learning. Palacios and Chapetón (2014) mention that, when class activities have close relation with the communities' life, learners feel committed and willing to adapt a participatory role into their learning process, and it becomes enjoyable and meaningful. In line with this point of view, Rincón & Clavijo (2016) point out that "when including students' context in their school programs, their learning practices become more meaningful" (p. 70).

It is important to mention that this approach brings many benefits to educators, students, and the community in general not only from rural areas but also from urban contexts. This implies that schools take into account the surroundings and the daily aspects of the community to carry out an education where students are responsible for their own knowledge, and also become principal actors of social transformation. The role of educators is to critically read the context and guide

students in the exploration of social issues of their setting with the purpose of finding solutions in a creative way while they are improving their skills in the English language. Bolaños et al. (2018) are some scholars that coincide in affirming that:

> This implies that, for students to have a voice, reflect upon social issues, and provide possible solutions to them, teachers need to involve learners in a critical pedagogy that motivates them to look for an improvement of the quality of their lives as individuals and as community members (p. 276).

In pursuit of an educational reconceptualization, these types of pedagogies must be implemented in teachers' education programs to train competent educators that fulfill the demands of the current education needs. Activities related to community cultural-immersion in teacher education programs can help pre-service teachers establish a strong relationship with their learners and perform activities based on community issues and thus engage students into their own learning process (Cooper, 2007). Another study (Vargas, 2019) states that involving both educators and learners in the community makes it possible to "identify issues, symbols, situations which, on one hand, can guide the construction of new knowledge and, on the other hand, can help raise awareness about the material conditions of their own community; this is a political action" (p. 28).

A study developed by Clavijo-Olarte & Ramírez (2018), where 32 pre-service teachers from Bogotá participated, shows that these pedagogies lead educators to value and involve community assets into the teaching process. In this sense, they state that knowledge construction must start from the community's local knowledge and experiences to reconceptualize the education; this can be achieved by giving a participatory role to students through the implementation of meaningful projects that allow them to develop their language proficiency skills. Moreover, Schecter, Solomon & Kittmer (2003) suggest some socio-cultural, economical, and political impacts on teaching and learning processes through building up knowledge in pre-service teachers; that is to say, education is not seen as a closed box given that the contexts have influence in teaching performance. In the same line of thought, Zeichner et al. (2014) mention that, when teachers explore the surroundings where they inhabit, they broaden their spectrum about the teaching

practice since those experiences "[...] invite teacher autonomy and ownership, and allow multiple entry points for curriculum design and different learning trajectories for teachers and students" (Sharkey et al., 2016), which are not taught merely from a theoretical perspective.

Community Teacher

In the CBP approach, educators take the role of community teachers and Murrell (2001) defines the community teacher as one who "possesses contextualized knowledge of the culture, community, and identity of the children and families he/she serves and draws on this knowledge to create core teaching practices necessary for effectiveness in diverse settings" (p. 51). That is to say, teachers take advantage of the community's culture, which becomes a compass for them to address their teaching practice and design activities that involve and impact the community so students find tasks developed in their learning process interesting.

In the same line of thought, Yuan (2018, p. 13) describes community-based teacher knowledge as "[...] knowledge of the lives, cultural traditions, and experiences of students." In other words, this means that teachers need to realize the relevance of learners' lives and background, and conceptions that they have about education as a scaffolding to improve teachers' performance, their "students' relationships to subject matter; [...] community life" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 81), and focus their attention on the well-being of students (Grossman et al., 2001). In this regard, educators do not perceive education as an isolated process from the sociocultural aspects embedded in their surroundings; instead, they enrich their pedagogical exercise by learning about and for their community.

Consequently, Canagarajah (2006) argues that this profession in the language education field has gone through different challenges, which have permeated the educator's philosophy and methodology; in this sense, he states that

> Teachers in different communities have to devise curricula and pedagogies that have local relevance. Teaching materials have to accommodate the values and needs of diverse settings, with sufficient complexity granted to local knowledge. Curriculum change cannot involve the top-down imposition of expertise from outside the community but should be a ground-up construction taking into account indigenous

resources and knowledge, with a sense of partnership between local and outside experts (p. 20).

In other words, teachers must not only reflect upon and research how helpful their community can be in terms of its local knowledge to be applied in the teaching-learning exercise, but they are also required to plan and implement a curriculum that can fit into that specific context and meet their needs.

Based on what has already been argued, Lastra et al. (2018) conclude that "the term community teacher refers to any teacher who teaches any area of knowledge but whose central point or resources of teaching is the community" (p. 211).

We agree with some educators when they argue that teachers must provide learners with skills to face the real world, but we frequently observe that the discourse does not match with the set of learning outcomes found in the curriculum. In this type of happenings, the key agents guiding the construction of school curriculum are teachers, because they are always in contact with the whole community and they possess knowledge and strong arguments to lead the process of developing a study plan that meets the community's needs.

Therefore, schools, when designing a curriculum, have to take into account both the teacher and students' knowledge in order to discover the community's assets for incorporating them into the curriculum to make it more inclusive and "contributing to the academic content and lessons (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). A clear example is a study in the United States which designed a curriculum founded in the personal interests of the students; as a result, students became participatory agents of the education (Grant, 2011). From this perspective, teachers are no longer seen as observers, but they have the responsibility of looking for strategies to generate agency in themselves and in students (Lastra et al, 2018, p. 216). Along similar lines, Rincón & Clavijo (2016) state that "CBP entails teachers organizing the curriculum content around social and cultural concerns of the local context, involving students and families in local inquiry, and discovering linguistic assets from the community" (p. 71).

When it comes to taking on different perspectives to a community teacher approach, we consider, of paramount relevance, the teacher training processes at university. An example of this is the

Professional Development School (PDS) model that Klieger & Oster-Levinz (2008; 2015) depict, which is "[...] based on collaboration between teacher-education institutions and schools" (as cited in Aviva Klieger & Alon Pauker, 2020, p. 7). To put it differently, the purpose of this model is to bridge the gap between school (PK-12) and college teachers so that prospective educators put into practice the theory acquired in their teaching training programs; in doing so, they develop a transformative education by involving themselves into their communities and therefore becoming cooperative, social, and educational activists. That is to say, teachers, besides being a guide, also take a participatory role where they experience through different social projects and start, at a certain point, a movement towards change; just as Jing Li & Cheryl J. Craig (2019) describe in their narrative inquiry about a Chinese teacher's emotions and identities in a rural area: "teachers [...] gain new perspectives of seeing their experience, which further refine their knowledge and inform their practices" (p. 3).

From our point of view, in rural areas where we can find illiterate parents, a community teacher plays an important role because, through his/her teaching practice, he/she can place the community at the core of the process for "making meaningful connections for and with children and their families" (Clavijo-Olarte, 2012, p. 34). Concerning the issues of educational reconceptualization, the teachers' education programs have to lead prospective educators to be community teachers to carry out meaningful activities which contribute to students' personal and professional growth. In this sense, a research on CBP developed by Clavijo-Olarte (2012), with teachers in Colombia, points out her concern on helping prospective teachers to be aware and appreciate the resources surrounding the school which are valuable input to "orient the curriculum, the linguistic, social and cultural diversity of their students as well as their subjectivities" (p. 33).

Critical Pedagogy

In a world that is experiencing many shifts year by year, the reconceptualization of education takes relevance not only in rural areas, but also in urban schools of our country, which aims to respond to the demands of the current century. In this sense, educators have the responsibility of providing learners tools that help them deal with different situations that emerge in this changing

world. Claxton (2002) claims that the key responsibility of educators is to provide young people knowledge, skills, attitudes, and tools to be worth having that allow them to become confident and competent designers and makers of their own tools to cope well in the world. By the same token, Facione (2011) argues that "educators must teach people to make good decisions and equip them to improve their own futures and become contributing members of society, rather than burdens on society" (p. 2). Taking into account the aforementioned, critical pedagogy fits accurately to reach these goals and meet the purpose of today's education, which implies to explore the definition of critical pedagogy and all the elements immersed in it.

Freire and Shor (1987) define critical pedagogy as "an active pedagogy which enables students to become truly participatory members of a community who not only belong to the society but who can create and recreate knowledge and society in and outside the classroom" (as cited in Bolaños et al, 2018, p. 276). Critical pedagogy shows us that the educational process involves a direct relationship between educators and students, and it also demands a relationship with the whole community to raise awareness among students regarding social issues and thus become devisers of their own knowledge and agents of social transformation. In the same line of thoughts, Luke (2000) points out that this is an approach that goes beyond the acquisition of individual knowledge, since it encourages students to critically read the community to analyze the social issues and turn those situations into opportunities to create their own knowledge.

"Reading the community critically means questioning reality, raising awareness, transforming self and rewriting the world" (Medina-Riveros, 2015, p. 45). The community provides different kinds of situations that lead learners to be aware of their context and, therefore, to spark the students' critical thinking to seek solutions and reconstruct their immediate settings. In other words, "[...] children have a wonderful potential to produce and analyze information, but it is necessary to implement the adequate strategies to engage them in the thinking and learning process" (Ruiz, 2013, p. 209).

A study held three years later by Rincon & Clavijo (2016) agrees that, through the inclusion of the community into the educational process, learners become critical readers of the context. Besides, students can develop meaningful learning due to the fact that they feel comfortable in

the process, since they are knowers of the context and they are seen as principal devisers of their own knowledge. Freire (1995) argues that it is necessary to advocate for a local approach that seizes "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (as cited in Hernandez & Gutierrez, 2020, p. 110). In this sense, critical pedagogy allows learners to express their thoughts and take actions about what is occurring around them.

In order to promote critical pedagogy and reconceptualize education in rural areas, teachers must design a curriculum that is connected with the community's reality and the milieu become a starting point to develop the teaching practices. From this perspective, educators, hand in hand with educational institutions, must provide activities where learners are exposed to situations that broaden their mind through the development of critical thinking; that is why schools are responsible for carrying out a meaningful curriculum that fosters students' participation in the community. Giroux & McLaren (1992) claim that schools must provide activities that "foster students' acquisition of the necessary strategies and skills that help them become social critics who are to make decisions which affect their social, political, and economic realities" (p. 79). In the same line of thoughts, Rincón & Clavijo (2016) coincided in affirming that, in communities, many conditions occur that can be properly worked in the classroom to provide language practices that give students a voice and the power to be critical actors of their own realities.

All in all, we strongly believe that critical pedagogy must be implemented in all schools, particularly in rural ones, taking into account that this teaching (and learning) approach relies on both teachers' and students' contexts, going against traditional ideas that are focused on making students proficiency on the four language skills downplaying the importance of individuals' social and cultural skills and background (Samacá, 2012); in the same vein, Kincheloe (2007) argues that this is a change in the educational paradigms because it leads students to develop skills for coping well in the world and being actors of social transformation. In this regard, we as educators have the responsibility to break down the traditional methods and incorporate, in our teaching practice, strategies through which students comprehend their reality, think and act critically about it, and take actions towards improving their community's wellbeing (Pennycook, 2001);

therefore, schools must turn into places where educational and social contexts join forces to become more sensible, critical, proposeful, and proactive individuals.

Developing Agency

"Agency is when learning involves the activity and the initiative of the learner, more than the inputs that are transmitted to the learner from the teacher, from the curriculum, the resources and so forth" (Core Education, 2014). In other words, "agency is deeply associated with personal and relational actions" (Espeland, Kvile & Holdhus, 2019, p. 3). Regarding this, agency gives learners the power to act based on their interests or social issues of their context. The development of agency in schools tends to educate critical and autonomous learners capable of taking actions to transform the society. However, the neoliberal agenda of the educational system does not allow educators to guide students to develop agency in the teaching process because they are limited to follow some curriculum or methods established by schools, which are focused merely on knowledge transmission (Segura & Torres, 2020). As Biesta et al. (2015) state, "There is an ongoing tension within educational policy worldwide between countries that seek to reduce the opportunities for teachers to exert judgment and control over their own work, and those who seek to promote it" (p. 624); that is to say, policy is being harmful for educational processes because there is a widespread agenda being developed by "rich countries" that completely disregards specific contexts with particular needs.

Freire (1974) states that traditional education is the principal obstacle to developing agency as it is "an educational practice which failed to offer opportunities for the analysis and debate of problems, or for genuine participation" (p. 32). Examples of this are found in Kayla's experience as a teacher for a indigenous school (as cited in Vaughn, 2018), where she found that "[...] the state's prescribed literacy curriculum lacked attention to indigenous culture" (p. 63); however, she managed to reach a more contextual approach to teaching kids through oral storytelling, informing themselves by elderly people's experiences, and reading culture-based narratives.

Agency is not focused on transmitting specific knowledge to learners or carrying out a memory education where students follow established patterns; instead, it encourages them to explore the world and take initiatives to transform reality. This goes in accordance with Giroux (2010), who

says that the purpose of education is not only to provide skills for learners to comprehend texts, but it also tends to "open up new avenues for them to make better moral judgments that will enable them to assume some sense of responsibility towards the other in light of those judgments" (p, 717). Unfortunately, neoliberalism has a tendency to regulate all social spheres and avoid people to think outside the box; this does not allow to develop agency in schools (Hernández & Gutiérrez, 2019).

As previously described, agency is a key element for the development of teaching-learning practices in students. However, we consider just as relevant to pinpoint the importance of agency development in teachers, who are, at the end of the day, the mediators throughout those processes. As Thumvichit (2021) describes it, "Teacher agency is regarded as a form of professional agency"; in other words, teachers ought to relate to multiple external resources (culture, syllabus, administrators, peers), as well as some internal ones available for them, such as methods, school supplies, and technological devices (Karin, 2019), so that agency has impacts not only on decision making and their belief system, but also their identity (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Deepening into teachers' agency, Buchanan (2015) bifurcates this into two groups: 'stepping up', which refers to "thinking outside the box", taking risks as a leader of a community; on the other hand, 'pushing back' means "going against the establishment", refusing to take national education policies laid down by government entities for granted.

Discussions and Conclusions

This paper leads us to figure out that CBP is a great approach to reconceptualize education in rural areas and to change people's misconception about the so-called 'low quality' of education. This review provides an overview about the CBP and the elements which nurture this approach. In synthesis, the implementation of CBP in schools can bring many benefits, since it leads educators to enrich their teaching practice and design curriculum connected with social issues embedded in the community. Besides, by bringing the social issues and connecting the community's reality to the classroom, teaching practices become interesting and encourage learners to develop critical thinking.

On the other hand, this paper states that educators have the responsibility of providing skills, attitudes, and knowledge to learners to face the challenges that life could bring along. For that reason, CBP take a great relevance in the educational field to educate critical and autonomous learners to take actions to transform their society. In this sense, the community is the starting point to design a suitable curriculum and implement a teaching practice where both a direct relationship between teacher and learner and where the community participates in knowledge construction coexist.

This pedagogy is worth implementing in any educational stage (urban and rural schools, academies, and universities), but we found very few studies developed in rural areas; we consider that rural schools have many assets to explore and CBP could be carried out in good sense in those areas. History and our experience as rural educators have told us that those contexts have remarkable stories and teenagers do not rely on parents' support, which triggers pregnancy and alcohol consumption at an early age; moreover, it is well known that the main economic resource is agriculture. In this line of thought, further studies on CBP in rural areas should be carried out around the topics aforementioned.

Some research drawn on language policies in a country like Colombia (Cruz-Arcila, 2020; Guerrero, 2008) claim that there are many language policies issued by the governmental entities; this kind of pedagogies cannot be developed at all because the neoliberal agenda limits educators to follow national and international standards in order to educate competent learners on the development of national tests like the Icfes exam which evaluates students' English proficiency. Besides, educators have to struggle with our Colombian culture where people downplay English, disregarding that this language contributes not only to their academic growth, but also to their personal growth. From our point of view, the Ministry of Education, educators, and community have to work hand in hand to reconceptualize Colombian education and give an important role to the community into the English teaching and learning process.

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