# Education Design: Methodological Strategies for Task Based on Project Work in the Classroom – A Secondary Publication

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the design of tasks based on project work for the teaching-learning process in any discipline, appealing to collaborative and interdisciplinary learning which implies more than one subject´s knowledge. The new implementation of study plans in Mexico has hindered educational design due to constant changes and the inclusion of new technologies. This paper tackles the concepts of transmedia, media convergence, and interdisciplinary to propose an easier and more effective design of dynamic and interactive projects which could be carried out by stages: formative and summative assessment, and may result in real and meaningful learning which connects daily life with the acquired knowledge.

**Keywords:** Formative evaluation; Summative evaluation; Interdisciplinary project; Transmedia

## 1. Introduction

This work aims to be a proposal to facilitate the design of educational projects and to create a bridge between two worlds that, in Mexico, nowadays, seem even antagonistic: on one hand, basic education, and on the other hand, upper secondary education. According to the new study plans and agreement number 11/06/221 regulating specific and extraordinary actions for the conclusion of the 2021–2022 school year and the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year [1], students are not allowed to fail a school year. This agreement is based on the notion that the third constitutional article decrees that education is a universal right. Consequently, the mere act of presence in the classrooms guarantees the obtaining of the corresponding certificates for basic education, without giving priority to the meaningful learning of the students.

Education is indeed a universal right that also allows the pursuit of new knowledge and life opportunities; however, it is necessary to mention the consequences provoked by the relaxation of academic rigor. The transition from basic education to upper secondary and subsequently higher education becomes increasingly difficult, thus closing the doors to many applicants. For this reason, it is necessary to seek new project designs

that allow teachers timely monitoring and relevant observation for proper correction and editing of errors before being evaluated. It may seem easy to follow a scheme of continuous education; however, it is necessary to take into account the network of cognitive, contextual, and emotional connections that must be put into relation to achieve the success of this task.

In the case of foreign languages, project work appeared from communicative approaches or the so-called "*approche actionnelle*" in French, although in Mexico, the level of foreign languages is low. According to the EF English Proficiency Index, in 2022 Mexico was ranked 88th out of 111 evaluated countries, reporting a very low proficiency level. It is evident that other foreign languages, such as French or German, fall below this percentage. Consequently, it is necessary to problematize which aspects need to be reinvented in education, taking into account that, within the framework of globalization, it is already impossible to delimit a discipline in an isolated framework.

In contrast, the interaction between various disciplines that can expand both the teacher's and the student's horizon of expectation becomes increasingly necessary. Thus, concepts such as interdisciplinarity and multiculturalism acquire new importance, but how can we translate these global concepts into a local reality? It is important to question how it is possible to adapt a project based on a specific context, and what is the concrete purpose of each of the desired learning outcomes. For this reason, this work presents a proposal for project design not only focused on teaching and learning languages but also on different ways to exploit the interrelation with the environment, with the new study plans, and the new technologies.

## 2. New educational plans for basic education in Mexico

The new curriculum proposed by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico aims to foster a new relationship between school and community, focusing on four formative fields: language, knowledge and scientific thinking, ethics, nature and societies, and from human to community. The distribution of these formative fields is complemented by articulating axes that, in theory, provide specific objectives and develop knowledge adequately through the experience of meaningful learning.

The new SEP 2022 plan resembles the proposal of the International Baccalaureate for the Middle Years Programme (MYP), adopted in Mexico in 1994. Currently, this program is aimed at students between 11 and 16 years old and comprises eight formative fields: language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, sciences, mathematics, arts, physical education and health, and design. These groups of subjects can be compared with the four fields of the national program. However, there are substantial differences between the national curriculum and the well-established proposal of the International Baccalaureate Programme, mostly implemented in Mexican private-sector schools. The MYP requires at least the annual configuration of an interdisciplinary learning unit that allows for collaborative learning.

According to the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO), "Students demonstrate interdisciplinary understanding when they can integrate concepts, methods, or forms of communication from two or more established disciplines or areas of knowledge to explain a phenomenon, solve a problem, create a product, or pose new questions in ways that might not have been possible from a single discipline" [2]. This interdisciplinary model is intended to be replicated in the new SEP 2022 curriculum. To achieve this, it will be necessary to consider that a deep understanding of interdisciplinary mechanisms by teachers, as well as the tools they can use to design, construct, and evaluate projects, will be decisive in their development and success.

According to the SEP, teacher training establishes bridges between the knowledge proposed in the curriculum and the teacher's knowledge, although it does not specify which knowledge it refers to. Various

competencies range from scientific knowledge, the formation and consolidation of ethical values, the ability to adapt to the environment, the didactic strategies provided by experience, and planning and design methodology. The SEP has also proposed the co-design of study programs by teachers, indicating that this will allow them to take ownership of the approach and content of the new plan and develop curricular autonomy. However, this appropriation will also take place among students since one of the objectives is precisely the ability to apprehend the environment in which they live; "knowledge implies a way of appropriating reality through multiple knowledge, experiences, and practices that converge in this appropriation" [3]. Thus, a defined objective has been proposed, stated in the guide of the new plan, "the formation of a new citizenship in which the principles of solidarity, substantive equality, social justice, interculturality, environmental care, inclusion, and human rights prevail, especially the rights of girls, boys, adolescents, and young people" [3]. Undoubtedly, in the face of defining the goal, it is necessary to develop strategies that allow for a successful outcome, both individually and collectively, considering that academic knowledge and ethical values are proposed without suggesting a specific methodology.

On one hand, the SEP has proposed the development of national curriculum design strategies. It is worth noting the need to clarify what kind of strategies, as well as the different contexts where they can be put into practice. It is crucial to understand that there is a wide range of socio-cultural contexts that hinder the practices of some projects. Some communities do not have the necessary resources to have an electronic device, or places lacking internet access. Although there is increasing access to cyberspace, this does not mean that users use it for study purposes. In this essay, the use of media is proposed as a way to connect the environment with students. Therefore, each teacher must be clear about the conditions in which they operate and the mass media available to them. However, the media are present in everyday life, even television and cinema are now references for cultural expressions.

To be able to combine different media, it is necessary to clarify what we want to make visible to the students and, at the same time, determine if knowledge acquired through other subjects can intervene in this approach. In the case of foreign languages, it is possible to propose a project on global migration that shows how the use of English, French, or Spanish has changed over the last decades due to constant and often forced migration. This approach appeals to a current and relevant reality that requires reflection. Likewise, to problematize this issue, knowledge of geography, history, and an ethical perspective is necessary. At the same time, it seeks to promote values of empathy and solidarity.

It is worth noting that combining knowledge does not necessarily mean carrying out an interdisciplinary project. There are significant differences between multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity. Multidisciplinary projects address the same problem from their specific area of knowledge without changing their work methodology. On the contrary, interdisciplinarity can combine methodologies and concepts to obtain more complex conclusions or solutions. So-called transversal projects involve teamwork (the same concepts interacting in different disciplines). For this reason, it is essential to observe the difference between a multidisciplinary project and an interdisciplinary one since, in the latter, the integration of two perspectives in solving the same problem is suggested to achieve a more elaborate result. The IBO asserts that interdisciplinarity should motivate students to understand a study object from different points of view, appealing to the development of understanding or empathy skills; through this process, students not only acquire lasting cognitive learning but also "demonstrate interdisciplinary understanding when they can integrate concepts, methods, or forms of communication from two or more established disciplines or areas of knowledge to explain a phenomenon, solve a problem, create a product, or pose new questions in ways that might not have been possible from a single discipline" [2].

Teachers need to establish meeting points between both programs: the new SEP curriculum and the international curriculum; however, it is equally important to analyze the similarities and differences found within the implementation of each curriculum. Although both programs propose comprehensive learning through the combination of everyday with academic learning, as well as the development of soft skills and ethical values, interdisciplinarity implies a detailed observation of reality and its socio-historical processes. This represents a challenge beyond the classrooms, as it appeals to the daily interaction of students with their families, and friends, on social networks, and other applications. Individual context directly impacts the consolidation of meaningful learning, therefore, the greatest achievement of the latter will be stimulating the capacity for analysis, critical thinking, and openness to new perspectives. How is it possible to develop these skills in such a heterogeneous school context, focusing on Mexico?

Understanding what is considered foreign brings a new perspective that allows for broadening horizons, both in experience and expectation. One way to understand the foreign is through the confrontation of the familiar. It is possible to present situations that arise in different contexts, problems to which one is not accustomed; the contrast and analysis of digressions consolidate anchoring points, as well as differences. Zygmunt Bauman explains that what is perceived as "foreign" or "distant" causes discomfort and uncertainty, "being far away means having problems: it demands lucidity, skill, cunning, or courage, learning strange norms from which one can do without elsewhere, mastering them through risky trials and frequently costly errors" [4].

While the Mexican context is very particular, the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) plan was taken as a basis because it is the first curriculum implemented globally, proposing comprehensive learning, just like the new national curriculum. It is worth noting the multiple similarities, even in the division of areas of knowledge. However, to achieve this, a deeper understanding of the means and ways of how to educate the population and what means we can have at our disposal to achieve it is necessary. Project-based work is undoubtedly a very useful strategy for addressing learning units, avoiding, as much as possible, the gap between students and the educational backlog. Projects suggest constant feedback and highlight the importance of evaluations as a formative rather than punitive measure, as in past decades. One way to understand this is by establishing the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment.

## 3. Formative and summative assessments

To understand the design of a project, it is necessary to define the stages that comprise it. In this case, we refer to formative and summative assessments, which are defined below. Since the 1960s, these terms have been popular and gained importance in the educational field. However, it remains to be defined when they are used and whether they are opposed or complementary.

Traditional education involves a numerical grade for each assignment. Subsequently, the average of all assignments is calculated, and a final grade is given. The new proposal consists of students carrying out non-numerical formative assessments that allow them to reformulate, edit, and correct their errors until reaching their final version. The goal is to help in their learning process so that they can correct or reformulate themselves in case of mistakes. Formative assessment informs the teacher of the student's learning progress during the teaching process; that is, it refers to continuous and constant assessment. It is important to remember that assessment does not necessarily have to be numerical or quantitative. The final result can be evaluated with a rigorous rubric, after having edited it previously.

On the other hand, summative assessment is used to measure final performance or the achievement of an educational objective. Formative assessment is more common in classrooms, as it refers to small activities

and tasks, and is used to guide the teaching process, while summative assessment is carried out at the end of a teaching period to measure overall performance.

If both are seen as complementary parts of a process, it will be easier to understand that the teacher is not at a crossroads, choosing the type of assessment, but rather will seek to integrate both parts into a whole oriented towards comprehensive learning. Formative and summative assessments are carried out on a small and large scale. Each learning unit integrates a project that addresses key concepts for meaningful learning of a specific topic; however, we could say that each learning unit is a formative assessment that prepares both students and teachers for the summative assessment at the end of each school year.

Continuous assessment favors performance observation, as long as it has well-defined objectives and expectations consistent with the environment and context of the students. Likewise, it aims to promote self-criticism and self-assessment to become aware of the importance of education, its advantages, and its impact on the community where one lives.

Generally, assessment is not an isolated concept. Like other concepts that can be coined in different disciplines, assessment interacts with others such as "feedback." This is essential for meaningful learning; it is a way of support and link between the student, the teacher, and the object of study. For this reason, a large part of attention must be focused on this process. The tasks to be performed must be supervised and monitored, in addition to establishing methods to stimulate good performance continuity. An unchecked task contributes to reducing the student's learning expectations and loss of motivation.

It is important to note that assessment should encompass the knowledge acquired, but also the procedure developed by the student, the attitudes, and the integrity demonstrated while doing it; that is, without plagiarism, with honesty, with solidarity in the case of group work, as well as the objectives intended to be achieved. The teacher also obtains feedback from the students on what their areas of interest are, generational trends, and how these relate to the concepts learned. Students build a generational bridge between the teacher and the object of study that can be reinforced by the media in different disciplines.

## 4. Transmediality and intermediality as didactic means

The term "transmediality" was first introduced in 1992 by the scholar Henry Jenkins. In his work "Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture," Jenkins defined transmediality as the ability of a story or character to move across various media platforms [5]. Julián Woodside simplified this term by stating that "transmedia refers to the practice of storytelling or communicating concepts in a non-linear manner using various media platforms" [6]; for example, a comic book character that also appears in a movie or a video game is transmedial, like the Avengers characters. However, Woodside also warned that "while this is not exclusive to digital environments, its popularization is related to the fact that such tools have allowed content creation economically, as well as facilitating access for the audience to 'jump' from one to another to complement their experience" [6].

In these cases, the aim is for the viewer to have a coherent and consistent experience across all media. Additionally, Jenkins complemented this idea with the term "media convergence," which he defined as "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" [5].

This definition, which was introduced in the literary context, is now crucial in other contexts and disciplines involving mass media, such as film, education, music, etc. Transmediality and media convergence

are concepts that allow us to closely observe technological interaction, not only between technology and the arts, but also between technology, the arts, different societies, audiences, and socio-historical change processes; all these factors act together shaping the reality in which we live.

Furthermore, we find the concept of "expanded media," which refers more to the way media are used than to an object; in other words, Jenkins states that "this circulation of media content—across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders—depends heavily on consumers' active participation" [5]. Collective participation is indispensable for knowledge construction.

Through media, it is also possible to expand dialogue among people from different nationalities and ideologies, as Zygmunt Bauman pointed out, physical boundaries have faded in cyberspace [4]. Jenkins then appealed to collective intelligence, resulting from the active participation of a community. "None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; and we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources and combine our skills" [5]. The search for collective intelligence is relevant in a classroom where brainstorming is commonly used to assemble a global idea. It is important to understand that knowledge construction cannot aspire to be universal or absolute. For this reason, it is possible to use different media that promote cultural and academic enrichment. Collaborative projects do not necessarily have to be carried out in teams, but it is important to know that collaboration can occur at different levels, such as interdisciplinarity (collaboration between two or more disciplines) and transmediality (collaboration between different communicative media).

However, transmediality does not necessarily imply the use of technology within the classroom, considering the limitations of school infrastructure in some cases. However, the connection between daily life within the framework of technological advancement is essential for new educational plans. Transmediality appeals to the mass media present in the students' environment, not only on the Internet but also as communication media in different formats. The project design can appeal to printed or digital newspapers. Decades ago, the use of newspapers and magazines was common in basic education to identify images, cut, or illustrate concepts. Currently, this possibility of illustrating concepts has grown thanks to a wide range of mass media, such as social networks, the increase in interactive publications like comics, manga, graphic novels, etc., television series, movies in theaters, and music videos. Many free applications allow viewing, creating, or exchanging videos, documentaries, biographies, and other materials. Some examples are YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram.

On the other hand, social networks now fulfill a socialization function and create an alternative space where mechanisms of commercial, social, labor, and even romantic exchange develop. As Zygmunt Bauman had warned, cyberspace is now a reality. Initially, Modernity was characterized by constant progress in means of transportation; one can evoke numerous inventions such as the subway, airplane, and automobile towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. However, Bauman pointed out that, in our time, there is an innovation in transportation, "a technical factor that had a particularly important function was the transportation of information: a type of communication that requires little or no displacement of physical bodies. Likewise, new technical means were constantly created to allow information to move, regardless of its corporeal carriers, as well as the objects about which it reported" [4].

This technical factor defined by the Polish philosopher can be identified on the internet and in all the applications currently used by a large part of the world's population. Cyberspace has become an alternative space where a parallel reality develops, and where, of course, it is necessary to make visible the role played by education. It is worth noting that it is impossible to overlook the role of cyberspace in current life since, if we were to do without media and virtuality, especially after the pandemic, education would present a strong gap between reality and what is understood from it. Hugo Zemelman had already pointed out that there was

a gap in thought, affirming that "the use of concepts without a clear meaning causes the constant need for re-signification (...) resignifying arises from the gap between theory and reality because the pace of reality is not the same as conceptual construction" [7]. Bauman added to this idea some years later, when the gap is more visible: "the separation of information movements, their carriers, and their objects allowed, in turn, the differentiation of their speed; the movement of information underwent much greater acceleration than that of bodies or changes in situations about which it was reported (...) information is available instantly worldwide" [4].

In this context, teachers face the challenge of learning and unlearning what exists as the norm, since changes are constant and accelerated. Media can be great allies in class preparation because they bridge the gap between the real world and cyberspace, connecting what happens in Mexico and other countries, and it's possible to find information in any language. Transmediality allows for a more cordial teacher-student approach, in sync with their interests and the social and communicative changes happening around them. Also, it's important to know that the media provide limitless information. Now, the role of the teacher is not to provide information for memorization but to explain its use and utility in daily life. For this, projects are extremely useful, as they present issues within a familiar context where students can solve problems or formulate useful ideas for their lives and appreciate the acquired knowledge.

## 5. Project-based learning

The first step in designing a meaningful project is a concrete and clear definition of the objective. Establishing specific objectives from the outset helps students carry out the project simply and effectively, as well as promoting overall understanding. The importance of this lies in providing direction for the activities to be carried out and, on the other hand, demonstrating their utility. If the objective is not clear or does not show the importance of the project, it will be difficult for students to feel motivated to create or develop an activity that they find of little use or that does not represent any connection to their daily lives. The teacher needs to establish a connection between the designed project and the student's daily lives. In this way, they may even discover new reasons to learn; that is, solving everyday problems, explaining facts and processes, organizing and analyzing information, etc.

The second part consists of defining the basic concepts, such as keywords, in a learning unit. This unit should address various topics that need to be integrated into the implementation of the work, as well as focusing on the detailed understanding of each concept and identifying how it can relate to problems and daily life. It is worth noting that the concept is not a topic, but a keyword that serves as a guideline in the set of the learning unit, present in various topics of the same, for example: "problem," "perspective," or "displacement." These are understood in different ways in different subjects such as mathematics, art, physics, or literature; however, to engage them in dialogue in different disciplines, it will be prudent to start with a detailed understanding of each one.

Each keyword allows for the development of a complex idea, which can be manifested through the completion of a task. This task should demonstrate the students' conceptual understanding, involving activities of reformulation, representation, and interpretation. The final product (summative evaluation) will be the result of several small activities (formative evaluations).

Another necessary action is to determine the timing for the completion of the project before starting. Students must be very clear about the deadlines. It is advisable to always leave a margin of two or three days for submission, depending on the teacher's workload; that is, if the partial or final submission is requested for a specific date, it should be two or three days earlier than the deadline for grade submission, in case of

an unforeseen situation or a delayed submission. To prevent students from falling behind, it is preferable to organize the activity in stages. This will allow for the distribution of work for both students and teachers and will enable teachers to monitor the individual and group progress of students. Each stage can be defined as a "task" and considered as a "formative evaluation."

It is worth noting that, currently, the concept of "homework" cannot be the same as it was a few decades ago, which was understood as complementary work at home to school hours. Now, homework resides in the interrelation of learned concepts with daily life, seeking utility for learning within the experience and interaction with the environment. The project should be carried out in the classrooms, with the help of the teacher and the exchange with peers, thus suggesting the home and family as a place for leisure and reflection on learning through dialogue and interaction. Therefore, "homework" should be understood as the assignment, the work to be done, or the result of effort and reflection that leads us to solve a problem or make a significant contribution. The task is concretized through the project, which consists of several small tasks carried out to reach the final result. Following this model, the small tasks represent formative assessments (Example: Step 1: information search, Step 2: summary of main ideas, Step 3: discussing these ideas as a team, Step 4: writing a critical essay in two phases, draft and final submission). These can be submitted weekly to monitor students' progress. The final submission represents the final product, in this case, the critical essay, previously corrected by the teacher and students.

To verify if the project has fulfilled its purpose, it is not enough to confirm that the general objective exposed to the students has been met. As teachers, it is necessary to carefully observe the relationship that each individual has established between a concept and their reality, as well as the way of presenting it within the project. This allows us to get to know the students and establish empathetic relationships that give us clues about their interests, hobbies, etc., which allows us to create and design more efficient projects in subsequent learning units. Each concept should have a close relationship with the central idea presented in the unit, as well as an interrelation among the concepts that have been addressed, as each one will be an essential component of the main idea. The reaffirmation of this latter is the answer to the questions posed in the initial formative activities and the result of the student's experience and interaction.

Finally, it is important to highlight the importance of defining the evaluation method; that is, whether a rubric will be used, whether a numerical scale, percentage, how many points each submission is worth, etc. Likewise, it is necessary to understand that the project is not an exam, but it should reflect the overall and detailed understanding of the concepts. A valuable tool is the use of a rubric, individually designed, which represents for each teacher a unit for monitoring and evaluating learning in real terms. Jesús Torres Gordillo and Víctor Hugo Perera have synthesized the concept of rubric as "a versatile tool that can be used in very different ways to evaluate and tutor students' work. On the one hand, it provides the student with a reference that provides feedback on how to improve their work. On the other hand, it provides the teacher with the possibility of expressing their expectations about the learning objectives set" [8].

In this way, each teacher can design a personalized rubric for their quarterly or annual work, as the case may be, to better communicate what each project should present and how the student is expected to assimilate this information. This rubric depends on the purpose of the evaluation; that is, for the student to demonstrate a global understanding of the topic, which can vary, and it is possible to add other components, such as student engagement, timeliness of submission, etc. Likewise, it is advisable to use an answer key, in case of having a question and answer exercise. This key will facilitate the correction of assignments, saving time that can be dedicated to observing the environment and areas for improvement. Similarly, exercise keys can be shared and exchanged among teaching colleagues, promoting interaction and interdisciplinary planning.

# 6. Conclusions

Currently, we live in a world that can no longer do without technology; but at the same time, it is necessary to preserve the ethical side of human beings. Through educational projects, we can attempt to combine learning experiences with the practical application of ethical values, such as solidarity, mutual respect, and human dignity. When interacting with other members of a group, students appeal to exchange and the development of emotional skills, which seem increasingly scarce. Faced with an era change like the one we live in, it is essential to reinforce the idea that learning is not limited solely to the cognitive or to the storage of information; nor to mere social skills. It is necessary to understand that both parts are necessary to achieve a balance and a process of adaptation to an era that abruptly broke with the customs of the preceding decades.

This essay aims to contribute to the new educational design, which can reduce as much as possible the gap between those who navigate daily in the media and those who cannot access it so easily. It is necessary to adapt projects to our own context and to achieve this, it is necessary to know the structure of the plan, the cognitive cores, and what their purposes are. However, we cannot ignore that cyberspace is a new reality where education needs to become increasingly visible to be part of it. Education is a life tool to create social harmony; therefore, we cannot leave behind innovation in teaching and learning processes. It is necessary to appeal to constant dialogue, new proposals, and criticism, both from specialists and from basic and higher education teachers, as only by working together can the gap between the two be reduced. Project work provides a collaborative perspective, not only in the sense of solidarity among peers but also among the various disciplines as a living and changing object of study that mutually reinforces itself. Similarly, media convergence is observed, which enriches the learning experience, making it more sensory and closer to reality.

For the successful design of a project, it is necessary to define in advance the working method, the applications or materials to be used, the delivery methods (virtual platform, physical delivery, printing, etc.), as well as the creation of formative stages and definition of learning in the summative stage. Clarity is key in communication between teachers and students.

To conclude, it is worth noting that in this textual space, project work has been problematized without reference to a specific subject. The theoretical foundations indeed come from sources based on foreign language learning and literature; however, this does not mean that these strategies are specifically for language teaching. One of the objectives of this work is precisely to promote interdisciplinary collaboration. Language is present in all aspects of our lives and is fundamental for understanding the world and developing thought; however, other factors affect the construction of that individual worldview. Consequently, the aim is to delve into how knowledge relates to a specific situation to create solutions. Sciences, mathematics, and arts can enrich and affect the perception that an individual or a collective has of the world. Likewise, one culture can influence another, thus changing thought.

Likewise, the proposal presented here appeals to various cultural, academic, mass media, and popular culture manifestations to integrate the school world with daily life. In this way, the aim is to build a bridge between knowledge and reality, between the abstract and the concrete, and to create the necessary skills to understand the world around us. Thus, we can build a reality based on values and mutual respect, which truly puts meaningful learning into practice for the benefit of collective well-being.

# Disclosure statement

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