L³IFT Framework:
Learning, Language, and Literacy Integrated Framework for Teaching

Lifting All Students through Rigorous Levels of Learning through Language

CESA2
Language & Culture
Center of Excellence

L³LIFT

Multilingual Children are Academically Successful and are Full Members of the School Community

INTEGRATION OF **DISCIPLINARY LITERACY, LANGUAGE** AND REASONING

EXPERIENCE-ANCHORED LANGUAGE LEARNING

EXPLICIT AND SUSTAINED LANGUAGE FOCUS

HIGH CHALLENGE & HIGH SUPPORT WITH **MACRO AND MICRO** SCAFFOLDING

QUALITY INTERACTIONS FOR MEANING **MAKING**

L³IFT

Learning, Language, and Literacy Integrated Framework for Teaching

Culturally Sustaining Practice

Creating a sense of belonging where students' identities, languages, and cultures are visible, leveraged, and sustained.

CESA2

About Us

The authors of this framework are members of the Language and Culture Center at the Cooperative Educational Service Agency 2 (CESA 2) in Wisconsin. CESA 2, based in south central Wisconsin partners with schools, universities, and businesses, and leads in advancing educational excellence by delivering innovative professional development, providing data-driven analysis to inform decision-making, and connecting districts to tailored resources. It fosters partnerships to bring fresh perspectives, maximizes cost efficiencies, and ensures alignment with its mission and values. Governed by Wisconsin State Statute 116.01, CESA 2 acts as a liaison between local districts, the Department of Public Instruction, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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This paper introduces the L³IFT framework, and answers the following questions:

What is the L³IFT?

To address the needs of Multilingual Learners and traditionally marginalized students, CESA 2's Language and Culture Center (LCC) team created a robust framework called the Learning, Language and Literacy Integrated Framework for Teaching (L³IFT). L³IFT, grounded in the most recent research, emphasizes culturally-sustaining teaching practices and the integration of disciplinary literacy, language, and learning. It focuses on explicit, sustained language development from a functional perspective to highlight the unique characteristics of academic language in support of learning (Schleppegrell, 2004). It also advocates for high-challenge, high-support classrooms that use both macro and micro scaffolding to foster quality interactions for meaning-making. Teachers are encouraged to understand the interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity, and to reflect on their own beliefs and practices to better serve Multilingual Learners. In our work at CESA 2, we use the term Multilingual Learners, or "MLs", to refer to English Learners and emergent bilinguals.

The framework promotes planning lessons that integrate content and language development standards while leveraging diverse student backgrounds. It emphasizes translanguaging – where multilingual speakers use their full linguistic repertoire, to enhance learning. Instruction is designed to be dynamic and responsive, incorporating ongoing language support, while assessment is authentic, iterative, and closely tied to language and disciplinary goals. This comprehensive approach aims to equip teachers to more effectively engage and support all students, especially MLs, in achieving high academic standards.

What Problems Is the Framework Trying to Solve?

L³IFT aims to address several key challenges in the education of MLs. Traditional models focus primarily on language development before content learning, often resulting in simplified language and reduced exposure to robust content that hinders academic progress and keeps students behind. L³IFT reverses this approach by scaffolding meaning-making at a rigorous level, starting with concept development through experiences, and building the necessary language skills in the service of learning. This allows students to engage with high-level content and academic knowledge while simultaneously developing their language.

L³IFT integrates the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards that help teachers focus on language in a functional and systematic way benefitting all students, not just Multilingual Learners. The framework supports culturally and linguistically sustaining classrooms, ensuring that all students can achieve high levels of academic success and language development in tandem.

Additionally, L³IFT addresses the issue of inadequate integration of language development standards in Tier I instruction. Traditionally, English Language Development (ELD) has been treated as a separate, often lower-priority intervention handled by EL teachers. L³IFT promotes the inclusion of language development in core content areas. This inclusion prevents EL teachers from being isolated as interventionists and ensures that ML students receive language support within their primary instruction.

By focusing on a functional approach to language and integrating content, disciplinary literacy, and ELD standards, L³IFT provides a robust, systematic framework for improving the academic and language outcomes for Multilingual Learners, supporting districts of any size and number of ML students.

What are the Components of the L³IFT?

The L³IFT consists of six core components:

1 Culturally Sustaining Practices

2 Integration of Disciplinary Literacy, Language, and Reasoning

3 Experience-Anchored Language Learning

4 Explicit and Sustained Language Focus

5 High Challenge & High Support with Macro-Micro Scaffolding

6 Quality Interactions for Meaning Making

L³IFT provides a structured approach by integrating culturally sustaining practices, disciplinary literacy, experiential learning, explicit language instruction, scaffolding, and quality interactions. By implementing these core components, educators can create inclusive and effective learning environments that promote the academic success and full participation of all students.
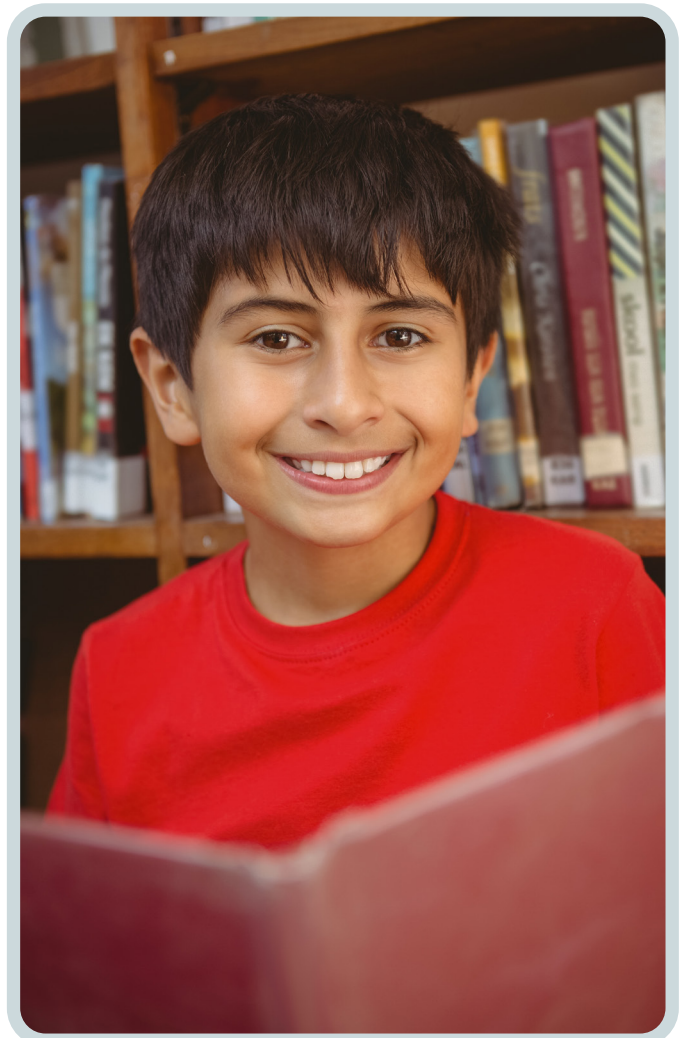
L³IFT Framework Components: Definitions and Research Base

Culturally Sustaining Teaching Practice

Definition

Culturally Sustaining Practice begins with a culturally aware mindset that sees all humans as cultural beings who work to stay continually curious to learn, unlearn, and relearn. This pedagogy recognizes that culture is a dynamic set of values, beliefs, practices, and ways of being (Alim et al, 2020). It is a pedagogy of promise and high expectations, aiming to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1994). By tailoring instruction to address social barriers, educators help students overcome obstacles and succeed (Rodriguez et a., 2004). Responsive classrooms also mitigate the effects of negative cultural stereotypes on student performance (Cohen & Garcia, 2008). Culturally sustaining approaches also build on culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) which involves using students' home languages, cultural and linguistic knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles to make learning more appropriate and effective.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy can be enacted through Translanguaging. Translanguaging values students' multilingual resources, develops their metalinguistic and metacultural awareness, and encourages culturally and linguistically responsive assessment. It encourages the strategic use of a student's entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning, promote learning, and foster critical thinking (Garcia et al, 2017). Translanguaging rings scaffold student meaning-making and classroom interactions in small group settings as students shift between the home language and target language and draw on all their linguistic repertoire in content area learning (Daniel & Pacheco, 2020: Kayumova et al, 2024).

To ensure MLs are academically successful and fully integrated into the school community, teachers should:

1. **Integrate Students' Cultural References:** Intentionally use students' cultural backgrounds in lessons to make learning more relevant and engaging (Gay, 2010).
2. **Build on Students' Linguistic Assets:** Leverage students' linguistic skills as resources in the classroom to support and enrich their learning experiences.

Integration of Disciplinary Literacy, Language, and Reasoning

Definition

Integration of Disciplinary Literacy, Language, and Reasoning ensures that instruction incorporates all three elements. Language is taught explicitly in the service of learning and is not reduced to only vocabulary. Teachers use the WIDA ELD standards as a resource to unpack the language demands of disciplinary genres (Narrate, Inform, Explain, Argue), Language Expectations, and Language Functions and Features to make language visible. By positioning language as a tool for learning, students use language to achieve disciplinary goals.

Disciplinary Literacy involves more than just reading; it includes the specific ways of knowing, reasoning, reading, writing, and communicating unique to

each discipline (Moje, 2008). It encompasses discourses and practices, identities, and knowledge, pursuing habits of mind valued by the discipline community (Moje, 2015). Learning in a subject area involves understanding the "norms of practice" for constructing and communicating disciplinary knowledge (Wineburg & Martin, 2004; Lemke,1990; Spires, et al, 2016). Evidence shows when teachers integrate these practices beginning in early grades, their reading and writing proficiency improves (Relyea, et al, 2024).

To ensure MLs are academically successful and fully integrated into the school community, teachers should:

1. **Incorporate Language Demands Explicitly:** Use the WIDA ELD Standards as a resource to identify and teach the language demands of disciplinary genres, ensuring that language learning supports content learning.
2. **Cultivate Disciplinary Literacy:** Engage students in the specific discourses and practices of the discipline, helping them understand and use the unique ways of reasoning and communicating within that field.

Experience-Anchored Language Learning
Definition

Experience-Anchored Language Learning (EALL) is a teaching approach that centers language development around engaging, meaningful experiences. These experiences serve as the foundation for learning, providing students with shared, concrete contexts that make language more accessible and relevant. Examples of such experiences include hands-on activities, video discussions, community events, virtual or in-person field trips at the start of a unit, phenomenon-based science investigations, outdoor exploration, project-based learning, and inquiry-based tasks (Estrella et al, 2018; Haneda & Wells, 2010; Gibbons, 2006; Lee et al, 2013).

This approach situates language learning in authentic, real-world contexts where learning is relevant to

student lives. By engaging with the experience first, students build background knowledge and generate everyday language, which teachers can later guide into more specialized academic language. For instance, a phenomenon-based science activity might involve observing a natural event, such as the water cycle, to introduce terms like "evaporation" or "condensation" through discussion before transitioning into reading and writing about the topic Molle et al, 2021; Windschitl et al, 2018). Ultimately, this fosters deeper understanding, critical thinking, and communication skills by anchoring abstract language in concrete, shared experiences.

To ensure MLs are academically successful and fully integrated into school community, teachers should:

1. **Design instruction** that allows students to interact and experience concepts through viewing and talking before the heavy lifting of reading and writing.
2. **Ground language learning in experiences** and introduce key vocabulary after and during the experience, not before.

Explicit and Sustained Language Focus
Definition

An explicit and sustained language focus involves deliberately teaching language in the service of learning within content instruction, ensuring that language development is consistently integrated with the learning it serves.

To ensure MLs are academically successful and fully integrated into the school community, teachers should:

1. **Make linguistic structures important for learning content visible** to students to help them understand and use academic language effectively (Schleppegrell, 2004).
2. **Intentionally design lessons with a sustained focus and long-term language development** by providing continuous opportunities for students to practice and apply language skills within meaningful contexts (Gibbons, 2009).

To ensure MLs are academically successful and are full members of the school community, teachers need to teach language not only at the beginning of the lesson such as pre-teaching vocabulary but sustain attention to language throughout the unit.

High Challenge + High Support Classrooms with Macro and Micro Scaffolding

Definition
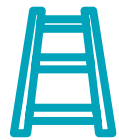
High Challenge and High Support starts with teachers believing that MLs are capable of learning the same material as their grade level peers and then providing sequencing of learning activities that gradually provide access towards successful participation through macro and micro scaffolding (de Oliveira & Smith 2019; de Oliveira & Westerlund, 2023; Gibbons, 2009; Michell & Sharpe 2005; Walqui & Bunch 2019).

1. **Macro scaffolding** is defined as the sequencing of learning activities in such a way that the gap is not too big from everyday to specialized ways of using language.
2. **Micro scaffolding** is also termed as interactional where the teacher recasts, probes, and elaborates student discourse to move the language forward. The pedagogy of HC+HS does not believe in simplifying it to the point where students have no chance to participate in grade-level learning.

Message Abundancy, a term coined by Pauline Gibbons in 2006, refers to the use of multiple meaning-making systems to support multilingual learners in understanding key concepts. Rather than simplifying language, it emphasizes amplifying it through scaffolding, encouraging teachers to present information in multiple modes—spoken, visual, interactive, graphic, and verbal—so students can engage with content in diverse ways. This approach challenges traditional delivery methods by providing students with multiple entry points to the same concept, inviting teachers to strategically integrate varied methods like color-coded text, margin questions, and graphic representations to enhance comprehension without relying on translation.

To ensure MLs are academically successful and are full members of the school community, teachers need to

- **Provide Access to Rigorous Tasks:** Ensure that tasks remain intellectually challenging while offering macro and micro scaffolding to support MLs' engagement and success (Gibbons, 2009).
- **Create Different Entry Points through Message Abundancy:** Develop various ways for MLs to engage with the same learning tasks, ensuring that all students can participate meaningfully (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

Quality Interactions for Meaning Making

Definition

Quality interactions for meaning-making encompass not only the quantity of student talk but, more importantly, the quality of these interactions. Research continuously finds that MLs are not talking enough in classrooms (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016; Van de Pol et al, 2012). The research that supports quality interactions recommends that teachers create a culture of talk where all voices and ideas are welcomed. It asks that teachers facilitate discussions that encourage sense-making by guiding conversations that prompt students to engage in problem-solving, and explicitly teaching students how to reconsider and refine their ideas based on new insights. This leads to deeper understanding of the subject matter (Dufficy, 2005; Kibler et al, 2020). Classroom talk can also serve as a tool for creating democratic classrooms where interactions serve as a means

to build a more inclusive classroom environment in which students arrive at new understandings together, fostering a sense of community and shared learning (Alexander, 2008; Gaunt & Stott, 2019, Zhang et al, 2013).

To ensure multilingual learners are academically successful and fully integrated into the school community, teachers need to:

- **Position Talk as Central to Learning:** Recognize and promote the importance of talk in learning processes, integrating it across various content areas.
- **Provide Diverse Opportunities for Talk:** Create multiple and varied opportunities for students to engage in meaningful conversations for different purposes, supporting their academic and social development.

What Do Teachers Have to Say About the L³IFT Framework?

Members of the Language and Culture Center team, Gretchen Lettau and Ruslana Westerlund, worked with several Wisconsin school districts over the course of the 2023-24 year using the L³IFT framework which resulted in improved student outcomes in disciplinary writing, as reported by teachers who analyzed student written work. The training focused on two components of the L³IFT framework and the teachers chose to learn about the school genres related to disciplinary writing related to informing, explaining, and arguing. At the end of the training, teachers said the following:

"L³IFT has made me really think about and question the practices that have been put into place at my district, school, and in my classroom. When considering lessons that I will be teaching, I think more about how to make it purposeful and explicit to support all students. Because of this, my ML students are able to have more explicit instructions and more whole group support without being pulled individually."
-4th-grade Classroom Teacher in Onalaska

"This is the one of the most impactful professional development sessions I have ever been to. I see how this instruction can move many students forward, not just our ML students. It has changed our practice as well as impacted our systems to provide services. This professional development helps you see the code of language and the impact it has on instruction across contents."
-District Instructional Coach in Cashton

"L³IFT has completely shifted how I think about my role in the content classroom. I now have a much deeper understanding of how to integrate ELD standards with content standards. I am still in the process of applying this. This has had a positive impact on my MLs because I am better able to address the ELD standards in my own classroom. It has provided a clearer focus in our learning. I wish that everyone I work with would be required to take this training. I can clearly see how this would have a huge impact for not only MLs but all students."
-ML Teacher in CESA 4

"Attending the L³IFT training truly transformed my classroom by fostering a collaborative environment where writing is jointly constructed. This approach has greatly benefited my ML students by providing them with a platform to engage in meaningful interactions and develop their language skills. The strategies learned have not only enhanced their writing abilities but have also enriched their overall language proficiency, creating a more inclusive and supportive learning atmosphere. I have used strategies to not only plan a well-thought-out unit, but also well-planned out lessons that give my students opportunities to construct well-written pieces."
-5th Grade General Education Teacher in Onalaska

What does a Unit Planning Checklist look like that incorporates these components?

The L³IFT Unit and Instructional Planning Checklist (see below) is designed to support educators in creating inclusive, engaging, and effective learning environments for Multilingual Learners. This comprehensive checklist emphasizes culturally-sustaining teaching practices that incorporate L³IFT's six essential elements.

Learning, Language & Literacy Integrated Framework for Teaching (L³IFT)
Unit and Instructional Planning Checklist:

Culturally Sustaining Teaching Practices

1. Create an affirming classroom environment of belonging where students' home language, and cultural and linguistic knowledge are sought out and actively incorporated into unit and lesson planning and assessment.
2. Use translanguaging pedagogy to affirm linguistic diversity, support meaning-making and allow students use all of their linguistic repertoire.

Integration of Disciplinary Literacy, Language, and Reasoning

3. Integrate WIDA ELD Standards Key Language Uses and Language Expectations with content and disciplinary literacy standards.
4. Incorporate writing into content areas by explicitly teaching the language features and text structures of disciplinary genres, integrating reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities to help students master both the language of genre and the content.
5. Align the summative assessment with disciplinary genres and Key Language Uses.

Experience-Anchored Language Learning

6. Identify learning experiences (e.g., virtual field trip, visiting local community, experiments, exploring outdoors) where students engage in observing, viewing and talking before reading and writing.
7. Make learning relevant to students by seeking out students' interests and building on student experiences.
8. Create scaffolded authentic assessments with opportunities for relevant use of knowledge in student lives in and outside of school.

Explicit and Sustained Language Focus Throughout the Unit

9. Plan lessons that sustain attention to authentic language use throughout the unit using the strategic focus on how language changes (language as action, language as interaction, language as reflection).
10. Scaffold language development from hands-on experiences to written language use through the Mode Continuum to move students from everyday to specialized language in a unit.
11. Gather formative language data throughout the unit to inform instruction.

High Challenge + High Support Classrooms with Macro and Micro Scaffolding

12. Plan units with learning activities that gradually move students towards success and independence (e.g., Teaching and Learning Cycle stages, including Deconstruction and Joint Construction).
13. Use mentor texts to teach the language of disciplinary genres and extend learning through discipline-specific writing activities (e.g., math explanations, social studies arguments).
14. Provide multiple entry points to the grade level content with Message Abundancy (multimodal input).

Quality Interactions for Meaning-Making

15. Design units with purposeful and structured activities where students need to communicate with each other for authentic purposes using Teacher and Student Talk Moves.
16. Plan units attending to different kinds of talk (e.g., exploratory, consensus-building, presentational).
17. Incorporate translanguaging scaffolding rings and translanguaging tools such as word walls and multilingual resources.
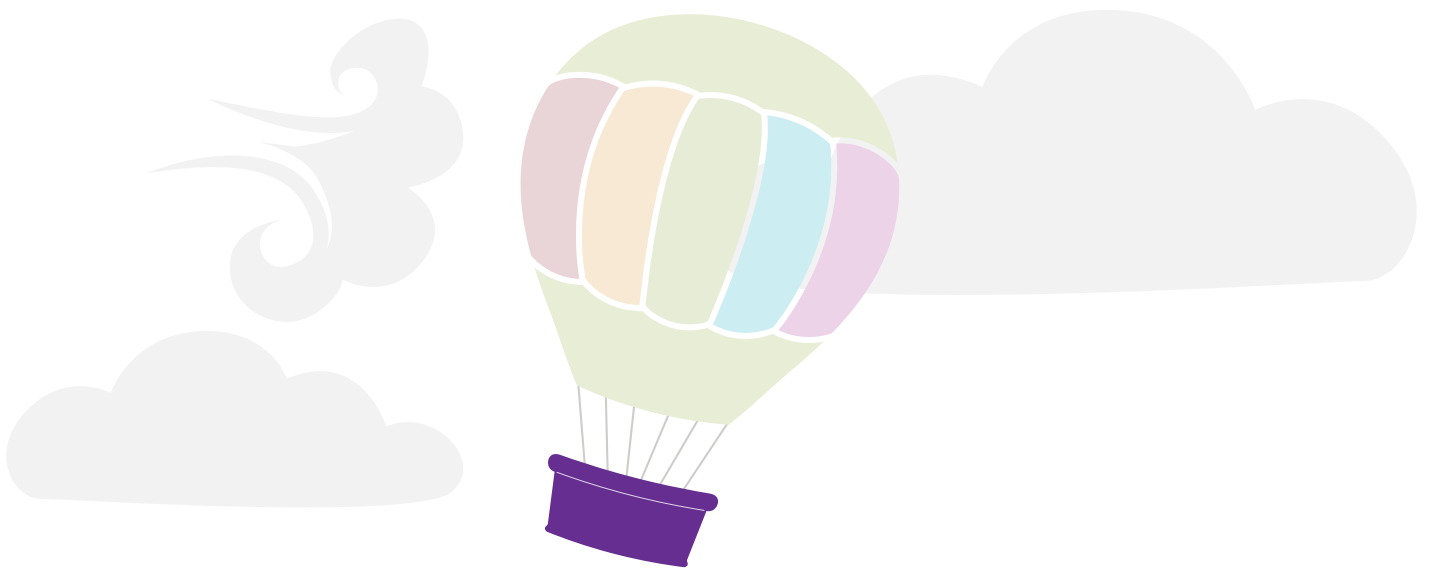
About the Authors:

Ruslana Westerlund, is an educational consultant at CESA 2 specializing in using the WIDA Standards for equity through rigorous and culturally relevant teaching, providing access to disciplinary genres for all students, and designing equitable instructional practices for English Learners. As a former researcher at WIDA, she was a co-author of the WIDA ELD Standards and she believes they have the power to improve educational outcomes for MLs. Her unique area of expertise and research is writing in the disciplines through an apprenticeship pedagogy called the Teaching and Learning Cycle for Disciplinary Genres.

Fran Veguilla is a transformational leader, committed to equitable practices that help eliminate barriers for our more marginalized students and their families, so that they can fulfill their true potential. Fran has over 15 years of experience as a classroom teacher, bilingual/EL teacher, mentor, instructional coach, PLC facilitator, and advocate for change. Fran holds a Master's degree in Bilingual Education from Rockford University and an Educational Leadership degree from Edgewood College. She is a collaborative leader who envisions schools and programs where diversity, inclusivism, and culture are seen, valued and celebrated.

Gretchen Lettau is a consultant in the Language and Culture Center of Excellence. Gretchen has worked as a teacher and coordinator for 20+ years with culturally and linguistically diverse populations. Throughout her career, Gretchen has collaborated with school districts in the areas of best practices, EL Co-teaching methods, academic language development, literacy and language practices when implementing workshop models, program reviews, and professional learning. Gretchen has a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and holds administrative licenses for the principalship and director of curriculum and instruction.

Audrey Lesondak is the Senior Director of the Language and Culture Center of Excellence at CESA 2, with over 25 years of experience in multilingual education. She has worked in K-12 schools, universities, and state agencies, designing workshops on linguistics, language acquisition, and culturally sustaining practices. As a former consultant with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Audrey co-created the EL Policy Handbook, managed the bilingual and Title III grant programs, developed accommodations and supports for Multilingual Learners on state assessments, and contributed to WIDA's standards framework and rollout of the ACCESS for ELLs. She holds degrees in German, Urban Planning, and teaching licenses.

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