

**THE POSSIBILITY OF A CRITICAL ANDRAGOGY: A DEDUCTIVE
IMPLICATION FROM PAULO FREIRE'S CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

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Abstract

This article is an advocacy for a critical andragogy as a logical deduction from Paulo Freire's critical Pedagogy. It is an attempt to specify the place and implications of Freire's reconstructionist approach to teaching and learning. For centuries, the idea that education should serve as an instrument of transformation has been sustained by many philosophers of education. Taking a more pragmatic bent, Freire advocates for a critical pedagogy, which presents education as a tool for conscious emancipation from political subjugation; and for creative thinking. This article, through philosophical analysis, looks at the trajectories and the prospects critical pedagogy portends for contemporary learners. It also narrows down the overstretched horizon of Freire's critical pedagogy; and argues that the horizon of extension ascribed to critical pedagogy by Freire does not seem defensible. Hence, the import of the subsequent question: Can critical pedagogy be applied at all levels of learning? The conclusive finding is that a critical pedagogy would be most feasible if Freire's extended horizon could be reconstructed and narrowed to a specific circle. To undertake this reconstruction, a critical andragogy is recommended as a credible alternative.

Keywords: Paulo Freire, Critical, Pedagogy, Reconstructionist, Andragogy

Introduction

For decades now, our classroom experiences present some frustrating observations; where the dominant learning approach is characterized by a sort of repetitive memorization. This, as it were, seems to vitiate creativity in learning; and invariably negates Aristotle's notion of education as that which, builds up man's workforce particularly his psyche so that he might have the option to appreciate the examination of incomparable truth. Following this notion of education as an instrument that builds up the human faculties, among scholars, there seems to be a general perception of education as an instrument for mental development and for man's ultimate wellbeing. Hence, the expectation that education should be emancipatory in character, by liberating people from ignorance, has always been an enduring view.

However, Paulo Freire seems to have introduced what sounds very legendary; that is the idea that the predominant methods of teaching and learning (before and during his time), have been serving the interest of the oppressors of the people by placing learners in perpetual servitude. This understanding is the central thesis of Freire in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Freire believes that education has been operating with a system that often subjects learners to the oppressive dominance of teachers. He proposes what he calls a critical pedagogy; and, according to him, only a critical pedagogy can balance the enduring inequality instituted through education. Freire's critical pedagogy postulates that an orientation in critical engagement between teachers and learners would enthrone an equal atmosphere of intellectual cross - pollination of ideas and a consciousness for self liberation out of the subjugating 'culture of silence', typical of the old system of learning which he calls the banking system.

Freire's Critical Pedagogy

Freire's critical pedagogy focuses on a pragmatic advocacy for critical thinking among students. This he believes would empower them cognitively to struggle for their emancipation from the crutches of intimidation and subjugation. While condemning the traditional education system, he advocates for an 'education for liberation'. Freire argues that the traditional methodology, the banking system, reinforces a lack of critical thinking and knowledge ownership in students, which in turn reinforces oppression, in contrast to Freire's understanding of knowledge as the result of a human, creative process.ⁱ Freire describes this form of education as "fundamentally narrative in character"ⁱⁱ He challenges critically, teachers who see themselves as the sole possessors of knowledge while they see their students as empty receptacles into which deposits of knowledge must be made. He likens their pedagogical approach to the process of colonization, given that the colonizing culture thinks of itself as the correct and valuable culture, while the colonized culture is deemed as inferior and in need of the colonizing culture for its own betterment.

According to him, apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention; through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world with the world, and with each other.ⁱⁱⁱ Freire argues that this education for freedom from alienation is impossible without dialogical relations between the student and the teacher.^{iv} It is only dialogue that ensures student-teacher relationship in which "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but

one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach; they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow.”^v

Dialogue or problem – posing system of learning, becomes then a possible way out of most existential woes. Talking of problem-posting method, Freire says that since the teacher is not the absolute authority, there is a mutual respect between the teacher and the students. Again he says that this makes it possible for students to be able to make valid contributions towards education; and thus, the humanity of students is considered. Freire stresses that problem-posting education is dialogical in character. It involves dialogue between the student-teacher and the teacher-students. Authentic education, according to Freire, will involve a mutual dialogue between the teacher and the student, mediated by the broader world context. He warns that the limits imposed upon both the oppressor and the oppressed dehumanize everyone involved, thereby removing the ability for dialogue to occur, and inevitably bars the possibility of transformation. He proposes ‘dialogic’ as an instrument to free the oppressed, through the use of cooperation, unity and organization and cultural synthesis. Dialogue becomes a way to overcome problems in society to liberate human beings; for there is no individual without limitations. All are incomplete. Understanding of these limitations and incompleteness is essential for dialogue with others.^{vi} Over and above the already identified limitations is the need for, humility, hope, faith and love in the dialogic process. Lastly, dialogue needs critical thinking. A kind of thinking that admits that reality is in process; not something static. Dialogue needs a kind of thinking which is not separate from action but which provokes involvement.^{vii} Lastly, dialogue needs critical thinking. A sort of thinking that admits that reality is in process; not something static. Dialogue needs a kind of thinking which is not separate from action but which provokes involvement.^{viii} Sunil *et al*, would consider this dialogue to be essential for the restoration of our incompleteness which invariably suffices for emancipation. The kind of education issuing from this dialogue implies that the teacher should not assume absolute authority, since what he or she is teaching is not something alien to the students and they can contribute positively as well.

This is contrary to the banking system which progresses by issuing series of communiqués. For example, some committees sit and prepare curriculum which is later imposed on students. This kind of educational process is one way in nature. However, it must be understood that a teacher who can empathize with the

students is needed for the critical method to be possible. The teacher should be able to enter into the activity of inquiry alongside the students. Freire notes: Then through dialogue, the teacher-of-the students and the-student-of - the-teacher cease to exist, and a new term emerges: teacher-student with student-teacher. The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught, also teaches.^{ix}

As interesting as it sounds, we shall look into the possibility of this learning condition. For, it stands to be proven that, unlike the teacher, that a new learner can be preoccupied with the content of a specific dialogue and engage meaningfully in an idea he or she has practically no knowledge about. This is where Friere's idea seems to need more clarifications. But Freire seems to suggest that the teacher's prior preparation before the actual dialogue engenders the feasibility of the exercise. In his words, "education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated. Thus, the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks herself or himself *what* she or he will dialogue with the latter *about*. And preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the program content of education.^x

In all, Freire's critical pedagogy, even with all its positive trajectories, seems to have been over stretched to an unrealizable level. Hence, the dominant stance of this research is that the Freire's model of critical pedagogy portends enormous relevance for the advancement of scholarship. Following the unresolved ambivalent fears over the possibility of its application among all classes of learners, this research suggests a new theory that seems more realistic and demonstrable.

Some Critiques of Critical Pedagogy

R. Gibson considers the praise of Freire as the product of uncritical reflections. Hence, his first onslaught against the followers of Freire was to refer to them as "a little publishing cabal flourished with uncritical praise for Freire."^{xi} He further criticizes what he calls Freire's bourgeois mentality and makes a bitter accusation that "Freire was usually a revolutionary wherever he was not - or after the revolution was won - and a liberal reformer wherever he was."^{xii} His criticism, however, is far more trenchant both on a personal and conceptual level; since he accuses the Brazilian philosopher and educator of being a logically inconsistent

charlatan. He maintains that it is apparently inconsistent to comprehend “the objective idealist Freire” and “the mechanically materialist Freire”. In the end, he announces the dead end of Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* based on logical inconsistency.^{xiii} One maybe obliged to agree with Gibson on one thing: that dialectical materialism is a key to change education and Freire may be perceived in this light. But announcing the end of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was rather an onslaught across borders; which sounds like an inconsistent use of inconsistent assumption against a perceived inconsistent position. Anchoring on the position of H. Arendt,^{xiv} who disagrees with the assumption that education is simply for political action, and that it essentially serves some political aims, it is believed that critical pedagogy, as traditionally conceived, might actually work against the possibility of educational transformation.^{xv}

Arguments are also being advanced against the advocacy of Freire’s critical pedagogy for an even ‘playing ground’ for both the teacher and the learner. This radical departure from former thinkers does not seem very feasible with a new or uninitiated learner who are said to require a master. This is believed to effect the very structure of a critical pedagogy. For in order to be empowered and emancipated, students need to discover their own enslavement. However, this requires their subordination to a knowing subject, a master of critique, who reveals to them their own oppression or who leads them to become aware of this oppression, or provides the conditions for this disclosure to happen.^{xvi}

As it were, one of the most popular onslaughts against critical pedagogy is the argument that it contains within its system some principles that have been adjudged utopian and illusory. Although the validity of these criticisms stands to be proven, it has to be noted that whatever be the pitfall, the entire project of Freire can hardly be logically established as utopian.

Faulting also the perceived utopian dimension of Freire’s critical pedagogy, PiotrStanczyk, in “The Critique of The Critical Critique of Critical Pedagogy,” while referencing Marx and Engels, subscribes to the idea and perception that social changes should attach importance to a material foundation of historical processes and human consciousness.^{xvii} Complementing the intervening argument, Carlos Torres, seems to share the common impression that Freire’s critical pedagogy appears built on principles that are not very practical. This impression, he insists, has both personal and conceptual level; a dissonance between the principles and the actual real life experience.^{xviii} Following the intervening argument, Torres perceives Freire’s Pedagogy as following a very

narrow approach. He believes that the horizon and contents of Freire's Pedagogy, if expanded, could impact on the productive indices of a society. As a result, Torres describes Freire as an influential philosopher and politician; and as one of the most significant educators in the world during the 20th century.^{xix} The description of Freire as a politician is likely to raise some philosophical questions, as to what constitutes the designation.

Employing the pejorative sobriquet, 'opportunistic pedagogy', Suchodolski, while advocating for a more practical pedagogy, underscores a Copernican revolution for critical pedagogy. He states that "from now on, pedagogy should, above all, understand life, not ideas. It should comprehend a real man in precise conditions, not ideas of man or ideas of culture. This is a true 'Copernican Revolution' in pedagogy"^{xx} Elucidating further on this, he maintains that critical pedagogy in a variety practiced at university campuses, cultivates a utopian illusion that education plays an extraordinary and autonomous role as if a change of consciousness could be provoked only by intellectual effort and as if the change was dependent on this intellectual effort. Hence, he considers it a "pedagogical illusion that the reform of human consciousness can, without reason, lead to a complete transformation of a man and the total of his relations with reality"^{xxi} Extending the horizon of the criticism of Freire, Jackson Sue advances the thesis that Freire's work does not acknowledge the issue of gender, class and race of teachers and learners. Elucidating further, Sue posits that Freire seems to have forgotten that structural inequalities are critical especially when articulating the ideas that transformation is possible via individual thought and action. For sue, Freire should have reflected on the issue of structural inequality, race and class in order to present a clear description of the possible change via the utopian concept of actions and dreams.^{xxii} Freire might not have been as specific as expected by Sue, but this appears encapsulated in his contentions on the pedagogy of the oppressed. It could be argued that his lamentation about the oppression of the poor and the need for equal playing ground presupposes a condemnation of inequality. J. P. Pitts sees an unwarranted narrowness in Freire's notions of education. He proposes that these notions of education appear rather selective for they do not attempt to articulate the vast richness of their opinions on issues regarding the collective personality of man's humanity.^{xxiii} Without mincing words, Pitts doesn't sound very specific here. However, one doubts if man's collective humanity is any way vitiated in Freire. In the face of these multi-faceted, and even conflicting approaches to the Freire's critical pedagogy, a face-value deduction would be logically risky. Objectively speaking, the enormity of the pro-

Freirean scholars in this enterprise; coupled with the consistency of their affirmative logic, are suggestive of the idea that critical pedagogy may not have been an effort in futility.

In all, Freire's critical pedagogy, even with all its positive trajectories, seems to have been over stretched to an unrealizable level. Hence, the dominant stance of this research is that the Freire's model of critical pedagogy portends enormous relevance for the advancement of scholarship. Following the unresolved ambivalent fears over the possibility of its application among all classes of learners, this article suggests a new theory that seems more realistic and demonstrable.

The Possibility of a Critical Andragogy

One of the crippling aspects of Freire's pedagogy is the expectation that learners, at all levels should be taught in dialogical form. But it seems unrealistic for the education of young children (pedagogy) to adopt effectively this dialogical method. Learners at pre-nursery, nursery and primary schools, for instance, do not seem to have acquired and developed sufficient intellectual capacities for dialogue with their teachers. Although it is abundantly plausible to hold that a form of critical learning should be encouraged at all levels of learning, the dialogical form advocated by Freire's critical pedagogy should be reserved for adult education technically called *andragogy*. Therefore, following the avalanche of pitfalls that tend to challenge the holistic feasibility of critical pedagogy, a *Critical Andragogy* is recommended as a credible alternative.

In the interest of clarity, the word andragogy stands for the science and practice of adult education. This contrasts pedagogy which stands for the science and practice of children's learning. M.S. Knowles defines 'Andragogy' as "the art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art of science of teaching children".^{xxiv} On his part, Sang Chan stresses that 'Andragogy' contributes to the understanding of how adults learn, in what context, and the process of learning. Moreover, andragogy is a rallying point for separating adult education from other areas of education^{xxv} The need for a *Critical Andragogy* seems to have been captured indirectly by Zmenov who states that "the andragogical principles of learning are widely needed now, and not only in adult education. Practically all sectors of educational services need these principles"^{xxvi}

In all, this dissertation is not assuming, in any way, a conclusive stance; but rather attempts more avenues for further reflections; thus confirming Podoschi's stand that "empirical research cannot resolve philosophical questions, nor dissolve the

philosophical assumptions of the researcher.”^{xxvii} For as long as a debate is structured along philosophical lines, there can be little hope for agreement as to definitions, antecedents, means, and aims of adult learning.

Andragogy is the teaching methodology used to achieve this end. According to Stephen Pew, the teacher is a facilitator who aids adults to become self-directed learners. While Pedagogy focuses on a transmission of a content, in a teacher-controlled environment, Andragogy focuses on facilitating the acquisition of and a critical comprehension of a content and its application in real life, explains. He adds also that Andragogy calls for learner control and voluntary involvement, voluntary at least in the broadest sense of the term, of students in the learning activity^{xxviii}.

As an underlying assumption, the andragogical model of education is a “process concerned with providing procedures and resources for helping learners acquire information and skills.” The teacher here is a facilitator or a consultant or a change-agent who establishes a climate that is apt for learning, creates a mechanism where the teacher and the learner can plan together the activity to be undertaken, diagnoses the needs of learning, formulates with the learners the programme objectives and the goals to be reached, designs a pattern for learning experiences, evaluates the progress and learning needs with the learners.^{xxix}

Principles and Tenets of Andragogy

The mission of adult educators is to assist adults to develop their full potential, and andragogy is the teaching methodology used to achieve this end. According to Stephen Pew, the teacher is a facilitator who aids adults to become self-directed learners. While Pedagogy focuses on a transmission of a content, in a teacher-controlled environment, Andragogy focuses on facilitating the acquisition of and a critical comprehension of a content and its application in real life, explains. He adds also that Andragogy calls for learner control and voluntary involvement, voluntary at least in the broadest sense of the term, of students in the learning activity^{xxx}.

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programme objectives and the goals to be reached, designs a pattern for learning experiences, evaluates the progress and learning needs with the learners.^{xxxix} For many, andragogy is a set of procedures and practices that constitute a distinctive form of education, in contrast to pedagogy, and most suited to adults because it acknowledges their needs, experience, and self-directed nature. This methodology of andragogy has attracted an enormous attention around the world. Andragogical methods or approaches have been applied in formal education settings as well as in non-formal settings. In this sense, Diflo Keven, expanding the scope and meaning of andragogy, states that andragogy has become a technology of instruction or facilitation of learning, transported from one culture to another and across various settings for a multitude of purposes.^{xxxix} Interestingly, andragogy appears to be sustained by the fact that adults need to know why they need to learn, need to learn experientially, they naturally approach learning as problem-solving, and finally, they learn more when there is an immediate value in view.

As a model of philosophy of education or a system of learning experience, andragogy, according to Jenifer Sandlin, is based on an image of the adult learner who is assumed to have the following characteristics: (i) as the person matures, his or her self-concept moves from being a dependent personality to a considerable self-directedness; (ii) the adult learns from life-experiences and the lessons learnt from the experiences and newer experiences become resources for further and new learning; (iii) the person sports a readiness to learn, which comes from a need to know, master or change a life situation; (iv) the person is not looking so much at a future application of the knowledge gained, as at an immediate relevance and application.^{xxxix} Sandlin finds yet another element, which is (v) that the adult is internally motivated to learn and this assumption grants an edge for Andragogy over Pedagogy, as “learning will thrive in an environment of Andragogy where the educators will seek to devote the majority of their time to teaching, not motivating”.^{xxxix} Collectively, these beliefs constitute a specific world view that cushion andragogy to certain forms of learning, approaches to instruction, and judgments about priorities in adult education. Clearly, andragogy is saturated with the ideals of individualism and entrepreneurial democracy. Societal change may be a by-product of individual change but it is not a primary goal of andragogy.^{xxxix} Andragogy, contrasted as the self-directed education model, from a teacher-directed model of pedagogy, has as one of its corner stone assumptions, the voluntary nature of adult involvement in the learning activities.^{xxxix} The learner and the educator, together create a structure or system, or simply a model where

the whole process works towards the realization of the following assertions. The method or this model, allows room for the learner to come to a state of being ready and motivated to learn something from the situation and the learning activity.^{xxxvii} Interestingly, the dialogic engagements and other creative motivations that issues from Freire's critical pedagogy could attain optimal levels of gratification in the consciousness of an average adult learner. No doubt, the cognitive development of adults naturally arouses curiosity and critical inquiries.

Extended Perspectives of Andragogy

It is critical to argue that adults bring a number of credulous biases and assimilated assumptions to the existential context of learning; consciously and unconsciously, willingly and unwillingly, and these cannot but exert influences on the learning process. It also tend to shape their individual opinions about a given reality. As Mezirow argues, social structures form the basis for our "conceptual categories, rules, tactics, and criteria for judging implicit habits of perception, thought, and behavior".^{xxxviii} Arguing from another perspective, Holmes and Cooper, contend that an exaggerated view of self-directed learning [or andragogy] can give rise to some myths, that adults are naturally self-directed, that self-direction is an "all-or-nothing concept" and that self-directed learning means learning in isolation. Not merely an exaggerated idea of the self-directed learning, but even the option of andragogy model of adult education cannot be absolutised. There are elements within the model that confront certain valid critiques from varied quarters.^{xxxix}

As a matter of fact, uncritical adoption of a particular view of adults as learners should not be the only measure by which we assess andragogy's contribution. From one perspective, the legions of adult educators who ascribe to andragogy may have a better understanding of adults as learners; from another perspective that understanding may be severely limited and even distorted. Further, while andragogy may have contributed to our understanding of adults as learners, it does not seem to have done much to expand or clarify our understanding of the process of learning itself.^{xl} According to Kroth Michal, transformational learning occurs when a person's frame of reference shifts to become more inclusive, permeable, integrated and differentiated. Transformational Learning involves a Discovering process. Transformation or discovering, can be either *Imposed* or *Intentional*. Discovering by immersing ourselves in new experiences, projects, relationships or communities, we can learn about our own identity and start working out newer ones at those. The intentional discovering process can be exciting and affirming but sometimes even discomfiting and adventuresome. But

the positive element about it is that it is within our control; it is intentional. The goal of personal discovering is for individuals to come to understand that about which they are passionate and consider the most humane and effective means of transformation.^{xli}

It is also philosophical to note that the two contrasted models of the teacher-directed learning and the self-directed learning may not be all that dichotomous or mutually exclusive as could assume. The former would still include moment when the educator would encourage a free exchange of ideas and attention to personal strengths and interests of individual learners. The latter, in its turn would include the requirements for the course and a set pattern for evaluation. It lauds the ideals of individualism, self-actualisation, self-reliance and self-directedness and takes for granted that these values are universal in nature. This is an attempt to 'normalise' one way of being and can give rise to sexism, racism and other absolutising modes of thinking. Andragogy seems to have failed to see the other ways of being and knowing; by accommodating various other world views and value systems which appear to have been ignored, silenced or forgotten. Andragogy contains too much of the 'self' and ignores the relationship between the self and the society. It does that by decontextualising the learning process by approaching the person of the learner from merely a psychological point of view, without the social, political, economic or historic context in perspective. According to Pratt Daniel, andragogy, for some, represents a prescriptive set of guidelines for the education of adults; while for others it represents a philosophical position vis-a-vis the existential nature of adults. For still others, it is an ideology based on beliefs regarding individual freedom, the relationship between individual and society, and the aims of adult education.^{xlii}

The whole influence of the structures like oppression or privilege based on gender, race, social stratification and class, on learning are not considered. Andragogy is applicable in multiple contexts. The andragogical approach has changed the teaching philosophy of educators around the world. Given the current educational needs, the pedagogical approach has become less effective in teaching and adult learners. Adult learners need more than passive transfer of knowledge from one person. Instead, they need to be involved actively in the learning process to construct their own knowledge, to make sense of the learning, and to apply what is learned. Educators as well as the educational systems world-wide should provide all learners, both children and adults, with the opportunities to be actively engaged in learner-centered educational experience.^{xliii}

Aside the methodology of andragogy, there is also a growing concern about *relationship*, suggesting that the essence of the andragogical learning process lies not in the approach one takes as much as the relationship that exists between learner and facilitator. Knowles, a prominent figure on andragogical learning, believes that andragogical approaches require a psychological climate of mutual respect, collaboration, trust, support, openness, authenticity, pleasure, and humane treatment and it is the responsibility of a facilitator, to provide such a caring, accepting, respecting, helping social atmosphere.^{xliv} Now to establish such an atmosphere may not be as feasible as it sounds; hence, it is not just a limiting factor, but an inescapable challenge. But as to whether the challenge is surmountable, this research would take an affirmative stance.

This emphasis on the nature of the relationship between learner and instructor (facilitator) is clearly related to the assumptions regarding the nature of the adult learner and seeks to address the existential balance between freedom and authority.^{xlv} In this sense it also begs the question of whether such a relationship can or should take precedence over situational factors in the exercise of individual freedom and control over instructional processes, particularly the evaluation of learning. This too has been a part of the debate.^{xlvi} This is the focus of one strand of the debate on andragogy, often characterized as a debate between psychological and sociological perspectives on the nature of adults as learners.^{xlvii} It is also, in essence, a debate between human agency and social structures as significant antecedents of adult learning. Here andragogy is unconditionally on the side of human agency and the power of the individual to shed the shackles of history and circumstance in pursuit of learning.

Conclusion

The central focus of this article has been an advocacy for the possibility of a critical andragogy as a teaching methodology. It flows logically from an appraisal of Freire's critical pedagogy as enunciated in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's critical pedagogy holds, as a fundamental tenet, that education is not neutral; but serves either as an instrument to domesticate human beings or is made into an instrument of human liberation. Freire chose the coinage, *critical pedagogy*; but this article argues that the emancipatory and dialogic approach to learning as presented by Freire, appears to need an adult for its effectiveness, and if an adult, then it is not pedagogical but andragogical; hence, the import of a *Critical Andragogy*. Even without making categorical claims, this article ends with the finding that Freire's critical pedagogy requires a specific horizon for its effective

application. It unequivocally holds that the said application is pragmatically feasible, only if a *Critical Andragogy* can be introduced as a credible alternative. For to engage adults in a dialogical form within the context of teaching and learning appears very feasible; and even more, if the adults in question have attained some level of cognitive advancement. *Critical Andragogy*, is therefore, in my option, the philosophy of education and model of learning, which emphasises the critical roles of adult learners, as active players, in an atmosphere of creative learning.

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