Guidance Document 3

CDC and Curriculum

Who is this document for

The main target group for this guidance document on curriculum is education policy makers, head teachers, deans or education leaders, curriculum developers at ministry, regional or local authority level, teachers and learners.

Purpose and overview

The purpose of the guidance document is to examine how the competences for democratic culture (CDC) model can be used by those in charge of designing and developing curricula and curriculum reform in education; how it can be used, for example in auditing or further developing an existing curriculum or planning a new curriculum.

The document discusses and defines different kinds of curricula and the levels at which decisions are made concerning the nature and contents of curricula: from the level of a prescribed curriculum to that of the curriculum decisions taken by teachers and learners. We use the term "prescribed curriculum" to refer to a statutory curriculum approved by a competent government in charge, by law, of defining the content of education. A prescribed curriculum must be implemented in schools.

Curricula may be produced from different starting points, for example the knowledge to be learned or the competences to be acquired. The CDC Framework can be used with every approach. Curricula may also be designed to accommodate different pedagogies and methodologies of teaching and learning, and this document discusses how the CDC model can be used according to the pedagogy and methodology chosen, for example project work or cross-curricular topics.

The document then presents ways of using the CDC model to audit and design curricula of different kinds and at different levels of decision making, from national to local to subject or classroom level. At the latter level of the curriculum, particular consideration is given to the specific situation of higher education.

The CDC model and the curriculum

The CDC model sets out the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding which an individual needs in order to be an active participant in a "democratic culture/society/group". It is accompanied by descriptors describing levels of competence (see Volume 2 of the Framework). These descriptors cover only those values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and understanding which are learnable, teachable and assessable.

Young people may acquire such competences in informal learning through their experience of the world and the society in which they live. They can also be learned in formal or non-formal education with the help of a teacher or other facilitator of learning. In the latter case, teachers and facilitators are expected to plan the affordances for learning in a systematic and principled way.

The CDC model can be used in planning and to analyse and audit existing plans and their implementation, in particular the learning outcomes that such plans promote.

The learning outcomes expected to be achieved by learners can be compared to the competence descriptors and their corresponding behaviours. The competence descriptors can also be used in formal and informal assessment to verify learning outcome achievements, as is explained in Guidance Document 3 on assessment.

In addition to use with existing curricula, the model can be used to designate the curriculum components and learning outcomes expected of a new curriculum with corresponding attention being paid to implementation and assessment.

Definitions, forms, approaches and organisation of the curriculum

Definitions

There are many definitions of curriculum and each one embodies a different conception of education. Traditionally, a curriculum is a plan for teaching a specific subject or area of study that occurs inside a classroom. Today, curriculum is conceived of as a plan for shaping the learning of learners through all kinds of experience within an educational institution, whether in the classroom or outside it.

In this document, "curriculum" is defined primarily as "a plan for learning" that occurs not only in a particular class or subject but in an education institution, such as a school, a university or any institution dedicated to education and training, as a whole. More specifically, curriculum means a plan for learning in the form of the description of learning outcomes, of learning content and of learning processes for a specified period of study.

The curriculum can also be defined simply as the total sum of experiences learners have in an education institution, some planned and others not. This definition will also be referred to in this document.

Levels of decision and forms of the curriculum

In curriculum design and development, a central question is: who decides the curriculum? When the decision making in education is centralised, curriculum as "a plan for learning" is decided by the public authority responsible for education or its appointed bodies. When the

decision making is decentralised, the institution and the teachers decide on the content and aims of the curriculum (e.g. school-based curriculum).

The CDC model can influence curricula at different levels of decision making: at the system level, at the institutional level, at the subject or classroom level and at the learner level.

A curriculum as "a plan for learning" has specific characteristics and forms at each level. At a system level, the curriculum is prescribed by the competent authority, which lays down what has to be learned at each stage of education. At an institutional level, the prescribed curriculum is developed by teachers and pedagogical leaders, who adapt it according to the school context and education needs.

At the subject or classroom level, the prescribed curriculum and the institutional curriculum are developed and applied in teaching plans and instructional materials. Teachers – and in some cases learners – then interpret a prescribed and an institutional curriculum and put them into practice. Finally, at the learner level, learners experience the curriculum planned by teachers, and construct and develop competences.

A curriculum is therefore a construction, planned, developed, and changed within a specific context and point in time, and the CDC model can be used, in whole or in part, at any level of curriculum elaboration.

The second meaning of curriculum, as stated above, refers to all the experiences that learners have within an education institution, and this is dealt with separately in Guidance Document 5 on the whole-school approach.

Curriculum approaches

There are many different approaches to developing the curriculum as a plan for learning, three of which can often be observed in European countries: the knowledge- based curriculum, the objectives-based curriculum and the competence-based curriculum. Each approach determines which central element will structure the curriculum, the remaining curriculum components following on from this central one.

The curriculum has traditionally been conceived and planned as a knowledge-based curriculum. In this approach, factual and conceptual knowledge (declarative knowledge) is given a more important role, even though other types of knowledge are also selected, such as procedural knowledge, metacognitive knowledge and attitudinal knowledge. The crucial element is the selection and classification of what is considered to be relevant knowledge for the purpose of a particular curriculum.

An objectives-based curriculum proposes that objectives, defined as the expected behaviour of learners, structure and guide the selection of the content of subject curricula. The curriculum is then formulated in terms of intentions about what learners should learn in order to achieve the defined objectives. In an earlier version of this approach, objectives are formulated in terms of what is to be taught, for example knowledge about the subject matter of chemistry or the skills required to carry out experiments. Later, this approach shifts towards a focus on learning, where objectives are formulated considering what behaviours learners

should demonstrate. This formulation may then be changed to an explicit reference to the "competences" learners are expected to acquire, for example the competence "To plan and carry out chemical experiments to validate one's own hypotheses".

A competence-based curriculum is thus a development of the objectives-based curriculum. It puts learning and the learner at the centre of the curriculum, using disciplinary or subject-specific competences and/or cross-curricular competences. The curriculum as a plan for learning is typically written in terms of what learners "can do" at the end of a period of study in a subject or in a cluster of competences that involve some or all subjects. The consideration of competences as what learners "can do" allows an approach to assessment which focuses on learners' performances and, therefore, what can be observed by assessors.

In this approach, competences (values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding) are considered to be interrelated. To act in a competent way, a person deploys relevant values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding in a specific situation, for example in order to interpret a phenomenon, to analyse and solve a problem, or to suggest alternative solutions.

The CDC model is conceived within the competence-based curriculum approach, but in practice none of these approaches exists exclusively and in a pure state. In reality, these curriculum approaches are often combined, and therefore it is important to note that the CDC model can be used in all curriculum approaches.

In the case of a knowledge-based curriculum, curriculum developers can stress the importance of understanding knowledge, for instance. In this case, teachers would emphasise knowledge about values (declarative knowledge) and teach learners to analyse and reflect on values, rather than intending to persuade learners to accept and demonstrate competence in specific values. Critical understanding of values does not commit teachers or learners to adoption or rejection of particular values.

Organisation of the curriculum

The curriculum as a plan for learning can be organised in subjects or disciplines, areas of study, cross-curricular topics or projects in each of which competences – such as those described in the CDC model – are acquired. This list covers only the main types of organising the curriculum.

➢ Subjects or disciplines. A curriculum can be organised in traditional subjects such as mathematics, language, physics, history, philosophy, etc., and all subjects can relate to CDC. For example, mathematics skills such as making estimations, recognising patterns, reasoning proportionally, or using computerised tools are related to CDC because they require learners to think critically and to communicate their own ideas.

➢ Areas of study. An area of study is a conceptual space delimited in terms of learning, rather than subjects/disciplines. Learning is then defined by what needs to be acquired for a particular kind of experience such as visual and plastic education, science, social sciences, or by a specific group of competences or skills, such as life skills.

➢ Cross-curricular topics and competences. Cross-curricular topics can be conceived in terms of phenomena or issues, such as "education for democracy", "environmental or

ecological education", and "peace education". Phenomena- based learning or issues-based learning are approaches that conceive teaching and learning in a holistic way based on real-world phenomena and issues. The starting point is to ask questions or pose problems that learners are interested in. The curriculum is then structured from these phenomena or issues, such as "migration", or "water or food supply", and different subjects are integrated around them. Pedagogical methods such as inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, project learning and portfolios are the most adequate for this particular type of curriculum.

Curricula are also organised in terms of cross-curricular competences, such as democratic competences, communication competences, learning-to-learn competences.

In this curriculum design, a cross-curricular competence is taught in all subjects or areas of study, and therefore by all teachers. "Key competences" are expected to be developed as cross-curricular competences in the curriculum, and this form of curriculum is expected to cross the boundaries of subjects and a disciplinary way of thinking about the contents of education.

Every type of curriculum organisation provides a specific conceptual space and time for learning what is considered to be appropriate at a particular level of education. Governments and/or public authorities decide which single or combination of these types of curriculum is deemed best to structure and organise education. They do so as a function of what they consider to be the nature of learning, what should be learned and which approach or combination of approaches is most adequate for their purpose.

Using the CDC Framework for curricula

The CDC model can be used as a whole or in part as a means of enriching a curriculum by auditing, designing and developing it. But before starting to use the CDC model in a curriculum, the first question to answer is what kind of education for democratic citizenship and democratic culture is to be developed in education institutions through teaching and learning. Users of the CDC model need to relate the aims of the Framework to the aims of their education system, in particular to the aims of institutions and their subjects, areas of study or whatever form of organisation is present.

The aims and the rationale of a curriculum enriched by the CDC model stress the importance of educating children and young people to live together equally and respectfully in a democratic society. The aims of a curriculum and the selection of its contents are in part determined by principles of democracy and human rights, and as a consequence the curriculum is oriented towards and connected with the everyday lifeworld situations and contexts, where learners and teachers live together.

Auditing

Auditing is the first step. In this text, auditing is defined as a systematic examination of the curriculum from the statement of curricular aims and purposes through pedagogy to assessment, with a view to ensuring coherence, comprehensiveness and transparency among all the elements.

By referring to the CDC Framework, those responsible for curriculum at the levels described above may audit their curriculum documents to identify areas for improvement in intercultural and democratic citizenship education, whichever type or organisation of curriculum is involved. Ideally, it should be evident from this audit to what extent, when and how learners are acquiring CDC in the course of their schooling as a whole.

Designing

The CDC model is by definition best used for a competence-based curriculum. Curriculum design in this approach is centred on learning, that is, learners are the focus of the selection of the curriculum components. Curriculum designers need to conceive, select and formulate the curriculum components in such a way as to ensure coherence between the curriculum approach, the curriculum and the educational practices. The Council of Europe has elsewhere promoted an active learning of democratic citizenship. However, it is not the function of the Framework to promote one particular curriculum approach.

Competences are context-dependent (the individual's competences develop and are needed in different combinations in different situations); time-dependent (the individual's competences progress over time); and situation-dependent (the individual's competences need to be transferred across different situations).

The internal resources of learners and their competences can vary and appear differently in different contexts. This means that one criterion for selecting the contents of curriculum as a plan for learning might be that curricula when implemented should reflect and be closely aligned to everyday, real-life issues.

Furthermore, in democratic cultures, individuals often realise their competences in interaction with others and therefore an important competence is that of "knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication", meaning that individuals are aware of, and can implement, socially appropriate verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions in the languages or language varieties they need for a specific situation.

Design principles

There are principles of planning curricular documents and creating learning experiences for developing CDC. These are:

➢ **Relevance.** All curriculum designers who write a curriculum in any form, such as for subjects and areas of study, are responsible not only for the learning and development of subject-specific competences, but also for the learning and development of CDC. This means, for example, that where teachers act as curriculum designers, they select from the study programme (syllabus or subject curriculum) of their subject what they consider relevant for their learners. They can then also use the CDC Framework to select the relevant CDC competences to integrate them together with the subject-specific competences, forming clusters of CDC and subject-specific competences.

➢ **Avoiding curriculum overload.** One of the main problems of curriculum design is selecting new curriculum components and adding them to the existing curriculum aims and contents. In this sense, when using CDC to change or enrich the curriculum of

specific subjects, there is a risk of overloading the curriculum with CDC. But it is not a matter of adding more to the curriculum, rather of designing what is realistic for the allocated time. Whatever is selected from CDC must be relevant and related to the overall aims to be achieved. It is crucial to find the right balance in the quantity of the selected components, because learners need time and opportunities to develop CDC.

- **Coherence and transparency.** Coherence is here understood in terms of the relation between the aims, the curriculum approach and the selected components of the curriculum. The selection from the CDC model should be coherent with skills and knowledge in a subject, and the way in which subject competences and competences from the CDC model are related should be made transparent. Then, these clusters of selected competences are coherently and transparently related to the overall aims of the curriculum. It is important to explain the cluster of subject and CDC competences and the aims which are to be achieved through them in order to reduce reluctance or misunderstandings among teachers and learners.

- **Vertical and horizontal coherence.** When designing the curriculum, vertical and horizontal coherence of the selected components of the curriculum is crucial. Horizontal coherence ensures that the appearance of learning activities related to a CDC model competence in one part of a curriculum is coherent with their appearance in another part of the curriculum when implemented in a given period of time. Vertical coherence ensures that there is development and expansion of competences over the course of time.

- **Progression in CDC**. In order to design the progression (e.g. refinement or improvement) and/or expansion (e.g. increasing the number) in the competences expected at the different levels of education, curriculum designers can decide which competences are more suitable for younger learners and which for older learners. The competences for democratic culture can then be organised as a spiral curriculum where some competences are revisited and others are added. All competences can be further developed by learners throughout their life. For this reason, it is important that learners learn how to understand CDC, to become autonomous and engaged in lifelong learning.

- **Language and the dialogic dimension.** Writing a curriculum requires the use of a precise vocabulary to express what is intended in order to facilitate interpretation by readers and avoid misunderstandings. To conceive and write a curriculum text requires participatory procedures for making a curriculum. All those involved – especially those who are the target of the curriculum – should have a voice and even take part in the decision making about its contents. Participation in the writing of a curriculum requires a consensus from the participants concerning the meaning of each word and concept that is included in the text throughout the whole process. Education institutions need to ensure that their organisational structures and procedures allow for these participatory processes, with an emphasis on transparency and coherence, if they are to establish a truly democratic culture in curriculum-making.

- **Contextualisation of CDC**. Competences for democratic culture need to be interpreted by reference to national, cultural and institutional situations in which a curriculum is taught, with an emphasis on solving problems or issues of the real world. Real-world

issues manifest, in local contexts, in different ways and forms, and have specific historical roots, reasons and causes. Some of them may be found in different contexts, for example extreme violence or bullying. However, in all cases the fundamental values of democratic and human rights can be brought into and develop CDC to help solve local and real-world issues. The Framework can thus be used in and adapted to local circumstances.

> **Safe environments for learning CDC.** There are some aspects of CDC which sensitive and controversial and curriculum design are needs to include planning for a safe environment for discussion and debate, and to manage possible conflicts or disagreements in a peaceful way (*see* [Guidance Document 5 on the whole- school approach](#)).

Clustering competences

Competences for democratic culture are unlikely to be deployed individually. Competent behaviour is likely to arise from the flexible use of clusters of competences in response to the particular demands that are presented by specific situations. With respect to curriculum design and development, the notion of clustering provides the basis for linking competences to all subject areas in the curriculum through particular subsets of competences that are pertinent to each area. This allows CDC to be explicitly included in design and development even where citizenship education courses do not exist as an independent element of curriculum.

References to clustered competences can be made in curricular documents for individual subjects and clusters of competences can also be linked to overall mission statements of education institutions. It is not necessary to define fixed sets of clusters, but the provision of general principles – perhaps accompanied by examples – allows teachers to take responsibility for adapting clustering to their context and the needs of learners.

Designing and developing curricula

How to use the CDC Framework in designing and developing a prescribed curriculum

As stated in [Volume 1 of the Framework](#), education has several purposes: to support personal development, to provide a broad and advanced knowledge base within society, and to prepare learners for the labour market. Education also has the function of preparing individuals for life as active democratic citizens. The competences for democratic culture can, then, be considered as key competences that need to be developed across all curriculum subjects and areas of study. In this sense, all teachers of all subjects are responsible for teaching, learning and assessing CDC. On the other hand, CDC can be the focus of a single subject, such as citizenship education or social sciences or social studies.

At the system level of the curriculum, curriculum developers can select competences (subject-based or cross-curricular) using the CDC model. They can also cluster subject or cross-curricular competences with competences from the CDC model when writing new curricula.

Auditing the current prescribed curriculum is always the first step. When an education system has democratic citizenship education as a subject or an area of study covering different social

disciplines or democratic cross-curricular competences, CDC can be used as a tool for discovering dimensions that the prescribed curriculum might not yet cover, for instance, law and human rights, or specific competences and curriculum components that the current programme has not yet selected.

Use of the CDC model must be guided by the curriculum rationale of each education system and decisions about what kind of democratic knowledge and competences is of most worth in a specific context. The Framework can help to conceptualise, analyse and reflect upon the curriculum in different ways, and therefore to select the curriculum components from new perspectives. This might mean a mode of conceptualising other than the disciplinary organisation of the curriculum, for example in order to move to a more global and complex way of approaching the selection of the prescribed curriculum components.

Example of good practice from Romania

Participatory citizenship represents the core of the competences of the new social education curriculum for lower secondary education and of the learning activities it promotes. The new curriculum aims to develop students' competences in co-operating with others, participating with responsibility in decision-making processes, using the specific acquisitions of the social field as tools for the critical examination of facts, events, ideas and processes which belong to the personal life of the students or to different groups and communities. Knowledge and understanding of concepts included in the CDC model (such as human rights, citizenship, rights and responsibilities, the necessity of laws and regulations, and the rule of law) are explicitly reflected in this curriculum at the level of the different components – general and specific competences, learning activities, essential knowledge (to operate with), and methodological suggestions.

Example of good practice from Ukraine

A **new competence-based national curriculum** was launched in 2016, and it sets out general learning goals (a so-called "portrait of a graduate") and lists eight competences that need to be developed across every subject and grade. Democratic citizenship is one of the eight competences. For the first time, the Ukrainian national curriculum is written and presented in a form of learning progression starting with defining competence-based learning goals for the 2nd year at school, then 4th, 6th, 9th and 12th (graduate). The Council of Europe CDC model was used to elaborate a draft curriculum by the social sciences and history subgroup. The CDC model and approaches of the Council of Europe were used to define expected learning goals.

How to use the CDC Framework in designing and developing an institution curriculum

The CDC is not only learned through teaching, but also through learners' wider experiences at school, reflecting curriculum as a "totality of experiences". Therefore, interdisciplinary projects, institutional projects, international projects, students' participation in institutional

governing bodies, student participation in students' associations, etc. play an important role in giving opportunities to learners to learn and develop CDC.

To develop an institution curriculum infused with CDC requires a commitment of the leaders of an institution to facilitating this kind of learning, as well as co-operation and co-ordination among leaders and teachers. They are responsible for constructing an education institution as a democratic environment where learners can participate in institution activities and in institution governance.

In order to teach democratic competences and to develop a democratic culture at institution level, teachers need to co-ordinate and work together to organise learning situations where learners can acquire and practice CDC. This is a case where the CDC model is used for planning the development of cross-curricular competences, and where teachers act as curriculum planners and implementers at institutional level.

Example of good practice from Andorra

Global projects in lower secondary education. In Andorran lower secondary schools (learners aged 12 and 13), the whole-school curriculum is organised around two global projects. One project sets a social science problem and the other, a natural science problem. The contents of all school subjects are selected, from the prescribed curriculum, in a way to solve or help to solve those social and natural problems. Each project is developed, weekly, in two sessions of two and three hours, at the beginning and at the end of the week respectively. The methodology of these projects is always cooperative, and all projects are communicated and shared with all class groups of the school, and even communicated and made known to the neighborhood. Each project is developed over four or five weeks, so there are six social global projects and six natural global projects per school year. Examples of social and natural global projects are: the challenges of intercultural cohabitation, and ecosystems and the human impact. CDC is present in every global project and also in the learning and teaching methodology.

How to use the CDC Framework in designing and developing a subject or interdisciplinary curriculum

Both subject curricula (disciplinary curriculum) and interdisciplinary curricula are not only plans for learning, but also comprise the activities and tasks which are in the textbooks and other instructional materials. Furthermore, all the learning experiences that learners have – the interactions and the way all the learners live in the classroom – are also part of the curriculum. Teachers then identify learners' needs and act as curriculum planners to suggest a sequence of activities and tasks, or projects.

The CDC model can be used here to design a single classroom activity, such as simulation activities, discussions, explanations, or in more complex tasks, such as projects, or activities which combine work in the classroom with activities in the local community. The CDC model can also be used for designing and developing extracurricular activities, such as community service and service learning, or for an exclusively out-of-school activity like volunteering.

In these tasks, activities or projects, CDC can be developed alone or together with subject-specific competences, or in cross-curricular themes and competences. Subject competences and CDC competences may be interrelated, and subject competences can be treated in clusters together with CDC for the purposes of curriculum planning. Such clusters are created in order to meet the learning needs in a specific context, whether at national, regional or local level.

CDC can be taught, learned and assessed through democratic, intercultural and real-life issues. When teaching these issues, it is crucial to create a safe environment in the classroom for discussion and debate, and to solve possible conflicts or disagreements in a peaceful way.

In all these approaches, teachers act as curriculum planners and developers with respect to both the overt and the hidden curriculum but learners may also have a voice in this process. They may be offered and choose to participate in the decision making on what and how they have to learn. This may be based on statutory requirements in a curriculum or may be a facet of pedagogy and teaching methodology pursued by teachers. Since a democratic environment and culture in the classroom involve a certain degree of student involvement and choice in their own learning, such participation in curriculum planning is a rich mode of implementation of CDC.

Example of good practice from Portugal

Project "We suggest!" on citizenship and innovation in Geography in lower secondary education and vocational education and training (15 years old). This is a national project, implemented in several schools in the country, which aims to identify local problems and to propose solutions by pupils. The project starts with pupils identifying and becoming aware of local problems. In small groups, pupils select the most important problems at school and in the neighborhood; they seek and get information directly from the mayor, and they carry out a small research project on the selected problem in order to make a proposal for a solution. Examples of problems selected are: changing the itinerary of public transport or restoring an abandoned building.

The situation of higher education is somewhat different. Principles of university autonomy and academic freedom are realised in the degree of autonomy conferred to those developing curricula for their courses. Higher education teachers and professors usually have control and freedom in selecting and designing subject-specific curricula. The courses they design take into consideration research priorities and societal issues and are also to be related to the world of work. Developing CDC should also be taken on board when designing subject-specific curricula in higher education.

How learners can use the CDC Framework to plan their own learning

Learners should not only be at the centre of education but also they should take more responsibility for their own learning, for example identifying their learning needs and interests, taking initiatives and becoming engaged in projects. In this case, learners become designers of their own curriculum, when they can recognise and be aware of which

competences they would like to learn more about. They can also assume the role of assessors by compiling their best products and keeping them in a portfolio, for example.

They can learn in a community of learning in which they have a voice and manage their own learning. They can participate actively in making decisions on their own learning, when they learn with a co-operative methodology, for instance, developing an attitude of openness to other views and understanding them. They can also participate in decision making at an institutional level together with teachers and pedagogical leaders, contributing to the democratic culture of the education institution.

Recommendations

To education policy makers

➢ Place democracy and democratic citizenship at the core of the aims of education and of the prescribed curriculum.
➢ Give adequate support to education leaders, teachers, learners, and other education stakeholders for using and including CDC in all forms of curriculum.
➢ Involve teachers in decision making and the writing of the prescribed curriculum.

To head teachers, deans or education leaders

➢ Place democracy and democratic citizenship at the core of the aims of education and of the institution curriculum.
➢ Involve stakeholders, especially teachers and learners, in decision making and the writing of the institution curriculum.
➢ Give adequate support to teachers and learners for using and including CDC in teaching and learning.
➢ Create new, or develop existing, democratic and participatory structures and procedures in order to ensure a democratic culture in all education institutions.

To curriculum developers

➢ Audit the prescribed curriculum to identify existing democratic and citizen- ship competences and use CDC to develop it or, where necessary, to change the current curriculum.
➢ Involve stakeholders in decision making and the writing of a curriculum.

To teachers

➢ Choose an appropriate pedagogy and teaching methodology respectful of democratic values and based on an explicit theory of learning suitable for all learners.
➢ Create a democratic climate for learning.
➢ Integrate assessment in teaching and learning as they are interrelated and share the same rationale, taking into consideration and using CDC.
➢ Encourage learners to participate actively in making decisions on their own learning.

Resources

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