
Rutgers Center for Literacy Development

Spring 2021 Newsletter

Volume XII, No. 2

The Big Three In 2020-2021

It has been quite a year for teachers, children and parents dealing with the Pandemic. In addition, Social Justice and Equity along with Social and Emotional Learning are important issues being discussed. At the same time the reading wars have been reignited with conversations about the Simple and Complex views of reading and the “Science of Reading.” I will address each one of these issues briefly.

1. Social Justice and Equity and Social and Emotional Learning (SJE)

SJE need to be prominent issues in our classrooms. You can begin addressing this issue by answering the following questions about your school.

What is done in your district to make the environment culturally responsive?

One teacher said: We have a Multicultural Day, which sheds light on the different cultural backgrounds of the students. But I ask, “Is that enough?”

Do you engage families in school activities to enhance the emphasis on cultural diversity in your school?

One teacher said: We ask parents from different backgrounds to share customs from their countries. But I ask, “Is that enough?”

How do your schools deal with critical literacy within a social justice framework?

A teacher responded: We connect past historical events, such as the Reformation, with protests, such as current marches. But I ask, “Is that enough?”

Do you use multicultural literature in your school?

A teacher responded: Students tell us their interests. They want books with authentic voices that respect multiple beliefs/opinions/identities. We search for narrative and informational books, magazines, poetry, and news articles that deal with multicultural characters and issues. But I ask, “Is that enough?”

Of course NO is the answer to “Is that enough”. We need to continuously learn to make our school communities equitable for all learners.

2. The Science of Reading: Simple or Complex Views?

Every 10 years, the debate over the best way to teach reading is discussed again. This year the term “The Science of Reading” was talked about in the news, in journals, at conferences, in schools and on multiple virtual platforms. The debate began with the media advocating for a simple view of reading with more systematic, sequential, direct instruction of phonics and phonemic awareness. This view is a result of research findings and therefore called the “Science of Reading” (Hanford, 2018; Hood, 2019). This simple view does include language comprehension as important, but not as much as decoding in the early years. The National Reading Panel Report (2000) and other research has found that reading is complex and in addition to decoding there is a need for instruction in vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and writing.

Rather than the “Science of Reading”, others consider calling it the “Sciences of Reading”. This research suggests that learning to read requires decoding skills and many other meaning making skills. By focusing primarily on explicit code-based instruction, early on we run the risk of having children who cannot understand what they read. To be a fluent reader children need instruction that simultaneously teaches decoding, vocabulary, oral language, comprehension, writing, with social and emotional concerns.

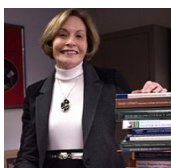
3. The Pandemic and School

The rest of this newsletter was written by Graduate Students in the Masters in Reading and Supervision Certification program at Rutgers Graduate School of Education. It is about positive happenings in school as a result of Covid 19. Their comments include social and emotional issues when learning to read virtually. They also discuss skill development during this time. I will start the discussion with my positive teaching experience during Covid.

The thought of changing my in-person graduate class to zoom in one week was frightening. When teaching I bring children’s literature to share around the room, I bring assessments, reading manipulatives to learn phonic and more. How would I do this virtually? I often tell my students to “turn and talk,” how will I do that? How do I show a power point? How would I do all these activities and interactions on Zoom. Little did I know I would learn to love Zoom, Flip Grid, Jam Board, etc.

I was surprised in my first zoom class that I could see every student and the expressions on their faces. My students are teachers and they have to drive to Rutgers after a day’s work, on crowded road. They are tired, and hungry. When they get to Rutgers and are running late, they have to find parking and walk a few blocks to our building. Rarely is anyone early and at the end of class they are out the door since they have family at home and have to go to work the next day. As the weeks passed, I found more students participating in discussion than in person. I learned how to put them in random groups or skill groups. I asked my students if they wanted to come early to class or stay late, I would be there for advisement, discussion about assignments, and chats about how they were doing in their schools. So many made appointments to meet! During the semester, I was able to schedule individualized conferences frequently. I really knew this class. I knew their concerns, their successes and difficulties. I met their husbands, wives, children, cats, dogs, etc. As a result of this positive experience for all involved I will use Zoom again.

Lesley



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Teacher's Comments about Education During Covid

Following are comments by teachers who are in the Reading Specialist/Supervisor MED Program at Rutgers Graduate School of Education. They represent many different districts, grades and roles in their schools. The comments are divided into categories.

Social and Emotional



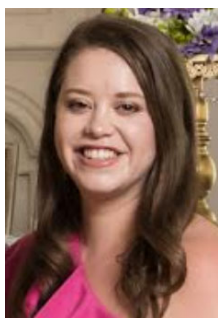
While various new technologies have been a positive outcome of teaching during Covid, one thing I will be taking into my post-Covid teaching is a stronger, more direct focus on social and emotional learning. During a time of such uncertainty and confusion, it has been incredibly difficult to ensure that the students' most basic needs are being met. If the students are not receptive to learning, no new technology will be able to bridge the gaps. Moving forward, continued focus on social and emotional learning will be immensely important, as the pandemic will have lasting effects on students' well-being. Without attention being given to emotional health and growth, academic progress will be limited, no matter the range of new technology available to students and teachers.

AnneMarie Wernlund ~ Special Education Teacher ~ Bergenfield, NJ



When I reflect about my students and how we got through the pandemic, I think how we tried to make the best of the situation. We learned to be very flexible and go with the flow since one day we were remote and the next day in person. We kept a positive mindset by cheering each other up which made lemonades from lemons. We talked about the future when the pandemic would end and what we would do then. We talked about taking things for granted such as hugging, holding hands and just being together. We were caring for each other socially and emotionally. SEL is a major topic of conversation in teaching these days, and we were practicing it in our classroom.

Kelli Dunston ~ 4th grade reading teacher ~ North Brunswick, NJ



My takeaway from teaching through a pandemic was the importance of listening to students. Since virtual instruction began, I purposefully began to ask for student feedback much more often than I had in the classroom. In a time where educators and students' lives were turned upside down, student voice was crucial in order to succeed. I utilized weekly google forms in order to have all students respond and then held a discussion based on the results. Because of this I was able to revise my instruction in order to better meet students' needs and interests. Now after completing over a year of remote learning, this is still something I do weekly in order to improve instruction. I will continue this practice since more positive and meaningful relationships occurred. Students became empowered since they saw their opinions mattered. Students are more engaged and interested in instruction and I have developed better practices to meet student needs.

Stephanie Miele ~ 2nd Grade Special Education Teacher ~ New Brunswick, NJ

Student and Teacher Resilience



Every year the Theatre Club at my H.S. puts on a play. Last year in April 2020 the play was cancelled. We were determined to do a play this year and started rehearsing on zoom since school was remote at the time. As rules changed, we were able to practice in person standing 6 ft. apart with markers on the stage floor to help us distance. We wore masks and used sanitary wipes often when practicing. Our show called "Silver Linings" was an original production written by our choir leader. With song and dance, the theme of the play illustrated how people handled the different parts of the Pandemic. Despite the challenges, the play came together and was presented 3 times in person. We were allowed an audience that occupied 30% of the space in the auditorium. This was difficult, stressful and wonderful all at the same time. It certainly fulfilled the show business phrase, no matter what, "The Show Must Go On."

Brianna Badami ~ H.S. Special Education Teacher ~ Manasquan, NJ



During remote learning, teachers have had to accept the shortcomings of student work ethic along with the variety of excuses that accompany it such as my dog ate my homework. In the wake of Covid, I have had to reevaluate my classroom policies to ensure that I am not shutting out any students due to this difficult time. I had to ask myself what I value more: Am I teaching them how to interact with texts in order to attain a deep understanding of content or am I trying to teach kids that there are consequences for not meeting deadlines? I chose the former. I removed my late work policy and accepted excuses my 8th grader ELA students gave me. There could be students that take advantage of the fact that I am going to meet them with understanding and patience, but for the most part they did not take advantage and I know my students are grateful for the compassion.

Stephanie Homyak ~ 5th Grade Teacher ~ Fair Haven, NJ



During COVID I learned that students are resilient. This year I have seen my first-grade students rise to any occasion that came along. I was sure that teaching these first graders was going to be very tough and I would see lots of learning gaps. To my surprise, the students have come so far with barely any "gaps". COVID made my class more responsible and self-regulate their learning and behavior. COVID introduced more technology to younger students, allowing teachers to use multimodal instructional techniques

Aditi Patel ~ 1st Grade Teacher ~ Warren, NJ

Expanding Teacher Learning



Teaching this year with COVID brought many challenges for me as a kindergarten teacher. I had to find a new way to engage students in an environment where socializing and collaboration became somewhat of a challenge due to social distancing and the inability to safely share materials. I learned how to use technology with my kindergarteners going beyond the redundant apps we've used on the iPads in the past. This year each student had his or her own Chromebook. In an effort to engage and motivate students by providing choice and giving them some control in their learning, I created choice boards using Google Slides. The choice boards were set up like a menu and students could choose which activity they wanted to work on, similar to when they would traditionally go to literacy stations and choose from a few activities. The choice boards were effective in developing literacy skills and fine motor skills with activities, such as read-alouds, educational games, and drawing tutorials. I am grateful for the opportunity I had this year to expand my students' learning using technology and plan to utilize choice boards in the future.

Ali Steffner ~ Kindergarten Teacher ~ Warren, NJ



When we walked out of the building one March day in 2020, we had no idea what lay ahead. We thought it would last for two or three weeks. No one could have imagined what was to come. We have had to totally change our regular routine and figure out how to teach in a completely different format. While I crave the bustling classroom full of students moving around working with each other, I have filled my teacher's toolbox with new instructional methods. Flip Grid is a technology tool that stands out. Flip Grid allows students to use the webcam and microphone on their computer and record a video message. It is easy to navigate and walks you through the recording process step-by-step.

When I create the discussion there are many options to choose from such as extending the length of time of the recording and allowing students the capability to edit their videos. In addition, it allowed students to have a little independence. Once they were familiar with recording, they did not need their parent's help to read the discussion topic with the click of a button, Flip Grid read the topic to the students. I have used it for students to create a way to communicate how they feel and to share what is happening in their lives. The great thing about Flip Grid is I can make the videos public to all of the other students or private so only I can see it. While I will be happy to have a break from so much technology use in the future, I know that Flip Grid will remain an important part of my teaching.

Lara Neary ~ 1st Grade Teacher ~ Eatontown, NJ



During my year of mostly remote teaching, I have learned many useful tools that I will continue to use in the future. Obviously, the technology that we have embraced has shifted some of our teaching. I have been using Near pod consistently to create interactive lessons that allow students both at home and in the classroom to interact with each other. Students could play games against each other, like each other's responses, and were seeing the same thing at the same time. This allowed me to create a sense of community that was missing during remote instruction. In addition, my district implemented office hours twice a week for students to meet individually with their teachers. I have found that students are more willing to show up for their meetings remotely rather than staying after school for questions. With that time, students have been able to have their individual needs met, regardless of where they are. I hope that this concept is adapted somehow for when we are fully back in the classrooms.

Matthew Zrebiec ~ 8th Grade ELA Teacher ~ Piscataway, NJ



One goal my colleagues and I had for this year was to offer students more choice in reading and writing. Therefore, when planning reading instruction, we made it a priority to collect information on our students' interests, attitudes, and self-perceptions as readers. This helped us to better support and guide students' book choices as well as plan instruction based on their specific needs. In a similar way, we also gathered information about our students as writers and provided them with many opportunities to explore topics of interest. We also used several digital tools such as Google Jamboard and Flipgrid to give students the opportunity to collaborate and share their ideas in new ways. Not only was this more motivating and engaging, but it also helped to foster a sense of community among students in the class. Overall, this experience has reminded us that it is important to find ways to support our students' individual needs. This will be especially important to consider as we begin planning instruction for the new school year.

Nicole Maraventano ~ Literacy Coach ~ Readington, NJ



I will continue to use Zoom to teach my students and collaborate with my colleagues. During Covid, I learned to use a variety of online tools to teach my students. I also learned how to use google slides to create interactive, multimodal lessons. When my school reopened, I learned how to simultaneously teach my students in person and online during hybrid learning. Teaching online has also allowed me to conference with my colleagues. Zoom is a great online tool that has allowed teachers from all over the world the ability to connect and collaborate. Teachers from different regions can talk about the best practices in teaching both online and in person. I will take these practices back to my home country Jamaica by sharing them virtually with other teachers.

Kimberley Mueller ~ Teaching Assistant ~ Princeton Public Schools



I am a teacher but I am speaking now as a parent. Since Writing Workshop during the Pandemic where my daughters go to school was asynchronous, I worked with my 3rd grade twin girls on a narrative unit of study. They were to draft small moment stories and they found it difficult to get all their thoughts and words onto the paper. Because they were my daughters, I knew they had more details to include, so I wanted to figure out a way for them to do so independently. They have always told me such detailed stories therefore, I decided to capitalize on this strength and have them orally share their story on Voice Memo. They both did so with ease and excitement and even included all the inner thoughts, dialogue, and actions in their storytelling, which was required on the rubric provided. From there, they typed their story as they listened to themselves tell it. What a difference! Not only were they proud to write such a detailed response in their Writer's Notebook, but they were also relieved to know that when they are stuck in the future they now have a strategy that works. This writing strategy can certainly help any writer who has writer's block or has difficulty with elaboration. Most importantly, it only takes a few minutes, which makes it easy to implement in any classroom!

Elizabeth Snevily ~ Middle School English Teacher

Positive Student Outcomes



Using video calls for teaching was a positive result of Covid. This meant that I was able to speak to students 1 on 1 without interrupting a lesson. Providing students with learning disabilities with support during instruction is a constant struggle. Virtual instruction provided me with methods that I'll never be able to replicate in a physical classroom setting. Students were willing to share what they were thinking since they didn't feel uncomfortable in front of others. Children did not feel they had to hide what they didn't understand. These insights were an invaluable window into how my students think so that I can provide them with better support by designing activities that promote student success.

Sean Murphy ~ Social Studies and Special Education H.S. Teacher ~ Hawthorne, NJ



When we are able to return to a more typical learning environment, I know that I will be more than ready to put away the Chromebooks for a while and soak up the luxury of holding books and learning tools and art supplies in our hands. Still, in the time, that we have spent engaged in virtual learning, a number of tools and resources have proven beneficial to my students, and not just as emergency stopgap measures. One thing I envision going forward is using these digital literacy activities as part of centers or choice time in the language arts block. It is often a challenge to provide targeted, purposeful, independent learning activities for students especially in my multiple-disabilities class where instructional levels vary widely. My students have been doing leveled developmental spelling with Words Their Way online, word study activities on a free online magnet letter board, recorded readings and responses on Flip Grid, and digital sticky note responses on Google and Jam board. They also use digital libraries and watching video read-alouds. It will be a relief when I do not have to rely so heavily on these tools, but I know they will find a useful place in my post-pandemic classroom.

Meredith Gnerre ~ 3rd & 4th Grade Special Education Teacher ~ Little Ferry, NJ



In the beginning of the school year, our literacy coach suggested that we begin the year with digital Reader's and Writer's Notebooks. We created a Jam board for our first reading unit. This allowed students to add pictures and use the text box and Post-It note features by jotting about their reading. We created a virtual Writer's Notebook using Google Slides for students to use. We started this in September, it is now May and we continue to utilize online notebooks. In the virtual setting, I have found these tools to be advantageous in tracking my readers' progress. I have the ability to view students' progress at any time.

Kari Rowe ~ 3rd Grade Teacher ~ Flemington, NJ



One benefit I found with online teaching is that transitions were much smoother than in person. The children were more prepared with their materials. There were no pencils flying across the table or things being dropped on the floor to slow up the transitions in between subjects. Another benefit is that all information has been shared with parents digitally. This improved communication and helped the environment since physical flyers have not been sent home.

Alexandra Casares ~ Kindergarten ELL



While teaching in a hybrid environment was completely different for us and took some getting used to, we found ways to get around the barriers of different cohorts, not seeing every student every day, and engaging all of the young adults in our classroom. One of the ways we did this was a very successful lesson in which we put our technology skills to the test. In order to teach suspenseful writing, we decided to immerse our students in a high stress, unpredictable situation by allowing them to utilize the virtual reality software in a game called "Five Nights at Freddy's." First, we taught students what the elements of suspense were such as limiting a point of view, or creating eerie settings. After we did this lesson, we asked them to identify these features in the virtual reality game as their classmates played it. We live streamed the experience, so all students could be involved. They absolutely

loved this activity and ask for it every time we are in class. It was nice to see students having fun, engaging in the material, and bonding with one another during such a tumultuous time in our world.

Stephanie Jennis ~ English H.S. Teacher ~ Randolph, NJ

Parent Communication and Involvement



Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I thought I did a good job of communicating with my students' families. I sent a newsletter at the start of every week, showcasing the children's work from the previous week and highlighting what we would be focusing on in the coming week. I made an effort to reach out to parents not only with any concerns I had about my students but also with my observations of student progress and good character. When the pandemic started and we were all sequestered in our respective homes, I found myself communicating with my students' parents more than ever. I checked in with them a few times a week to ask about the students' social-emotional well-being. I believe that my regular communication with parents has had a direct positive influence on my students' abilities to adjust to distance learning and levels of engagement. My more frequent communication with families is one practice that I will certainly continue once this pandemic is over.

Amalia Kanaras ~ 2nd Grade Teacher ~ American International School, Cyprus



I learned how important relationships are when keeping children engaged virtually. I have always thought that building, developing, and maintaining relationships in school with students and peers was crucial. However, this year I have noticed that my children entered the classroom in the fall very anxious and unsure of the state of the world. Through one-on-one conferences with students daily, the children have shown that they are more at ease and are able to voice their concerns, talk about their day, or share something that they find important to them. In addition, parent communication has also increased greatly. I find myself using various forms of digital communication (email, Google Meet, and Zoom) with parents to discuss their concerns, their child's progress, or even collaborate. I look forward to continuing the use of these digital tools to increase communication next year.

Carleigh Twillmann ~ 1st Grade Teacher ~ Montville



Distance learning created important relationships between educators and families. Being able to meet virtually with families to discuss progress and provide feedback has been one of the positive and most rewarding outcomes of the Pandemic. Often parents and caregivers have multiple children, employment and other obligations. The flexibility of being able to meet virtually at a time that is convenient for them allowed for meaningful collaboration that was critical in decreasing our stress and increasing frequency of communication. The result was deeper student engagement and growth especially in literacy. When we return to in person learning, I am excited to build off these virtual meetings and look for new ways to foster partnerships to provide frequent and flexible options for ongoing and meaningful collaboration with families. Most importantly during these virtual meetings, children were welcomed and able to observe how the significant adults in their lives made decisions concerning their well-being and learning. This is a great model for children to see. During virtual learning, a close partnership was established with parents and teachers that helped students reach growth objectives. More progress was made when parent, teacher and child worked together. This has been wonderful outcome of remote learning.

Annette Landin ~ Kindergarten Teacher ~ Piscataway, NJ

The Center for Literacy Development is back with Webinar and In-Person Events



NANCY FREY
Wednesday September 29
Webinar, 4 to 5:15 pm
Rebuilding Agency,
Accelerating Learning
Recovery, and Rethinking in
Schools



GLORIA LADSON-BILLINGS
Thursday, October 21
Webinar, 4 to 5:15 pm
Reading as a Right: Rethinking
the Purpose and Mandate of
Reading in Our Schools



KELLY GALLAGHER
Tuesday, November 16
9 am to 2 pm
Rutgers Student Center
Bringing More Choice
and Voice Into the Writing
Curriculum



ERNEST MORRELL
Tuesday, December 7
9 am to 2 pm
Busch Student Center
Cultural Responsiveness
and Engagement in 21st
Century ELA

** Both of these presentations will take
place on Tuesday, April 5th*



CRIS TOVANI
Thursday, January 20
9 am to 2 pm
Busch Student Center
Comprehension and
Struggling Readers



SARA AHMED
Thursday, February 24
9 am to 2 pm
Busch Student Center
Being the Change:
Leveraging Identity and
Social Comprehension in
the Classroom



WILEY BLEVINS
Tuesday, April 5
9 am to 2 pm
Busch Student Center
Fresh Look at Phonics and
Navigating Nonfiction



KATHY GANSKE
Tuesday, April 5
9 am to 2 pm
Busch Student Center
Best Practice in Vocabulary
Instructions

Registration Information:

Webinars are \$35 each and Onsite Events \$160 each. *Look for OPEN Registration to be announced soon! Please visit our website at <http://rutgersliteracycenter.org/> for more information.*

All on-site events will be held at the Rutgers Campus Student Centers.

Please Note: All Covid-19 guidelines will be followed and enforced. All registrants must be vaccinated to attend Rutgers On-site event. Register early due to limited space based on social distancing rules at the time of the meetings.



An After School Literacy Program For Struggling Readers

Center for Literacy Development Rutgers Reading Club

Instruction focuses on the child's needs. The teaching plan includes the integration of the language arts with developing: word work, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency and writing.

Motivation is a major goal in sessions. For example, the child can choose a book for the teacher to read to them that is too difficult for the child to read themselves. Literacy games are also played.

Each child is taught twice a week for 12 weeks for an hour by a teacher who is certified. Teachers work on building a relationship with the child.



Rutgers Reading Club Cheer

Rutgers Reading!
Rutgers Writing!
Hoo-Rah!
Hoo-Rah!
Rutgers Reading
Reading Red team!
Writing Red team!
Rah! Rah!

Research based practices that make the Reading Club successful:

- Motivating and Engaging children
- Building Self-esteem
- Time for socializing and snacking
- Building relationships between teacher and student
- Allows for choice and success
- Differentiating instruction
- Provides added time for literacy instruction in the school day
- Allowing for practice

Treatment Group

DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR
Sight Words	Sight Words	Sight Words	Running Record	Running Record	Running Record	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory
128	171	255	E	H	J	42/74	3/74	68/74

Control Group

DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR	DEC	JAN	MAR
Sight Words	Sight Words	Sight Words	Running Record	Running Record	Running Record	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory	Phonics Inventory
134	144	170	E	E	F	42/74	44/74	50/74



How Can We Help You This Summer and Next Fall



The Center for Literacy Development

Information for:

Teachers, Reading Interventionists, Coaches, Supervisors, Principals, Parents

Learn About:

In person and remote services that the
Center for Literacy Development will provide this summer and in the fall

- **Virtual and in person tutoring** in reading and writing during, after school and in the summer
- Virtual and face to face Implementation of the Rutgers Reading Club: An Intervention for Struggling Readers
- Summer Literacy Coaching for Educators in the following areas:
 - ♦ Guided reading groups virtually and in person
 - ♦ Technology techniques in school and for remote learning
 - ♦ Reading workshop
 - ♦ Writing workshop
 - ♦ Use of informational text
 - ♦ Assessment
 - ♦ Project based learning
 - ♦ Close reading
 - ♦ Differentiated instruction
 - ♦ Dyslexia
 - ♦ Mentoring new teachers
 - ♦ Struggling readers
 - ♦ Parent involvement programs
 - ♦ Evaluation and organization of your language arts programs
 - ♦ Programs designed individually for your school and children

To discuss further email Center-for-literacy-development@gse.rutgers.edu or contact Kelly Clarida at (848) 932-0762.



New Tutoring Opportunities available through the Center for Literacy Development



- ***Employment Opportunities for Teachers to tutor children in school districts in New Jersey***
- ***The children will be tutored Virtually and In person***
- ***Small group instruction for 3-4 children***
- ***Contact us if you are interested in being a Tutor for the Center for Literacy Development***

If you are interested or have additional questions, please email Center-for-literacy-development@gse.rutgers.edu or contact Kelly Clarida at (848) 932-0762.



CENTER FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT COACHING AT YOUR SCHOOL OR VIRTUALLY



The center provides experienced coaches to do workshops, coaching, and modeling strategies to enhance teacher performance and student achievement. Professional development is tailored to your school's needs.



Over
50
Districts Served



RUTGERS

Graduate School of Education

COACHING TOPICS

- Reading workshop
- Guided Reading
- Writing Workshop
- Standards
- Use of Informational Text
- Assessment
- Project Based Learning
- Close Reading
- Differentiated Instruction
- Dyslexia
- Mentoring New Teachers
- Literacy and technology
- Struggling Readers
- Parent Involvement Programs
- Evaluations of Language Arts Programs
- Evaluation of your curriculum and how it's implemented

AND MORE

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