

Continuous Professional Development of Teachers: A Policy Perspective

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ABSTRACT:

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for teachers should be a policy-driven, evidence-based approach that enhances educational quality by linking to student outcomes, equity, and sustainability. CPD is defined as any activity that develops skills and knowledge relevant to a professional's duties. In education, it encompasses both formal and informal learning, involving various activities with different durations, purposes, and impacts. Evidence shows that teachers benefit from deepening their Subject Content Knowledge (SCK), enhancing pedagogical skills, and improving technology use. Nonetheless, many countries face challenges like limited time, funding, and guidance for effective CPD. (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019)

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, educational quality, technology, Subject Content Knowledge (SCK).

INTRODUCTION:

Teacher CPD should be viewed through a policy-oriented lens within a broader framework of educational improvement. Policymakers depend on solid evidence about the links between teacher development and educational quality; the following principles help to clarify and communicate these linkages. Improvement in student performance, whether in academic achievement, skills acquisition, or other core outcomes, remains the central and ultimate objective. Development opportunities must demonstrate explicitly how learning and practice are enhanced. CPD is most effective when it addresses core curriculum content, teaching strategies, pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices that teachers need to adopt or enhance in their work. In light of the growing emphasis on policy concerns related to equity and inclusion, both global and policy-research evidence increasingly asserts the necessity for professional-development opportunities to focus explicitly on equity issues as well. Access to CPD cannot be assumed to be uniformly available; existing opportunities are often concentrated disproportionately among specific teacher segments and localized within certain geographical boundaries (Desta et al., 2013) ; (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATION:

Continuous professional development (CPD) is essential for enhancing educational quality. It includes diverse activities, emphasizing the ongoing nature of professional learning. CPD fosters reflection, adaptation, and the integration of new ideas into practice. Evidence-based practice highlights the connection between activities and the cognition that supports them, aiding teachers in linking their efforts to student success.

Policies at system and school levels shape teacher learning, varying by context over time. Globally, teachers are recognized as vital to improving education quality, with initial and ongoing professional development identified as crucial for this. Various frameworks exist that complement each other, focusing on the same core principles. System-level policies aim for the systemic capacity-building of the teaching profession, encompassing both pre-service education and CPD. Teacher-led professional development is central to policy and promotes greater empowerment, involvement, and agency among educators. (L. Hager Moore, 2009) (L Mokhele, 2014)

CONCEPTS OF CPD, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) reflects a shift from traditional “in-service” training to the broader idea of continuous professional learning, which is shaped by policy and context (Desta et al., 2013) ; (L. Hager Moore, 2009) ; (L Mokhele, 2014). CPD relates directly to student learning and outcomes, and it has a particular policy significance in the field of education. Evidence from research on teaching and learning shapes the concept of evidence-based practice, which can be understood as an approach to teaching and learning that draws on well-established research and theory and that involves framing problems and questions, testing them against evidence and examining the implications for action; Evidence-based practice provides a fourth lens through which the concept of CPD may be understood.

POLICY FRAMEWORKS SHAPING TEACHER DEVELOPMENT:

The continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers is increasingly framed as a policy-driven, evidence-based driver of educational quality, with explicit linkages to student outcomes, equity, and system sustainability. There is growing recognition of CPD not only as an individual responsibility, but as a strategic priority requiring whole-of-system approaches. This understanding of CPD has begun to shape the policy discourse and the design of policy frameworks and practices in many contexts, including Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. These frameworks formalise the linkages between educational goals and CPD, including the intended policy aims and anticipated outcomes.

Frameworks for teacher CPD are often expressed in terms of three types of policy: (i) the overarching principles and aims, defining the relevant content of teacher CPD and why it is important from a public policy perspective; (ii) the policy levers through which CPD is promoted and governed, describing the mechanisms, instruments, and channels by which knowledge is transferred into practice; and (iii) the anticipated short-term and long-term outcomes of teacher CPD investments, identifying the expected benefits to both the individual and the education system as a whole (L Mokhele, 2014) ; (L. Hager Moore, 2009).

Because CPD is increasingly viewed through this lens, frameworks are now being developed that specify more precisely the overarching principles and aims that guide CPD policymaking. Examination of such frameworks in a range of jurisdictions highlights some commonly observed features, as well as significant variations, within

a shared global discourse on CPD. Comparison of the practical implications of different approaches provides insight into the local and global dimensions of CPD, and suggests elements of a preliminary framework for teacher CPD that may be relevant in Australian settings.

POLICY AIMS AND RATIONALES FOR CPD:

A central aim of CPD policy is to foster high-quality teaching to promote improved student learning. Education systems across the globe must meet the challenge of providing diverse learning opportunities that enable all students to thrive and to develop knowledge, skills and attributes so that they can contribute to social cohesion and build sustainable economies (L Mokhele, 2014). Teachers have a central role in ensuring that students receive high-quality, equitable learning opportunities. Consequently, the professional learning of teachers is critical to the quality of teaching in schools, and improving the professional learning opportunities available to teachers to improve student outcomes is a key priority for policymakers (Patrick et al., 2003). The rationale for CPD policy is grounded in evidence that teacher learning and development are fundamental to improved student learning and outcomes. Comprehensive research has established strong links between teacher learning, changes in teaching practices and improved student outcomes across a wide range of settings (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). Professional learning can take many forms – from initial training to ongoing support throughout a professional career – but, for practising teachers, the greatest potential for learning relates to the investigation and analysis of the practical tasks of teaching. Teachers therefore need access to professional development that enables them to reflect on their practice, collaborative inquiry and the systematic collection of evidence. Education systems should ensure that professional development is built around teaching practice, drawing on the description and analysis of real-world practice in order to reconnect professional learning to teachers' daily work. Global evidence indicates that traditional one-off workshops or generic programs of only a few hours have little or no impact on teaching practices or student outcomes. Access to rich, sustained, collaborative professional development aligned to the school and policy statewide system has been demonstrated to improve students' learning and outcomes. Consequently, policies that support teachers in accessing substantive, sustained, collaborative professional learning through school and system-based structural arrangements, combined with a focus on teacher practice, are critical to the quality and effectiveness of CPD.

IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES THROUGH TEACHER LEARNING:

This research analyses the contribution of teacher learning to improving students' educational outcomes. Numerous recent high-profile reports (L. Hager Moore, 2009) describe mechanisms by which teacher professional development affects student learning, and establish a causal logic framework linking teacher learning and student achievement—through the mediating factors of enhanced teaching practice, increased student engagement, and the cultivation of a positive educational environment. Empirical evidence shows that CPD in the form of collaborative or collective learning is linked to improved students' performance. In its

second stage, this research considers the dimensions of equity, inclusion, and access across professional development and CPD systems, in order to identify the barriers to equitable opportunities, and relevant policy levers to increase equitable participation.

EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS IN CPD:

National progress in providing equity, inclusion, and access to all students and stakeholders demands aligned and coordinated efforts across institutional levels (Desta et al., 2013). Policymakers have therefore called for corresponding educational developments that drive equity, inclusion, and access (Shroyer et al., 2013) and the interoperability of diverse education sectors—such as early childhood, primary, higher, and adult learning—that converge around common equity agendas (Dikert, Kull, & Valge, 2010). Teacher education systems should strengthen reasoning and mathematics abilities as well as attitudes, motivation, values, and aspirations—factors that influence students’ pursuit of mathematics learning and careers (Esty, 2015). Such engagements also support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Tett, Kearney, & McLusky, 2018).

Nonetheless, examinations of equity, inclusion, and access in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) arrangements reveal substantial shortcomings and inconsistencies between the principles underlying CPD policies and actual provision. While many policies claim to foster equity, systemic solutions rarely accompany specific teacher development priorities. Systemic policy interdependencies promote more coherent and focused strategies (Altinyelken, 2010). A systematic analysis of their alignment, together with feedback from active CPD stakeholders, can strengthen coherence and further a common vision across initial teacher education, induction, ongoing teacher learning, and more (Scott, 2009).

POLICY INSTRUMENTS AND DELIVERY MODELS:

Teachers’ continuous professional development (CPD)—also referred to as teacher professional development, professional learning, or in-service education and training—encompasses all kinds of education and training activities intended to advance teachers’ professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes throughout their careers. Such activities have long been linked to capacity building in teaching, and by extension capacity building in educational leadership and management, yet their role as a policy instrument and mechanism for teaching school improvement has attracted increasing attention in recent years. Quality of teaching undeniably matters, and large-scale studies indicate two significant links between the quality of teachers’ CPD activities and the quality of their students’ learning outcomes, as well as a strong correlation between the quality of CPD activities received over the years across all school levels and the same quality as perceived by teachers themselves. A worldwide synthesis of the characteristics of effective CPD shows that the similarity between teachers’ own perceptions of quality and the definition of effective CPD endorsed at system level indirectly shapes students’ chances of learning (Desta et al., 2013); (L Mokhele, 2014).

Systems engaged in teaching school improvement have consequently adopted different hybrid solutions to the CPD challenge, often coupling enhanced governance and accountability mechanisms with controlled funding to steer and stimulate the supply of and demand for high-quality CPD. The different hybrids provide illuminating insights on how specific demand-side, supply-side, governance, and funding attributes interact and complement and reinforce each other, and indicate important policy considerations when addressing CPD as an integral component of broader system-wide teaching school improvement.

MANDATED LICENSURE AND RENEWAL REQUIREMENTS:

Licensure requirements stipulate the minimum qualifications for teaching in one or more subject areas. They are typically composed of academic degrees, tests, and other credentials. The minimum standards specified in licensure requirements are not synonymous with hiring standards, and many effective teachers fall into the category of “underqualified.” Professional development requirements for re-licensure are typically expressed either in terms of time or credits. A time-based system requires a specified number of hours of professional development (generally between 30 and 150) that must occur during a certain period (usually three to five years). A time-based system requires a specified number of credits of professional development (from 6 to 15 credits). Development requirements change only when specific conditions are met (L. Hager Moore, 2009).

GRANTS, FUNDING STREAMS, AND INCENTIVES:

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is expected to keep up and remain effective and relevant in changing educational contexts. CPD encompasses acquiring competencies and evidence-based knowledge throughout one’s career to inform teaching practice, and it possesses a significant influence on desired student learning outcomes. Teachers, instead of being recipient of concerns of CPD, must be seen as active contributors to its conception and future involvement. Education institutions are necessary—who are eligible on funding of CPD—capable to provide evidence-based professional development need to be of a high standard (L. Hager Moore, 2009).

In many countries, CPD goals established at national level compete with the local freedom to choose detailed content of such activity. Policies therefore diverge widely. CPD refers to various monetary and other incentives granted by government or external bodies to institutionalise and sustain teacher professional development. Funding provided on a discretionary but recurrent basis in support of the school-based professional development is widely adopted policy approach. Institutional support rate of teacher professional development thus considerably increased.

SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:

School-based professional learning communities are an important strategy for promoting teacher collaboration and reforming pedagogical practices. The structure of school-based learning communities varies

considerably by case, including the frequency of participation, whether school leaders take part, and the focus of discussions. Evidence suggests that engagement in learning communities enhances teachers' pedagogical practices, leads to improvements in student academic performance, and increases teacher retention. Nevertheless, the extent of engagement and consequent outcomes differ widely across settings.

The best-supported models of school-based professional learning are those that foster collaborative inquiry and that include the school principal as a participant. In these models, which are sometimes called professional learning communities or collaborative learning teams, teachers work together to improve instructional practices using a structured approach to inquiry into their own practice. Typically, they share their teaching materials and student work, review student performance data, and study relevant literature or research, guided by a facilitator who is not necessarily a content area expert (Kay Adams, 2008) (Baricaua Gutierrez & Kim, 2018).

PARTNERSHIPS WITH HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

Teacher development opportunities offered by higher education and professional associations have considerable potential to expand the breadth and diversity of continuing professional development (CPD) experiences available to educators. In addition to traditional pre-service and in-service teacher education, a range of collaborative professional development initiatives exists between various stakeholders and schools, including grant-funded projects and community service-based programs. With some local and regional variation, partnerships between schools and higher education and professional associations generally adhere to two broad structures: co-presentation and co-design (L Mokhele, 2014). Co-presentation describes arrangements whereby specific ongoing, accredited professional learning opportunities are presented on site in collaboration with a higher education or professional association partner to augment the school's teacher-focused professional learning program. Co-design refers to community-based initiatives involving collaborative, curriculum-oriented partnerships that allow educators to apply current curriculum and pedagogy interests and issues to broader community interests and concerns (Patrick et al., 2003). Typically supported by in-kind resources rather than financial or material support, such initiatives are often aligned with the school's strategic direction concerning, for example, locally negotiated curriculum and assessment or early literacy development. With shared ownership and equal input valued in community-based projects, schools can present proposals outlining specific curriculum interests that form the basis for collaborative discussions. Collaboration serves to enhance community engagement and school-university partnerships focused on curriculum and pedagogy.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN CPD POLICY:

Continuous professional development (CPD) for educators lacks universally established standards and assessment frameworks or consistent procedures for quality assurance and impact evaluation (Davies et al., 2019). Numerous approaches to CPD take account of local circumstances and circumstances relevant to specific

subject areas. Many systems, however, use globally adopted frameworks such as those provided by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) to develop, deliver, and assess CPD opportunities. Aspects which CPD policies in various governance systems regularly specify include required content and structure, intended target audience, conditions for approval, assessments required for recognition, duration of certification, and contrast with other types of development activities. Similar guidelines recommend performance indicators to indicate whether intended objectives have been achieved and further areas for growth remain. Potential indicators include participant satisfaction, impact on learner outcomes, alignment with local educational priorities, and systematic implementation and development of CPD activities. Data sources span completion records submitted by the provider, participant feedback, analyses of student results, follow-up questionnaire returns exploring aspects of CPD experience and implementation, and repositories holding CPD activities undertaken by teachers (Desta et al., 2013).

STANDARDS, FRAMEWORKS, AND ASSESSMENT OF CPD:

Teachers' ongoing development is governed in many countries by high-stakes standards and frameworks. These instruments set expectations for teachers' professional development throughout their careers, specifying what counts as eligible activity, and informing both provider actions and teacher choices (Bamber, 2009). Such mandates also shape how continuous professional development (CPD) is interpreted, fostering the view that the activity must satisfy the pre-established criteria in order to be recognised officially (Desta et al., 2013).

Only a minority of education systems assess the quality of CPD supplied by external providers. For the most part, such reviews are concentrated on the specification of CPD standards, frameworks, and acceptability rules, leaving broader quality assurance strategies outside the prevailing focus (L Mokhele, 2014). Moreover, quality criteria tend to address format rather than content, specifying delivery modes and duration without considering alignment with teachers' professional development needs.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND IMPACT MEASUREMENT:

The absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms raises serious concerns. Initial follow-up is conducted through a monitoring mechanism (e.g. financial or physical monitoring) within the first year of implementation, focusing on whether equipment is used, training is conducted, and materials are received (Aklilu Betemariam, 2017). However, there is no impact evaluation or tracking of how CPD has influenced teaching practices and improved learning outcomes.

Globally, provision of greater care and attention to planning, designing and implementing innovative and appropriate CPD systems is growing (Azhar & Munir Kayani, 2016). The attention is dedicated to garnering political and institutional commitment and support ("buy-in") for CPD at all levels (national, provincial/regional and school). Yet, there is not enough on a systematic understanding of whether or how, and in what specific

contexts, these existing systems have actually produced the desired improvements in CPD. This calls for developing and operationalising innovative and context-specific frameworks and/or instruments for measuring and evaluating the quality, efficacy, effectiveness and impact of CPD on a wide range of indicators and criteria. Measuring, monitoring and evaluating CPD activities has gained prominence as a policy commitment and operational priority. However, these CPD activities have not yet been adequately documented, monitored and evaluated. While there is an on-going collection of information, it is being mainly conducted on ad-hoc basis and is unsystematic. At present, there is no formal assessment on whether and how CPD supports the achievement of national development objectives in Ethiopia.

Follow-up monitoring of other CPD is not in place; there is no analysis about whether and how the CPD found in the reviewed systems and countries is supporting, catalysing and boosting the achievement of national development objectives at large, nor the indicators that could be drawn out to track, monitor and measure CPD. There are instances of attempts to realise CPD in a few sectors and areas in the country; however, it has not yet gained a systematic country-wide dynamic momentum. At national level, CPD is not yet being in place that will eventually feed-up to track the degree to which those targeted development objectives and levels of national development could be achieved, nor is a framework having been in place to undertake that monitoring.

GLOBAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON CPD POLICY:

Globally, the role and functioning of CPD systems vary widely according to national policy priorities and contexts; yet, policy hybrids nonetheless emerge from common approaches to CPD. Policy decisions thus reflect the key variables that inform governance and funding arrangements. Within this global framework, a few exemplary CPD systems unmistakably stand out; drawing from these examples provides strikingly illustrative lessons regarding policy design, system coherence, and stakeholder involvement. Even when particular practices do not readily transfer, countries can benefit from confronting common design issues—drawing inspiration from the signals and cautionary notes conveyed by other systems.

Countries, regions, and localities pursue CPD policies to enhance instructional quality and, subsequently, student learning. Patterns point to four major CPD policy principles: (1) continuous professional development (CPD) is framed as a national policy priority for enhancing educational quality; (2) personal, professional and social, and organizational systems are established as the priority IPD focus; (3) selected CPD opportunities arise from stakeholders' systemic conditions and identified needs; and (4) pertinent IPD practices are rigorously monitored and evaluated across diverse education systems and with the support of expert researchers, thereby encompassing significant change efforts, major projects, or a new generation of instructional reforms (Desta et al., 2013) ; Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019).

CROSS-NATIONAL POLICY HYBRIDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS:

Across diverse jurisdictions, teacher professional-development policies exhibit a range of guiding assumptions, rationales, and programmatic features, highlighting their formative role as system-level

metapractices that define the professional learning landscape. Such cross-national hybrids reflect competing policy imperatives and tensions in educational legislation; for instance, nations aspiring to position teacher quality at the core of improvement agendas simultaneously retain systems that require only sporadic and relatively low-commitment professional development.

Teacher-development policies provide distinctive vantage points via which researchers can discern national and regional priorities and policy trajectories. Examinations of such frameworks reveal pronounced contrasts even among countries regarded as educationally similar; in Scotland, for instance, an explicit policy commitment to the establishment and growth of a “professional learning culture” coexists with entrenched legislative and contractual provisions pertaining to “in-service training” that are generally viewed by practitioners and other stakeholders as outdated (Patrick et al., 2003) (Patrick et al., 2003). Yet systematic cross-national comparisons also yield a selection of recurring questions. In matters of content, for instance, the meaning of “professional learning” remains ambiguous, with considerable variation across countries in the anticipated substance, focus, and direction of teacher-development activities. Similarly, the relative emphasis placed on collaborative and collegial engagements—on professional development that is formally recognised and sanctioned by the education system—varies markedly from one context to another (Hardy et al., 2010) (Hardy et al., 2010).

LESSONS FROM EXEMPLARY CPD SYSTEMS

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers is increasingly being framed as a policy-driven, evidence-based driver of educational quality, with explicit linkages to student outcomes, equity, and system sustainability.

Many countries have introduced or revised national CPD policies. Arguments in favour of these policy initiatives draw attention to the direct impact of teacher learning on student achievement; the need to strengthen CPD links with higher education institutions; the visibility that policy frameworks bring; and the demand of other stakeholders for clear commitments from governments (Desta et al., 2013). These CPD policies or frameworks exhibit notable variation across countries but also share a number of common features. An analysis of selected CPD policies, frameworks, and support tools from Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, and the United Kingdom (specifically, England) reveals transferable insights about CPD policy design, implementation, and management.

CHALLENGES AND TENSIONS IN CPD POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

With increasing recognition that teachers are agents of change in the quest for equitable quality education, systems continue to seek ways to engage educators in processes of change. Continuous Professional Development (CPD)—from formal training to informal, teacher-driven learning arrangements—remains one key strategy. Yet, several tensions persist.

Educational system governance typically combines public, private, quasi-public, and not-for-profit actors. Each actor has different incentives that influence governance modalities, potentially generating tensions. For

example, public and quasi-public actors pursuing CPD initiatives aimed at system coherence may compete with private actors simply aiming to meet emerging market demand. The latter may prioritize short-term training addressing immediate classroom concerns, while the former emphasize longer-term, systemic engagements that consider a broader range of classroom and pedagogical issues.

Educational systems routinely face serious resource constraints. Substantial investment in CPD remains challenging despite public recognition of its importance. Resource competition may thus create tensions among ambitious policy proposals for CPD delivery, enhancing the attractiveness of lower-investment programs.

Finally, the pursuit of CPD features other aspirations, such as teacher accountability or efforts to engage poorly performing educators in improvement strategies, which can also create misalignment (Desta et al., 2013).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION:

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers should be framed as a policy-driven, evidence-based driver of educational quality, with explicit linkages to student outcomes, equity, and system sustainability. In diverse contexts, CPD plays a pivotal role in enhancing educational quality and equity across systems. Despite the wide range of CPD activities undertaken by teachers, policies in various jurisdictions neither delineate a coherent set of priorities nor specify instruments for promoting quality and relevance. Previous sections have characterized CPD as policy-driven, evidence-based, and focused on improving educational quality and equity. Drawing on this analysis, this section focuses on the design and implementation of CPD policy through a series of five recommendations.

Governments can frame CPD as a policy-driven, evidence-based driver of educational quality, with explicit linkages to student outcomes, equity, and system sustainability. This framing will assist in policy design and implementation by clarifying the problem being addressed, identifying relevant evaluation indicators, and helping to select priority delivery mechanisms (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019).

Policy aims, rationales, instruments, and governance arrangements have a significant influence on CPD quality (L Mokhele, 2014). Setting policy priorities and specifying the desired nature of CPD at an early stage enhances the appropriateness of subsequent decisions. Explicitly articulating the overall CPD vision drives the choice of supporting instruments. Where systems already possess a clear framework, a hybrid approach may be beneficial; articulating school leaders' functions within an existing overarching vision of CPD provides a supportive entry point for capacity development.

Establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework at the outset enables timely data collection on implementation progress; an accessible, system-wide overview of capability-enhancing provision serves as a foundation for ongoing adaptations and continuous improvement (L. Hager Moore, 2009). Implementation indicators focus on the nature of capacity building—interventions that educators regard as “helpful”—as well as the educational outcomes being prioritised. Even when the aim is to expand coverage of demand-driven support, it remains essential to specify progress indicators.

CONCLUSION

Effective CPD is context-specific and attuned to collective needs (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). Teachers require time to engage in collegial conversations and find sustainable solutions to authentic problems, necessitating collaborative structures. Uncoordinated, sporadic interventions focused narrowly on technical skills diminish possibilities for purposeful professional growth (L Mokhele, 2014). Consequently, many CPD regulations and initiatives adopted or intensified in response to the COVID-19 pandemic lack coherence with longer-term educational transformation objectives.

State and local policymakers committed to CPD regulation reform must deliberate the compatibility of their existing systems and envisioned transformations. Reassessing policies, programmes, and priorities through this lens can uncover potential hindrances or supports before systems become further entrenched. Whenever possible, new interventions should be designed for simultaneous introduction with broad-based reforms, facilitating alignment among CPD offerings and other educational initiatives.

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