

The Optimization of Student Potential through a Learning Design Based on Multiple Intelligences in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Every individual possesses distinct potential and intelligence, necessitating the design of basic-level learning to accommodate these differences. A learning design based on multiple intelligences has become one way to optimize students' potential. From the results of a preliminary study, there are schools that have implemented learning practices based on Multiple Intelligences to reduce uniformity in the learning system. This study aims to describe the optimization of students' potential through a learning design based on multiple intelligences at SDIU Cahaya Al-Fatih. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design at Elementary School Cahaya Al-Fatih in Pandeglang District. In-depth interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and several students. Participatory observation was carried out in classrooms and school environments, as well as during the learning activities. Lastly, documentation was used to collect data. The study reveals that the theory of Multiple Intelligences at School begins with a systematic approach, starting from student profile assessments, the design of diverse curricula and lesson plans, the implementation of active project-based learning, and continuous evaluation. This demonstrates that education can shift its focus from logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligences to recognizing and appreciating other types of intelligence, such as musical, kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligence. However, as a consideration or recommendation, schools need to remain consistent in developing teacher training, establish specific assessment standards or rubrics, and ensure a balance

between developing students' dominant intelligences and nurturing other potentially dormant intelligences.

Keywords

Diverse Curricula
Elementary School
Learning Design
Multiple Intelligences

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Introduction

Indonesia Gold 2045 is an idea aimed at preparing a high-quality generation capable of competing in the 21st century. To realize this vision, support from various development sectors is necessary, with education being the main pillar. In line with the Education Objectives outlined in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 4, paragraph 1, education must be organized democratically, justly, non-discriminatively, and uphold human rights, religious values, culture, and the diversity of the nation.

Every individual inherently has diverse potential, characteristics, and levels of intelligence. Therefore, a learning design is needed from the primary education level that can accommodate these differences inclusively and adaptively. In response to this need, the government has developed the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes learner-centered learning. This curriculum prioritizes the appreciation of student diversity, beginning with the implementation of diagnostic assessments to map students' initial abilities, potential, and learning needs. As a result, the learning process can be designed more accurately and differentiated [1].

Furthermore, the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, embodied in the Pancasila Student Profile, align with Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences. This theory asserts that intelligence is not singular but comprises various types of intelligence that each individual possesses in different proportions. This alignment shows that the national curriculum policy has accommodated an approach to education that is holistic, humanistic, and oriented towards the comprehensive development of students' potential.

Intelligence and learning are interrelated. In the learning process, teachers must consider the aspects of intelligence in students so that the learning process becomes directed and systematic according to the students' needs, allowing them to understand the material being studied [2]. A quality individual can utilize all the potential within them, which can then benefit their surroundings. This statement aligns with what [3] expressed, stating that human resources of quality are those who can develop all their potential. Potential is a gift from God given to every individual on Earth. One form of potential given by God to each individual is

intellectual potential, or the potential related to knowledge, which can be developed through intelligence.

Human intelligence is diverse and includes more than one type of intelligence. These types of intelligence are known as Multiple Intelligences. Multiple Intelligence theory was proposed by Gardner in 1983. Howard Gardner made several observations about human intelligence based on 35 years of accumulated neurological studies. The emergence of this theory was based on: the idea of multiple intelligences, early views on intelligence, the biological foundation of intelligence, and the question of what intelligence is [3]. His research resulted in seven aspects of intelligence, which he later expanded to eight types: "linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic." [4]. However, in its application in Indonesia, an additional intelligence—spiritual intelligence—is included, making it nine types of intelligence [5].

To develop these nine types of intelligence, an educational system focused on meeting the needs and interests of students is required. Through learning oriented towards Multiple Intelligences, the learning process becomes effective, engaging, and able to accommodate various student characteristics, needs, and interests. Although this theory has been recognized, few educators have applied it in teaching. In fact, learning with Multiple Intelligences helps improve the expected learning outcomes [6] [7].

In Indonesia, most learning is still generalized to fit the conditions and potential of all students, resulting in suboptimal learning outcomes due to various factors, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic [8]. To improve the quality of learning implementation, it must begin with educators who understand and comprehend students' learning needs and interests. This ensures that the learning process is effective and leads to good learning outcomes. Students will lose confidence in their intelligence, feel pressured during the learning process, and feel unappreciated. Passive learners will become more passive and less likely to contribute to the learning process when observing other, more active and dominant learners [9]. This will ultimately lead to a decline in students' learning motivation.

According to Aghnia [10], students have various abilities and potentials, one of which is intelligence. The intelligence that can support an individual's learning process may consist of more than one type. This intelligence is called Multiple Intelligences. This view is in line with what Nikmah [11] states that Multiple Intelligences is a gift possessed by every living being. Multiple Intelligences are crucial in education for students to develop. Students with Multiple Intelligences can easily do things not solely based on one type of intelligence.

The application of Multiple Intelligences theory in learning design can help both students and teachers better understand the students' abilities. "This helps students build confidence by showing them how they can use their strengths to overcome their weaknesses"

[12]. This theory emerges as a new way of seeing students' essence in education. Previous researchers have revealed that this theory is not just theoretical but is based on strong reasons why it should be applied in education. First, this theory is based on various research results about the potential every person possesses. Second, Gardner's theory not only provides theoretical insights but also practical ones, as it has been tested in the field, such as in American Airlines, Bell Atlantic, and others. Third, this idea has been elaborated from its philosophy to its practical implementation [13].

At SDIU Cahaya Al-Fatih, this theory is not merely a concept on paper but a practical guide in every teaching and learning activity. The teachers there realize that various types of intelligence need to be honed, such as visual-spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, and existential intelligence, in addition to the commonly recognized linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences.

For example, when studying the theme of ecosystems, students are not only asked to read books and complete assignments. Students can be taken to the school garden to observe plants and animals directly (naturalistic intelligence), create a miniature forest diorama (visual-spatial intelligence), sing a song about the food chain (musical intelligence), or simulate the roles of animals and plants (kinesthetic intelligence). This way, learning becomes more relevant, interactive, and aligns with various student learning styles. Through this study, it is hoped that the best practices conducted by the school can be revealed, thus becoming a model for other schools to adopt and implement Multiple Intelligences-based learning to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Material and Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which aims to explore and comprehensively understand the implementation of the Multiple Intelligences theory in learning design at Elementary School Cahaya Al-Fatih, Pandeglang Regency, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to dig deep into the data from the perspective of the research subject, as well as understand the social context and interactions that occur within it. Thus, the picture obtained is not only limited to quantitative data, but also a rich narrative about the processes, challenges, and results of the application of this theory in the field. Data collection techniques are carried out through three main ways to ensure the completeness and validity of the data. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and some students to gain first-hand views on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning. Participatory observation is carried out in the classroom and school environment to record directly the interaction between teachers and students, as well as the learning activities that take place. Finally, documentation is used to

collect data in the form of Learning Implementation Plans, student worksheets, teachers' diaries, and student project artifacts that are tangible evidence of the application of theory.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research results, four main criteria are used. First, the credibility test is carried out through triangulation of sources, namely by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. Second, the transferability test is carried out by providing a thick and detailed description of the research context, so that the findings can be applied or understood in other similar contexts. Third, the dependency test is applied to ensure that the research process is consistent and verifiable, while in the latter, the confirmability test is carried out to maintain the objectivity of the researcher and ensure that the findings are supported by original data, not subjective interpretations.

Results and Discussions

It's not new that intelligence is often seen as the primary measure of success. For a long time, various parties have been fixated on narrow definitions of intelligence, such as the ability to calculate, logic, and use language. We have built educational systems, the world of work, and even social standards that glorify logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligence, while other intelligences, such as the ability to understand oneself, interact with others, or even feel the rhythm of music, are often set aside, considered simply "talents" or "hobbies."

Intelligence, in a very critical view, is a biased social construct. Intelligence is not only a cognitive ability, but also a reflection of the values upheld by a society. The old paradigm labels someone "smart" if they excel in science or math, but is hesitant to give the same label to an artist who can create deep emotions through their work, or a leader who is able to bring different groups together.

This narrow view has created a gap. Thousands of children feel untalented because the way they learn does not match conventional methods. Students who have kinesthetic intelligence, for example, are considered "intolerable," instead of being seen as individuals who learn best through movement. As a result, they lose confidence, and their potential is limited. So, it is time for practitioners in the world of education to question what intelligence is. True intelligence may lie in the way we recognize and appreciate all forms of the human mind, not just the most dominant. The concept of MI emerged as a critical answer to the narrow view of intelligence. This theory rejects the idea that intelligence is a single entity that can be measured by a single standardized test, such as an IQ test. Humans have at least a variety of different types of intelligence and are autonomous.

Each individual has a unique combination of these intelligences, and the way they learn, think, and solve problems will be greatly influenced by these combinations. Intelligence is no longer about how smart a child is academically, but rather about how a child can interact with

the world around him. According to Hargetty, as cited in Karwadi [14], educational institutions must adhere to certain principles for developing intelligence. These principles include:

- considering all aspects of intellectual intelligence, rather than focusing on just one aspect;
- ensuring education is individualized;
- providing encouragement and motivation for students to achieve their goals;
- aligning development with adequate infrastructure;
- employing diverse evaluation methods; and
- recognizing that the classroom is one of the places for learning, but not the only one.

Based on these principles, schools must have guidelines that align with the characteristics and intelligence of their students. The application of Multiple Intelligences (MI) Theory or multiple intelligences at school is a systematic approach that aims to optimize the potential of each student as a whole, not only in academic intelligence. This process consists of several integrated stages, starting from planning to evaluation

A. Assessment and Introduction of Student Profiles

The planning stage begins with the assessment process and introduction of student profiles, which aims to enable teachers to understand the potential, interests, needs, learning styles, and backgrounds of each student. Through this stage, teachers get an overview of students' academic and non-academic conditions so that the learning strategies designed can be more targeted. In addition, assessment and introduction to student profiles also help in identifying learning barriers that may be faced, as well as determining the form of support or intervention needed.

This activity is carried out by the school by directly observing the behavior, interaction, and habits of students in the school environment, as well as through interviews with students, teachers, and parents to obtain more in-depth information. Table 1 presents the nine domains of Multiple Intelligences and their corresponding observable actions as indicators of students' dominant learning tendencies and behavioral expressions. Each intelligence is represented through specific activities that reflect how learners process information, solve problems, communicate, create, interact, and construct meaning. The table serves as a conceptual guide for identifying students' diverse potentials and provides a foundation for designing differentiated instruction, learning activities, and assessment strategies aligned with the principles of Multiple Intelligences-based education.

Teachers at elementary school realize that each child has their own specialties that cannot be assessed only from report cards or academic numbers alone. Therefore, the process of introducing students is carried out in more depth through various approaches. Teachers actively conduct daily observations in the classroom to observe students' behavior, interests,

and learning styles. When there are students who show linguistic intelligence with a tendency to ask a lot of questions and enjoy debate, while other students seem to stand out in spatial intelligence, who often daydream while drawing. There are also students with kinesthetic intelligence who are more active when involved in practical activities.

Table 1. Multiple Intelligences

Intelligence	Observable action
Verbal	Read, write, speak, tell, ask, explain, inform, convey, report, articulate, address, confer, request, recount, lecture, present, announce, narrate, debate, discuss, converse, recite, quote, describe, clarify.
Logical	Solve, resolve, question, hypothesize, theorize, scrutinize, investigate, experiment, analyze, deduce, prove, verify, decipher, determine, predict, estimate, measure, calculate, quantify, simplify.
Visual	Observe, symbolize, draw, sketch, draft, illustrate, paint, color, contour, outline, rearrange, design, redesign, invent, create, cover, originate, innovate, imagine, picture, envision, visualize, pretend.
Kinesthetic	Build, construct, erect, assemble, make, manufacture, structure, craft, imitate, play, perform, walk, run, jump, dance, collect, gather, compile, fashion, shape, duplicate, dissect, exercise, move, pretend.
Musical	Listen, hear, infer, audit, note, pattern, sing, clap, chant, model, repeat, replicate, report, express, represent, improvise, mimic, compose, narrate, drum, rap, orchestrate.
Intrapersonal	Express, imply, support, sponsor, promote, advise, advocate, encourage, champion, justify, rationalize, characterize, defend, validate, vindicate, assess, appraise, reevaluate, evaluate, propose, survey, poll.
Interpersonal	Share, lead, guide, direct, help, mediate, manage, conduct, collaborate, cooperate, influence, facilitate, interpret, persuade, campaign, convince, compromise, role-play, improvise, ad-lib, referee, reconcile.
Naturalist	Sort, organize, categorize, compare, contrast, differentiate, separate, classify, identify, distinguish, discover, observe, arrange, inventory, catalogue, group, index, use, employ, map, chart, graph.
Existential	Reflect, contemplate, deliberate, ponder, summarize, synthesize, associate, relate, recap, encapsulate, elaborate, appreciate, appraise, critique, evaluate, assess, speculate, explore, dream, wonder.

In addition to observation, teachers also use intelligence inventory instruments through questionnaires or simple checklists filled out by students and parents. This step is an additional picture of the potential tendency of children from the perspective of the family. It does not stop there; the school also facilitates initial project activities as a means of exploration. At the beginning of the school year, students are asked to do a variety of simple tasks such as sketching themselves, writing poems, or composing songs about their names. From this creative activity, teachers can see more clearly the tendency of intelligence that arises naturally.

All data from observation, inventory, and projects are then combined to compile an intelligence profile of each student. This profile is not only a formal record, but an important reference in designing a learning strategy that suits the needs and character of children. With this kind of approach, teachers do not only place students as recipients of knowledge, but also as individuals whose intelligence potential needs to be recognized, appreciated, and facilitated in order to develop optimally.

B. Curriculum Design and Lesson Plan Stages

After the student's profile is known in depth, the teacher then begins to design a Learning Implementation Plan that is able to accommodate a variety of intelligences. It is at this stage that the essence of the Multiple Intelligences theory is really applied. The lesson plan is no longer prepared with a conventional approach that tends to rely on only one method, such as lectures, but is designed to present a variety of activities that are in harmony with the various intelligences possessed by students. This shows a paradigm shift from uniform learning to more differentiated and inclusive learning.

For example, in the lesson on the Obligatory Nature of Allah (*Asmaul Husna*), the teacher mapped the material into the eight intelligences presented by Gardner. Students with linguistic intelligence are allowed to express their understanding through short stories or poems about the meaning of *Asmaul Husna*. For those who are more musical, learning is brought to life with *Asmaul Husna* songs sung with a pleasant rhythm. Meanwhile, students with spatial intelligence are given space to create concept maps or pictorial posters as visual representations of each God's name. No less important, students with kinesthetic intelligence can channel their energy through short dramas that illustrate the practice of God's attributes in daily life.

Interpersonal intelligence is also facilitated by group discussions that allow students to exchange views and construct mutual understanding. Instead, intrapersonal intelligence is trained through reflective activities, such as writing personal journals that contain reflections on how they can imitate the nature of God in their daily lives. All of these activities do not stand alone, but are intertwined in one learning unit that makes teachers aware that each child has a unique way to understand knowledge.

This kind of approach emphasizes that learning success is not only measured by cognitive achievement, but also by the extent to which students can find ways of learning that suit them. However, the challenge that arises is the consistency of teachers at SDIU Cahaya Al-Fatih in designing a balanced learning variety and the ability to manage a more dynamic classroom. This is where the importance of teachers' professional awareness lies, that the application of Multiple Intelligences is not just a variation of methods, but a commitment to appreciate the diversity of students' potential in real life in educational practice. This is in line with the findings of the study by Abushihab [15], which suggests that Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences can be viewed from a perspective that is linked to the school curriculum.

C. Stages of Active and Collaborative Learning Implementation

At this stage, the learning atmosphere in the classroom becomes much more dynamic because the teacher really facilitates various activities that have been designed in the multi-intelligence-based lesson plan. Classes at school are no longer centered on teachers, but

instead shift to students as the center of learning activities. This shift shows a significant paradigm shift in learning that is no longer one-way instructional, but rather collaborative, participatory, and provides room for students' creativity to flourish.

Fig. 1 illustrates the implementation of logical-mathematical learning activities designed to develop students' analytical reasoning, problem-solving skills, and numerical understanding within a Multiple Intelligences-based classroom. Through structured tasks such as pattern recognition, classification, counting, measurement, and problem-solving exercises, students are encouraged to apply logical thinking in meaningful learning contexts. The figure reflects how logical-mathematical intelligence is stimulated through active engagement, inquiry, and contextualized learning experiences that support deeper conceptual understanding.



Fig. 1. Logical-Mathematical Learning

The main method used is project-based learning. Through long-term projects, students are not only required to understand the material conceptually, but also to integrate the various intelligences they possess. For example, in the Muslim Creation Week project, students were invited to create a miniature Kaaba that trained spatial and kinesthetic intelligence, write historical papers that hone linguistic intelligence, and prepare interactive presentations that utilized logical-mathematical and interpersonal intelligence [15], [16]. This kind of project encourages students to work across fields of intelligence, so that they learn to see the connections between knowledge, skills, and self-expression [17].

In addition to projects, classes are also designed with the concept of learning centers that allow students to move from one area to another according to their interests and learning styles. For example, literacy centers that encourage students to read and write, art centers that provide space for drawing or visual work, and science centers that provide opportunities to experiment. This design not only creates a variety of activities, but also gives students autonomy in choosing the way they learn that works best for them [18].

However, such classroom dynamics demand high readiness and managerial skills from teachers. Managing a classroom with various activity centers and complex projects is certainly

more challenging than just delivering a lecture. Teachers need to be able to supervise, facilitate, and ensure that every student remains on a meaningful learning path. This is where the critical value of the success of this approach lies, not only measured by student creativity, but also by the capacity of teachers to maintain a balance between the freedom of learning and the achievement of structured learning goals [19].

D. Continuous Assessment and Evaluation Stage

Assessment at School is not seen as an activity that is only carried out at the end of the material, but as a continuous process and integrated with learning activities. The orientation of assessment is no longer just on the final result, but also on the process that students take in achieving understanding. Thus, evaluation is not only an instrument to measure achievement, but also a means to accompany the development of diverse intelligence.

Table 2 illustrates the alignment between multiple intelligences, corresponding learning methods, data collection techniques, and descriptive evidence identified in the study. The table demonstrates how each type of intelligence is developed through specific instructional strategies, such as storytelling, projects, demonstrations, experiments, and sociodrama, supported by evidence from interviews, observations, and documents. This mapping highlights the practical implementation of Multiple Intelligences theory in classroom instruction and provides a structured framework for understanding how diverse intelligences are fostered through differentiated learning approaches.

Table 2. Development of Intelligence in Learning Methods

No	Intelligence	Learning Methods	Data Collection	Descriptive Explanation
1.	Linguistics (Bahasa)	It can be done with activities, such as looking at writing, listening, and pronouncing it. For example, with the storytelling method.	Interviews, Observations	Evidence from teacher interviews and classroom observations on language-based learning activities.
2.	Logical-math	The right way to learn is through numbers, thinking, asking, trying, guessing, calculating, weighing, sorting, classifying, and constructing. For example, with the project method.	Observations, Documents	Observational data and teacher interviews describing visual and spatial learning activities.
3.	Visual Spatial	How to learn through colors, doodles, directions, shapes, and spaces. For example, with the project method.	Observations, Interviews	Observational data and teacher interviews describing visual and spatial learning activities.
4.	Musical	The way to learn is with tone, rhythm, and melody. For example, the demonstration method.	Interviews Observations,	Evidence from teacher interviews on how musical elements are integrated into lessons.
5.	From Kines	The learning method is given a space to move by facilitating the development of gross and fine	Observations, Documents	Classroom and field-trip observations documenting kinesthetic learning activities.

No	Intelligence	Learning Methods	Data Collection	Descriptive Explanation
		motor skills. For example, with the tourism method.		
6.	Interpersonal	The way to learn is by interacting with others. For example, with the sociodrama method.	Interviews Observations,	Interviews with teachers and observations of students engaging in group-based learning activities.
7.	Naturalis	The learning method can be done by the experimental method.	Documents, Observations,	Documented reports on science experiments and field observations in natural settings.
8.	Intrapersonal	The way to learn is through assignments, trust, and recognition. For example, with the method of assigning tasks.	Interviews Observations,	Teacher interviews and observations of students working independently or on individual tasks.

An alternative assessment framework emphasizes performance-based evaluation, portfolio development, project-based assessment, and self-reflection activities, which allow students to demonstrate competencies through their cognitive strengths rather than being limited by narrow linguistic and logical-mathematical measures [20], [21], [22]. Teachers provide formative assessments throughout the learning process, so students receive feedback that guides their progress, rather than merely marking answers as right or wrong. In this way, students can correct mistakes, recognize strengths, and develop more effective learning strategies [23]. Additionally, each student maintains a portfolio containing a collection of their work, ranging from drawings, writings, song recordings, to project documentation. This portfolio serves as tangible evidence of the students' learning journey and reflects the development of their intelligence, which cannot be captured solely by report card grades [21], [24].

Fig. 2 illustrates the role of teacher involvement in facilitating Multiple Intelligences-based learning through instructional guidance, classroom management, assessment, and reflective support. The figure highlights how teachers function not only as knowledge transmitters, but also as facilitators, motivators, and learning managers who support diverse student potentials through differentiated strategies. It also reflects the importance of teacher engagement in balancing student autonomy, meaningful learning experiences, and the achievement of structured educational objectives.

Furthermore, assessment is also directed at building reflective awareness through self-assessment. Students are invited to assess their own work as a form of strengthening intrapersonal intelligence, while peer assessment provides an opportunity for them to provide constructive feedback on the work of their peers, practicing interpersonal intelligence as well as social skills [25]. This kind of approach emphasizes that assessment is not only the domain

of the teacher, but also part of the student's learning process in knowing himself and respecting others.



Fig. 2. Teacher Involvement in Learning

However, this multi-layered evaluation system requires consistency and patience from teachers in documenting and interpreting student development data. Challenges arise when teachers must maintain objectivity amid the diversity of work products and the subjectivity of self-assessment and peer assessment [23], [25]. However, this kind of assessment model is more in line with the spirit of Multiple Intelligences-based education because it provides space for various forms of intelligence to be recognized, appreciated, and developed [22], [24].

Conclusion

The MI theory holds the view that intelligence is not a single entity that can be measured by standard tests, but consists of different types of intelligence that are unique to each individual. Its application at school shows a systematic approach ranging from student profile assessment, designing diverse curriculum and lesson plans, implementing project-based active learning, to continuous evaluation. This proves that education can shift from a focus on logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligence to recognition and appreciation of a variety of other intelligence potentials, such as musical, kinesthetic, and interpersonal. This implementation fosters an inclusive learning environment, motivates students who learn differently, and encourages creativity and collaboration.

Although the implementation of the MI theory at school deserves appreciation and can be used as a reference, there are several implications that need to be considered. The first implication is that the success of this implementation heavily depends on the competence and commitment of teachers in designing, managing, and evaluating various learning activities. Therefore, the recommendation is that continuous training is necessary for teachers to enhance their managerial skills and understanding of each type of intelligence. The second implication is the challenge of maintaining the objectivity of assessment amidst the diversity of student learning outcomes. The recommendation to address this is for the school to develop

clear and holistic assessment rubrics to ensure that every type of intelligence is fairly valued, not just those that are easily measurable. Finally, although MI theory encourages the recognition of all forms of intelligence, the last implication is that the school must ensure a balance between the development of students' dominant intelligences and the development of other potentially latent intelligences. Thus, the recommendation for educational practice is that education should not only optimize the existing potential but also help students become well-rounded, balanced individuals who are ready to face future challenges.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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