Editorial: Enhancing English Language Arts Education With Digital Video

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Although film is widely regarded as an important component of the English language arts, its importance and role in the teaching of English and in developing English language arts curricula has been debated for ages. The moving film image was first created around 1890 by scientific researchers such as William Dickson and Thomas Edison, who were primarily interested in using film to capture scenes of real moving images. Around the same time, the Lumière brothers of France developed a similar technology that allowed them to record street scenes and the routines of daily life (e.g., see their 1895 film of *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYpKZx090UE). Interest in this new medium, however, quickly shifted to using it to present narrative action (Sobchack & Sobchack, 1994).

The earliest narratives portrayed real world scenes, but by the turn of the 20th century, filmmakers were beginning to experiment with fictional narratives, which enjoyed tremendous popularity with the general public. In 1927, *The Jazz Singer* made history as the first film with sound. The addition of sound revolutionized the still fledgling medium, because it gave film the ability to convey a complete narrative. These moving pictures, or movies as they came to be called, only increased in popularity with the general public, thus leading to even greater film production. Therefore, filmmakers quickly became "expert at the art of telling stories both aurally and visually" (Sobchack & Sobchack, 1994, p. 182).

Almost immediately, scholars and teachers took note of motion pictures as a form of storytelling. The intense popularity of the movies demanded notice, and experts quickly recognized that, although film was a modern version of narrative, its roots could be traced to earlier narrative traditions (Costanzo, 1992). This understanding led to efforts to place film within the context of literature studies.

In 1932, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) officially recognized this new medium with the creation of its Committee of Photoplay Appreciation (Applebee, 1974). This committee made recommendations about film use in English classes and generated study guides for teachers. However, the attention to film was not well received by all, and there was criticism that teachers were not properly trained to teach film (Hatfield, 1935).

Yet film continued to have its advocates. Speaking at the 1947 NCTE convention, Frazier (1948) called for educators to seek a common ground between books and film and asserted that teachers could "combine films and books on a basis of equality" (p. 176).

While some experts readily accepted film as an important component of the English language arts, others were not willing to regard it as equal to traditional written texts. Frazier (1948) attributed this skepticism to film's "lowly origin, its humble associations" (p. 175). Written narratives remained the province of the learned; film required no prerequisite education and was accessible to all (Monaco, 2000). In other words, film was popular culture while literature was high culture or high art, a more scholarly and respectable endeavor. Therefore, one could not be equal to the other.

Such an attitude was not limited to the first half of the 20th century but can still be found today. In an article describing how film might be used in teaching fiction, Ostrander (2003) wrote that "a viewer of film has to do little work, other than stay awake to complete the cinematic image" (p. 35) and suggested that the easiness of films may be "why most people believe that the book is usually better" (p. 35).

Less discussed is the perception that film is a threat to the traditional order of the English class. In a guide to using film in the classroom, Miller (1979) asserted that "not enough has been said about teacher resistance to using film" (p. 96). She attributed much of this resistance to teachers' fears about film. She said that hesitancies resulting from the sense of not being competent in teaching film can be easily overcome with training (p. 96).

What Miller found more alarming are those teachers who avoid using film because they are unwilling to alter their control of content and consider alternate texts (p. 96). Other teachers are threatened by film's popularity and fear that movies will prove more popular than their instruction (p. 96). Perhaps this fear of being upstaged by films is partially responsible for teachers' choosing to reserve film for use as a reward or presentation as supplementary entertainment (Golden, 2007; Whipple, 1998).

Thus, film's established position in education has long been one of supplement—one of interest, but not the focus. Teachers have routinely used film in the classroom as a means of illuminating a written text; indeed, some guides to teaching film recommend it for this purpose (Sheridan, Owen, Macrorie, & Marcus, 1994).

The most common approach has been to view film adaptations of the same novel or short story (Teasley & Wilder, 1997). In fact, adaptation theory is a specific area of study within

film theory (Bluestone, 1957; McFarlane, 1996). However, within English language arts classes, analysis of adaptations typically focuses on fidelity to the text (Costanzo, 1992; Golden, 2007).

Not only do educators utilize film for the study of adaptation, many also see film as a useful medium for teaching the skills of literary analysis (Teasley & Wilder, 1997). Golden (2001) described film as a tool and explained his purpose as "using film to help students improve their reading and analytical skills" (p. xiii).

Ostrander (2003) also advocated using the visual elements of film to aid in the analysis of a written literary text. Although such an approach recognizes film as having a purpose, it still seems to relegate it to a lower position, and the implication is that film's worth is dependent upon its usefulness to print text. It fails to meet Frazier's call to regard film as equal to books.

A New Era for Film: The Rise of Digital Video

Recent movements in the field of the English language arts should herald a new era for film. In the past 2 decades the conception of literacy has shifted dramatically. Rather than conceiving of literacy only as the ability to read print-based texts, the field has shifted toward an appreciation of multiple forms of literacy and an acknowledgement that people employ "a variety of ways to mean (art, music, movement, etc.)" (Harste, 2003, p. 3). Simultaneously, rapidly developing new technologies are changing the ways through which students read and write, as well as affecting the ways in which text is conceived, created, manipulated, and understood. The result has been the emergence of the new literacies movement that takes into account the multimodal nature of communication and addresses the influence of information technology.

To become fully literate in today's world, students must become proficient in the new literacies inspired by 21st-century technologies, including the Internet and other forms of information and communication technologies. Together, these new and emerging digital technologies are redefining the ways we read, write, think, and learn. In turn, they must also inform the ways we teach.

In their *Standards for the English Language Arts,* NCTE and the International Reading Association (1996) reflected the influences of this movement, calling for instruction that includes visual literacy and emphasizes the importance of nonprint texts.

More recently, Kathleen Blake Yancey (2009), NCTE past president, in *Writing in the 21st Century: A Report from the National Council of Teachers of English*, called for a new era of writing instruction that focuses on students as composers of multimodal texts—products that combine text, images, audio, and video in innovative ways that build upon traditional notions of what we understand to be good writing. According to Yancey, meaning is "created through the interaction between visual and verbal resources," and "the role of audience and the social aspect of writing" have become central features of the new composing models of today (p. 4).

As Kajder and Young (in press) pointed out, "It is both a daunting and an exhilarating time to teach English." With an increased emphasis placed on a multiliteracies approach to the English language arts, English educators face the challenge of determining which textual forms to include in their instruction and prioritizing the attention that will be given to these various forms. Dalton and Proctor (2008) explained, "Text is not restricted to written prose; text can be primarily visual, such as an animated graphic, video clip,

photo slideshow, or image with little accompanying verbal information, and verbal information presented in an auditory rather than written format" (p. 301).

Traditionally, however, the curriculum has centered on print text. Relatively few forms of nonprint text have been included in standard classroom instruction, film being one of the few such forms to be incorporated into English language arts instruction. Indeed, such an inclusion seems logical since film is a delivery medium for drama, a major genre of literature. However, even as film has been included, it has been regarded as less important than print-based texts (Teasley & Wilder, 1997).

Although film may frequently be valued only as a minor text in the classroom, a great number of students are extremely skillful at making meaning through film and are, in effect, expert readers of this medium. For many of them, film is the primary method through which they process narrative. As small children, many of their earliest experiences with story came through Elmo from *Sesame Street* and *Dora the Explorer*. As these children grow, they progress from Nickelodeon and the Disney Channel to the CW television network (and others like it) and regular visits to multiplex theaters.

Through their iTunes account and free sites like Hulu.com, they can also access digital narratives for a small fee or for free. YouTube affords them additional opportunities to view digital narratives that may range in quality but are easily accessible. Filmed narratives remain a daily part of their lives. For our students, film literacy is a common practice, an everyday literacy, even if it is not as critical as we may prefer it to be.

A multiliteracies approach to the English language arts demands that credence be given to everyday literacies and all forms of making meaning. Because students have access to a multitude of communication tools, they draw from all of these forms of representation to construct meaning. In order for classroom instruction to be most productive, it must be open to all modes of communication (Kist, 2000). English teachers have long been challenged by how to make literature instruction most effective.

Frequently, they complain that their students have poor comprehension skills and are resistant to reading outside of class. Yet these same students are completely absorbed by the latest episode of *90210*. (A 1-hour drama broadcast on the CW television network, *90210* was nominated by teen audiences as a top television drama in the 2009 Teen Choice Awards.)   Although English teachers may argue that *90210* should not be considered literature, the fact remains that it is a narrative and a compelling one for today's youth at that. Young people are able to comprehend this medium, and they do so willingly.

Effective English language arts instruction must acknowledge and build upon these already developed reading skills. English educators must also question why students are so facile at reading film texts when they frequently struggle with print texts. Proponents of multiliteracies would suggest that students process film differently because the reading of film is a multimodal experience. The film experience is both visual and auditory and one that often includes music. Students draw upon these multiple modalities to make meaning of the text. As they do so, they hone their abilities to analyze and think critically about a text. Considering the skill with which they read film, it becomes necessary to reevaluate its importance in the English language arts curriculum.

Established Uses of Film in the English Language Arts

English language arts teachers have long had an established practice of using film adaptations of the literary works their students read. Teasley and Wilder (1997) defined this approach as a "'read-the-book-see-the-movie' pattern" (p. 6) and argued that such an approach "does a disservice to both film and literature by portraying literature as the difficult business in the classroom and film as a frivolous experience" (p. 7). They found that many teachers strongly believe that "literature is inherently superior to film" (p. 3).

Teasley and Wilder concluded that teachers frequently do not allow students to make independent judgments about the film but rather present the film as "an inherently inferior medium" (p. 4). This type of instruction denies students the opportunity to make critical assessments and instead trains them to identify how the film does not measure up to the original print text.

In *Reading in the Dark*, Golden (2001) also mentioned the approach of using film adaptations in English classes. Although he devoted relatively little discussion to this approach, Golden acknowledged that it is the most common use of film and described it simply as "an extension of the written text" (p. xiii).

In a more recent article, Golden (2007) described an attitude he saw as common among English teachers: "We want them to love the book first" (p. 24). Based on that belief, film has been incorporated in ways that focus "on how the film and the print text are different" (p. 24). Golden found that often this comparison of the two forms "is where students begin and end their analyses" (p. 24).

In pointing to the shortcomings of the comparison approach, Golden (2001) did not condemn it as futile. He instead advocated for extending this method of textual analysis. He cited adaptation theory to show that examining two versions of the same text can "promote active interaction between print and film" (p. 25). Golden argued that if teachers are willing to lead their students through a deeper comparison of film and print text, "there is a tremendous amount of accessible analytical work that students can do while working closely with both mediums" (p. 25).

Even in promoting a deep analysis of film, Golden (2007) seemed to give film a position of less importance than the written text. In his conclusion, Golden asserted, "I am not a film teacher: I'm an English teacher who happens to like movies" (p. 30). This statement carries the implication that being an English teacher does not inherently mean teaching film. He instead placed film in a supplementary role as a resource that can "help students do better at the subject [he] is teaching" (p. 30).

Such a position is not uncommon. Christel (2007) suggested that some teachers may see film's popularity as a threat to written text, but also said that it is "probably the medium that teachers are most comfortable integrating into a literature unit" (p. 53). Even William Kist (2000), a current advocate for new literacies, admitted that when he began his teaching career he used film "mainly to support and enrich a printed text" (p. 711).

Teasley and Wilder (1997) saw this philosophy as so prevalent that they cautioned against it. In fact, in their text *Reel Conversations: Reading Films With Young Adults* (1997), they encouraged teachers to use films as stand-alone texts. Costanzo (1992) supported such a position and said that "because they tell a story, feature films can be read as literature" (p. 8). Fehlman (1996) argued that "if 'literary' describes thoughtful textual response, then viewing can be as literary as reading" (p. 47).

Ultimately, digital video enters in the English language arts classroom not only as an extension of past conceptions and practices with film, but also as a form of new media and a tool for the type of multimodal composition that Yancey (2009) advocated. In the soon-to-be published edited collection that inspired this editorial, Bull and Bell (in press) presented a pedagogical framework that involves students in not only actively *watching* and critically *analyzing* digital video, but also creating dynamic digital video multimodal compositions. In order to facilitate students' being able to do this in school, English teacher preparation efforts must provide explicit and effective instruction and professional development opportunities for their English education candidates.

English Language Arts Teacher Education, Film, and Digital Video

Research is, at best, still emerging when considering the role of digital video in the English language arts classroom, as well as English education programs. Little has been written about preservice teachers and their perceptions of film in English language arts instruction, but we do know that learning is enhanced when students use multiliteracies to read and compose in new ways. Albers and Harste (2007) referenced a teacher education program that teaches preservice teachers how to create digital video in which they "learn about and create multimodal texts using IM, iMovie, blogs, wikis, and iPods to more fully explore the potential of media tools to communicate and to critically study how media can shape interpretation" (p. 19).

Trier (2006) is one of the few scholars who has written about research with preservice teachers and film. Trier acknowledged the shift to a multiple literacies approach and summarized research concerned with literacies that develop outside of the school setting (p. 510). He advocated using film "to engage preservice teachers in a process of reconceptualizing the traditional, autonomous views of literacy that they had upon entering the teacher education program and of acquiring a sociocultural view of multiliteracies" (p. 511). Trier used both written texts and film texts to guide his students through an exploration of the concepts of literacy.

Finding that his students entered his teacher education course with the "initial assumptions that literacy was essentially a matter of reading and writing print text" (Trier, 2006, p. 512), Trier provided the students with a theoretical framework for analyzing discourse and literary events. He then called on the students to apply this theoretical framework by analyzing what he termed *school films* or "films that are in some way, even incidentally, about an educator or a student" (p. 515).

Trier found that his students began to develop "a broad conceptualization of what constitutes a *text*...and of what constitutes *reading*" (p. 517). Concluding the discussion of his research, Trier asserted, "Though academic print texts were quite important, the film texts that we took up were equally important" (p. 520). Hence, Trier advocated for instruction that regards film as equal to written text. It is important to note, however, that while Trier discussed how instruction in film and discourse theory affected his students' understanding of literacy, he did not directly discuss their perceptions of film's place in instruction. He instead focused on his belief in film's importance.

Bousted and Ozturk (2004) explored the comparison of film adaptations and the original written text through a research study they conducted with preservice teachers in England. The authors based their research on the theory of "narrative as the key link between written text and visual media" (p. 53). In helping their preservice teachers to understand their own facility with film analysis, the researchers hoped to help them recognize "their prospective pupils as expert readers of moving-image texts" (p. 53).

Through their work with these preservice teachers, Bousted and Ozturk concluded that "viewing is never a passive process" (p. 55) and that film is a text that can be read for meaning. However, they did not directly address the preservice teachers' beliefs about how film should be situated within English language arts instruction. They broached the topic by quoting a student who described herself as open to including moving image and changing technology in her classroom, but the student did not reveal how she would include such literacies (p. 56).

Miller (2007) presented research exploring how digital video composing influences prospective teachers' use of multimodal literacy practices. Working with both preservice and in-service teachers, Miller has found that "the potential for digital video production as a multimodal literacy practice seemed to emerge most profoundly as teachers began to see it as a composing activity, similar to writing text, but often more engaging" (p. 70). She also found that the publication or screening of student-created digital video created a "social opportunity to 'read' digital video texts as a class" (p. 73). By taking the students all the way through the process of digital composing and publishing, Miller helped them develop a more thorough understanding of literacy and how the medium can serve to enhance learning.

The Affordances Digital Video Offers English Education

As we progress further into the 21st century, digital video continues to become an established thread in the tapestry that comprises English education and the English language arts classroom. Rather than thinking of this tapestry as a finished product, however, we more appropriately see it as an active and dynamic quilt that is continually being crafted, shaped, added to, and redesigned in compelling ways—a living, digital story in progress, if you will.

Advances in technology in the 1980s and 90s led to the proliferation of videotapes and players which made distributing, showing, and reproducing tapes much cheaper and more efficient. By 2000, most teachers had television and video accessible for classroom instruction, and the continued development of digital formats, and small, digital video cameras have made recording accessible and efficient for professional, educational, and personal (e.g., home) contexts. In addition, the continued trend of bundled digital video editors and software on Mac and PC computers over the past decade have created the terms for the typical user not only to film digital video, but also to self-edit, self-produce, and self-publish.

As Yancey (2009) pointed out, the typical user does not do this in isolation, but with and for a captive, collaborative, and potentially global audience online in informal digitally networked contexts. Video sharing sites like YouTube host user-generated digital videos from around the world, allowing users to post, browse, and comment on digital content as members of a global community. Teachers can create and post their own instructional videos via TeacherTube.com, and schools can also subscribe to commercial video streaming resources like the Discovery streaming or SAS's Curriculum Pathways.

Some colleges of education even have their own video servers (e.g., North Carolina State's CED Video server, https://cedvideo.ncsu.edu/index.php). Additional technologies that interface with digital video, free applications like Skype and Ning, create opportunities for video conferencing and video blogging for anyone with a webcam.

As a result of these developments, digital video is steadily becoming the dominant media in which our student demographic engages—definitely out of school, but more and more

in school and in English education as well. Digital technologies provide an opportunity to reimagine, revision, and rethink our pedagogical approaches and the curriculum itself. As Young and Kajder (2009) explained, digital video has the potential to further enhance meaning through not only the juxtaposition of text and pictures, but also by adding "motion, design, and interactivity...to the mix" (p. 38).

In *The Digital Writing Workshop*, Troy Hicks (2009) reconceptualized one of our field's most trusted and honored best practices for the 21st century and beyond, emphasizing the power of multimodal composition and digital storytelling. Similarly, in *Adolescents and Digital Literacies*, Sara Kajder (2010) emphasized the importance of learning alongside of our students. Whether the context be a K-12 classroom or an English education program, the premise holds true. Ultimately, there is a growing need to see the 21st-century classroom as one in need of *a new learning ecology* (Barron, 2006; Brown, 1999; Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Spires, Wiebe, Young, Hollenbrands, & Lee 2009).

In Kajder and Young (in press) for the forthcoming book on *Teaching with Digital Video*, a strong effort was made to identify classroom examples that might shed light on the many possibilities digital video affords the English language arts classroom that extended beyond traditional uses of film from the past. Limiting the number of those examples proved difficult, as the possibilities seemed endless. The framework presented in the book—*watching, analyzing*, and *creating* digital video—is designed to be direct, practical, and intuitive. It can encompass a wide variety of the many educational opportunities afforded by digital video, and the examples provided for each of the three components of the framework in the chapter may serve to inspire, guide, and provide connections for English language arts teachers as they plan and prepare for teaching with digital video.

To further explore the merits of digital video specifically for English teacher preparation, we have drawn inspiration from our colleagues in social studies education (see Hammond and Lee in this issue) and initiated a discussion with English education colleagues and researchers focused on current practices with and aspirations for digital video in their methods courses that we hope to continue and expand upon in the near future.

While ongoing, our conversations thus far have revealed that English educators are using digital video in a variety of ways, including the following applications: microteaching sessions of preservice candidates used for critical reflection, music videos inspired by young adult literature titles, videos of poetry collaborations between preservice teachers and middle school students, digital stories that range in focus and topic, digital book trailers, digital video sound bites, commercial narrative remixes, and public service announcements. In addition to modeling some of these applications for their students, English educators are also creating videos themselves for narrative composing and instructional purposes, including screencasts. They also report posting and streaming their own and their students' videos from a variety of sites ranging from private social networks to university video server sites to YouTube.

Similarly, they identify showing clips from Discovery streaming, the Annenberg Media site (learner.org), YouTube, and other resources when appropriate or applicable. Most of the colleagues we have heard from thus far report wanting to be able to do more with digital video production themselves and to integrate it into their curriculum more as well. They identify time and programs packed with requirements as challenges to overcome with regard to integration, and they see a need to make composing and editing a more efficient part of the process.

In addition to conversing with English educators, we have also heard from some of the teachers with whom they partner in the field. One of the key characteristics of digital video that English educators and English teachers report on together is that integrating digital video into learning activities builds upon the representational power of replay, review, and reflection. Learning fundamentally involves the naming of experience and the negotiation of those names among those who share in the experience. Being able to record a stream of experience then replay it for review and reflection over and over again, provides a shared space for student teachers to negotiate teaching practices. English education students comment on the value of studying themselves as teachers through digital video, as well as the intensive examination of student literacy activity in their English classrooms.

> We recently made an iMovie based on my students analyzing literature in small groups. Using digital video was a very effective way to show the development of students' understanding throughout the process of this project. It is encouraging to see this growth from start to finish and digital video helped us to literally see it and analyze it as a finished project. (Catherine Campbell, student teacher, 2010)

This potential of digital video authoring to support the construction of knowledge about pedagogy and student development extends to the exploration of content ideas in the English classroom, especially in relation to literature.

> Theme, at least in the way that I understand it, is a kind of essential life question that runs through a text. Asking students to explore and express their own understandings of how a theme is presented in a given text in the students' own writing restricts their representations to those that their writing is able to express. Handing them the technology to present those ideas in video frequently allows them to demonstrate those ideas more easily and more fully. (Kevin Hulburt, English Mentor Teacher, 2010)

This power to bring together in digital space and time multiple images and sounds and text provides students with new tools to create and design connections between the everyday texts of their multimedia lives. The connective power of digital video pushes students' thinking about the ideas in any one text further by its examination in another text of a different media. Students' use of media from their everyday lives pushes the ideas out of the covers of the old dusty English classroom books to take their rightful place in the ages of human experience.

> Many English teachers believe that students might struggle with writing because they are more oriented to thinking in visual ways. They often claim that students' minds lock down when faced with the blank page and they can't construct their best creative and critical ideas. This tension between the necessity of writing for future success in society and the historical perception of film or digital video authoring as not academic enough to replace the literary essay as an analytic tool is being revised by the new generation of English teachers being prepared. English education students and their mentors who have used digital video with students have discovered that "students can be creative and intentional in a similar way that they are when writing, but for some of them, the visual nature of this medium comes more naturally" (Rebecca Thorsen, English Mentor teacher, 2010). As such, "Video [then] serves as a great opportunity for visual learners to experience material in a manner that serves their learning style" (Michelle Wrambel, student teacher, 2010).

Young, Hicks, and Kajder (2008) called for English educators to "create and enact a more intentional and sustained research agenda addressing new and emerging technologies and their effects on student literacy and learning" (p. 81). As our research continues to unfold, we see digital video as one of the more compelling technologies for the times and for our field, and as such, it deserves focused attention both in terms of research and practice. The fuller integration of digital video authoring in English education methods will enhance the construction of reflective knowledge on our cultural representational and communication practices, both print and multimodal, thus supporting the growth of far greater pedagogical knowledge for English education students than in the days of paper journals and supervisor feedback sessions alone.

As a step toward focused attention, the three articles in this special issue on digital video are especially important in offering research on the uses of digital authoring in English classrooms and in the preparation of the next generation of English teachers. The contribution by Hughes and Robertson explores how English education students extend their own experiences authoring video autobiographies into curricular projects for their own secondary English students. Through their projects they construct theoretical knowledge of multiliteracies as they become digital storytellers of their own identities, and they construct technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK) about how to integrate such digital video technology in their future classrooms. The future teachers revised their perceptions of what it means to be literate in a digital age, and became critical designers of media representations within their culture and in their own video production.

In their article, Butler, Leahy, and McCormack describe an online book review site for students from six Irish primary schools through which students developed narrative skills in creating entertaining and informative summaries of books for the actual audience of other peer readers. Critical viewing organized in the classroom by the teachers had a direct impact on the quality of subsequent book reviews as students became more passionate and coherent in their presentations, and the website generated motivation in students to read more books. Their article provides various technological pedagogical strategies to enable teachers to engage in the production and sharing of video book reviews.

In the third article, Figg, McCartney, and Gonsoulin describe how students' digital biographies of family members improves their narrative writing skills, motivation, and a sense of identity with respect to future life directions. The English education students who guided the middle school student authors also learned new strategies of instruction focused on facilitating student authoring in multimodal literacies rather than direct instruction of narrative print skills. They learned how students increase their motivation and thinking when they can connect school projects with their families and life-relevant cultures, activities, and histories. The family members who participated in the digital histories gained new appreciation for the creative and critical thinking abilities of the middle school students through the entire process of digital authoring with the students.

Together, these three articles illuminate the value of digital video for English teacher education and secondary English classrooms. They highlight the important role digital literacies play in enabling all to more fully construct potential identities and communities by wielding multimodal representations. These are important considerations as we enter a new age, not just for composing (Yancey, 2009) but for English education in general, one in which we must continue to grapple with the challenges and affordances of new literacies, multimodal representations, and digital technologies.

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