DESIGNING STRATEGIES FOR
A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

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Introduction

Congregation of many languages in one classroom is a common scenario in Indian classrooms in different rural and urban areas. In many instances, one classroom comprises languages that have different structures, patterns and vocabulary. "Multilingualism" is a social situation where groups or communities communicate in more than one language with varying proficiency. This is called "societal multilingualism". When individuals have the ability to use two languages, separately or mixed, with varying degrees of competence, it is called "individual multilingualism" (Maher, 2017: 3). As Edwards pointed out, multilingualism is the necessity of the majority in the world today (Edwards, 2002: 1). Monolingualism is an idea related to one powerful language for wider communication.

The heterogeneity of the classroom is often considered as a hindrance for conducting everyday teaching-learning practices. As a result, the potential for using multiple languages/using multilingualism as a resource for classrooms is not explored by the teachers concerned and teacher educators. The position paper for teaching Indian languages, National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005), suggested that every child in India should receive early education in their mother tongue. It has been mentioned in the NCF 2005 position paper that 'the new teacher training programmes will sensitize the teachers to the nature, structure and functions of language, language acquisition and language change and equip her with strategies that can help her to build on the resources of a multilingual classroom' (NCF, 2005: 27).

Ideally, children with varied linguistic backgrounds can avail of the facility of learning in mother tongue if multilingual pedagogy is adopted. In order to ensure meaningful participation of all students in the classroom, there is a strong need to understand the nature of multilinguality that is rooted in almost all Indian classrooms.

Where existence of many languages creates a conflict in classrooms, multilingual learning space can enable students to use their own language to negotiate while communicating. Multilinguality has been viewed as a potential site for negotiating conflict (Agnihotri, 2014).

India is not only a multilingual country; it has intense language contact situations in different areas. Languages with different origin and structure are often located in the same space where languages share common features as a result of contact. There is 'diffusion of grammatical process over contiguous areas' (Emeneau, 1956:3). For example, in the north-eastern part of India, different Tibeto Burman languages often exist with Austric languages like Santali, Khasi, Mundari and Indo-Aryan languages like Assamese. Co-occurrence of different languages in the same space gives rise to different types and degrees of bilingualism and multilingualism, language shift and language mixture of different degrees. Children with different types of bilingualism/multilingualism (simultaneous or sequential)[1] are often present in the same classroom. Children often shift their languages as a result and mix their codes at the word, phrasal or sentential levels.

The paper aims at:

(a) understanding the nature of children's talk in terms of multilinguality;
(b) discussing some problems of multilingual classrooms as commonly viewed by teachers;
(c) understanding situations where language conflicts are common in classroom; and
(d) suggesting some planning strategies for multilingual classrooms where there are language conflicts due to the presence of many languages in a single classroom.

The paper tries to explore the nature of multilingualism present in rural school children's speech in India, with special reference to the situation in West Bengal, and to find out the gap between the idea of a multilingual classroom as proposed in pedagogic policy documents and the actual multilingual classroom situations.

Towards a Multilingual Pedagogy

Understanding Multilingual Pedagogy

Use of old instructivist approaches are often not encouraged along with the recent developments in the educational scenario in India.

Elementary level education is presently viewed as a reflective and collaborative process where the teacher is also empowered. The overall learning experience has become learner-centric, while previously the predominant system was teacher-centric. In the era of various new teaching-learning objectives, multilingual education has been adopted as an approach to combat social injustice in the classroom, as the use of homogeneous language and culture always marginalizes the child in multilingual-multicultural classrooms.

There is a need to understand the types and nature of multilingual pedagogies. As Garcia and Flores mentioned, 'multilingual pedagogies have started to acknowledge the hybrid language practices of bilingual people and their role in the development of more competent users of academic practices in different standards.' (Garcia & Flores, 2010: 232) Multilingual pedagogies are designed keeping a number of factors in mind, for example, language use, orientation, etc. Multilingual pedagogies can be of different types. These can be additive and linear (L1+L2= L1+L2)[2] where two languages are used together or subtractive or linear (L1+L2-L1= L2), where two languages are used initially followed by the use of one language. These designed multilingual or bilingual pedagogies can be used for transitional bi/multilingual education for immigrant children. Multilingual pedagogies can also be used in immersion revitaliza-tion programmes. In transitional bi/multilingual programmes, children's home language is used along with the formal school language initially. At a later level, only the school language is used in classrooms where the transition is marked by the bi/multilingual classrooms. Language revitalization programmes aim at revitalizing the languages in danger. In immersion programmes, the target language is used along with a different language that is known by the learners.

Multilingual pedagogies were initially linear, later they became dynamic. Instead of conceptualizing L1 and L2 as two different sets in a linear way, dynamic pedagogy conceptualized L1 and L2 as complex and interrelated. So, in dynamic multilingual pedagogy languages are not carefully controlled so that the children can negotiate their language use among themselves through interaction (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011). It can be understood that a multilingual classroom does not merely use pedagogies where children with different mother tongues are present in a common space. Rather, it deals with multilinguality in every individual child's linguistic behaviour. In a typically multilingual classroom, various tasks are conducted using different languages used by the children. For example, words from different languages can be written on a blackboard with different

coloured pens. Children can be allowed to use those words while constructing some sentences, either by speaking them or writing them.

Designing and implementing multilingual pedagogy in multi-lingual provinces is not an easy task. Various challenges have been addressed for implementing the idea of multilingual education in terms of administrative tasks, teacher training, and bringing changes in the existing curriculum and developing materials in different languages.

Multilingual Education Policy in India with Special
Reference to West Bengal

In the Indian scenario, multilingualism has been adopted as a major approach in several schools in certain multilingual states, e.g. Chattisgarh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, where a huge number of students are from different indigenous communities. Multilingual education was started in Odisha by using ten languages in 754 schools initially. Plans have also been made where children shift from mother tongue to the regional standard through a transitional phase. The system has been implemented in around 1000 schools in the year 2014-15 and nine more languages were introduced in the multilingual education programme. Textbooks, supplementary materials and other resources were also prepared for implementing the multilingual teaching-learning experience. Initially, all the content areas in school (e.g. mathematics, social science etc.) use the mother tongue of the children. Gradually, the L2 or second language and L3 or third language are introduced to the children. After the 5th standard, the different curricular areas start using the regional standard.

Multilingualism has not been adopted as a policy in West Bengal yet, while the province has a high degree of rural as well as urban multilingualism. Due to language contact and convergence, children use three to four languages in their day-to-day life in a number of districts of West Bengal. For example, children from Purulia, Bankura and Midnapore districts use multilingual codes with mixture of eastern Hindi (Magahi, Angika etc.), Bangla and other languages like Santali, Koda, Mundari, etc. Districts of northern Bengal have borders with Assam, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Children from Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Cooch Behar use Nepali, Bangla, Sadri (a link language)[3] and their mother tongue (often a Tibeto Burman language like Rabha, Garo, Boro etc.). Though

the state has multilinguality as a common phenomenon, neither the curriculum nor teacher training policies concerning language address questions related to use of multilinguality in classrooms.

The document 'Teachers' Training in West Bengal', published by the West Bengal District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1999, is an important document in this regard. The document mentioned that teachers in a multilingual state like West Bengal need to decide the language of the classroom, i.e. the language in which the interaction will take place primarily. Bangla (the regional standard) is generally considered as the sole language that is to be used in the classroom. The document pointed out the issue of reconsidering the language of interaction for the classroom. There was a scope of allowing a multilingual interaction following the document, but unfortunately it was not considered. Multilingual pedagogy has not been implemented in West Bengal yet, but a recent scheme called Early Grade Reading and Numeracy (EGRaN) by The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan suggested the use of multilingual pedagogies to some extent.[4]

Considering the huge number of bilingual/multilingual children of the province, teachers can be encouraged to use multilingual pedagogy if needed. Teachers can be allowed to create low-cost user-friendly multilingual Teaching Learning Material and preserve the materials in a common resource centre for future use (Piplai, 2016: 43).

Multilingual Children: Different Dimensions

Nature and Types of Multilingual Children

Bi/multilingualism has different sources. Paradis mentioned that there are both internal and external sources (Paradis, 2013: 69). Internal sources of multilingualism for a child depend on the following factors:

    a. Typology of the first language: typological features of L1 are important for overall language acquisition and use. L2/L3 can be typologically different from L1. For example, native speakers of many Austric languages (e.g. Santali, Mundari, Ho) acquire Indo-Aryan language/languages as L2. Thus, the features of their native language and the second language differ widely.

    b. Language transfer: Transfer from first language (or L1) to the second language (or L2) is an important factor for

multilingual children. Negative transfer of the L2 often results in developmental errors in L1. On the other hand, positive transfer boosts the use of L2. There is a need to understand the language transfer issues of children who get input in a different language in formal classrooms.

c. Patterns of acquisition: The sequence of acquiring L1, L2, L3, etc. affects the multilinguality of a child.

Some of the external factors that contribute to the multilinguality of the child include the following:

a. Richness of environment related to the languages: The context of the child may have resources that are helpful for the acquisition of L2, L3, etc. If a child lives in an environment where there is frequent interaction with members of other speech communities, the child can use codes of different speech communities alternately. The child can mix codes as well.

b. Socio-economic status of the family: Language use of the family members may or may not include input in L2, if the family members are not exposed to the regional standard language or other languages of the neighbourhood. Educational level of the child's mother is also important regarding the L2 input. If the mother is exposed to a certain level of education, the primary language data from the mother in L2 helps the child to develop mastery in the L2. If the family is exposed to L2 through newspapers, television and exposure to education, it is possible for the child to listen to or read materials in L2. Mobility of the family members is also related to their socio-economic status. If a rural family has members who go to cities/towns everyday for work, the child gets exposure to the languages of city/town.

c. Size and type of family: Bigger families have more members. Different members have different mobility patterns and exposure to languages. In bigger families, different women are of different provenance; they come from different villages/cities. Therefore, children get access to different languages and codes.

d. Birth order of the child: In rural areas, younger children have access to regional standard/school languages through the older siblings. School is a major source of acquiring a new set of codes/a new language. School bi/multilingualism helps older children to use the newly acquired languages with younger children at home domain.

e. Cultural identity: Oral narratives of a community are passed through the older members. Folk tales, riddles, songs in traditional languages contribute to the multilinguality of children. A child may or may not be fluent in the family language, but the family language is viewed as the vehicle to preserve cultural identity.

The reflection of multilingualism is different in children for a number of reasons. Children get access to different languages if the family members speak those languages. At times, different family members come from different communities as well as different linguistic backgrounds. For example, a child may have Rabha-speaking mother and Boro-speaking father in the northern part of Bengal. The child is likely to receive primary linguistic data from both the languages throughout the acquisition period. In some instances, members of a family regularly visit a linguistically-culturally different place for livelihood. As a result, those members get access to different languages. Thus, the child gets access to the different languages at home through them. In this way, the rate of multilingualism differs in different children depending on the linguistic exposure of his/her family members. It has already been mentioned that schools play a major role regarding access to multilingual codes. Negative context factors contribute to the linguistic behaviour of subtractive bi/multilinguals. Exposure to a new language in school may contribute to additive bi/multilingualism.

Multilingualism and Children's Talk

The multilinguality embedded in children's everyday language use can be understood from a close analysis of domain-specific language use. Ethnographic accounts of children's talk at home domain or playground reveal different patterns of multilinguality. Hymes gave an analysis based on ethnography of communication of the African American children (Hymes, 1996). The analysis showed that the speech and narrative structures of the African-American children were often different from the other children of the classroom. It has been observed that the structural difference of the African American Vernacular English with the Standard English used for classroom often lead to poor performance of the children in class. It has been found that children negotiate their perception of differential values placed by educators on dominant and non-dominant cultural capital. Ethnographic accounts of the children's language use can also reflect this negotiation process. Children use different multilingual

codes to negotiate while talking with each other. Children naturally tap linguistic resources, using rules and vocabulary from both the languages. Children use code switching intentionally for specific situations, listeners and topics. Children may switch language to demonstrate social identity, convey specific meanings or emphasize a point.

Alternative use of different set of codes from different languages is common for multilingual children. As mentioned above, children utilize vocabularies and rules of different languages and switch different codes often. Thus, the speech used for everyday talk is linguistically rich. Inability to visualize the richness of speech and its potential use to facilitate classrooms often creates tensions in terms of formulating strategies for classroom. In this situation, it becomes difficult to choose the language of interaction, instruction and various tasks for classroom.

Silencing of 'Powerless' Languages

Apart from the basic understanding of multilinguality in children's language, it is also important to talk about the notion of Critical Language Awareness (CLA) at this point. CLA is a major part of language education systems that educators and teachers need to understand. As Fairclough mentioned, CLA is about "how language conventions and language practices are invested with power relations and ideological process which people are unaware of" (Fairclough, 1992: 205). When the heterogeneity of a multilingual classroom is ignored and homogeneous language and culture are imposed, factors related to Critical Language Awareness become necessary to understand. In many instances, a multilingual classroom comprises children who speak the so-called 'powerless' languages.

In the state of West Bengal, districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Cooch Behar, north and south Dinajpur in the north; and districts of Bankura, east and west Midnapore, Purulia have a high concentration of different minority languages including indigenous languages. The languages include Rabha, Tamang, Bhutia, Mahali, Kora, Lodha, Bhumij, etc. There is a strong need to understand the relevance of critical language awareness in terms of the multilingual classrooms comprising a number of minority languages, as there is always a possibility of silencing the minority children who speak the so-called 'powerless' languages. This silencing is a common scenario in many schools of West Bengal (specifically in the districts mentioned above) where children from different linguistic backgrounds study

together in a class. The teachers, in many cases, are not aware of the linguistic backgrounds of their students. Thus, teachers interact with the students in either the regional standard (Bangla, in case of West Bengal) or widely used regional languages (e.g. Hindi, Nepali, Santali etc.). Teachers in these areas mostly use the regional standard as the instructional language.

Potential Problems and Possible Solutions

The regular planning for classroom, keeping in mind the choice of the language of interaction, instruction and the language of regular tasks (monolingual vs. multilingual designed tasks) can help to maintain the pace of multilingual children.

If there is an initiative from the lesson planner (teachers mostly) regarding a basic evaluation of the multilingual nature of the children, it can be helpful for the overall teaching-learning experience. The evaluation can be done through creation of a basic note on the language use of the children. Teachers can be allowed to note down the language use of the children in different domains, e.g. home, playground, market, and so on by listing basic words and sentences used by them. *Prathamik Shiksha Karyakram* or Prashika (1999) mentioned such an intervention method for understanding children's linguistic background.[5]

Various teacher training initiatives for pre-service and in-service teachers discuss the language teaching strategies regularly or irregularly. The suggestion of keeping a note on the children's domain specific linguistic behaviour can be a part of these teacher training initiatives. The relevant notes on the children's linguistic behaviour can be used as a platform for designing tasks for classroom. In fact, it is possible to design tasks based on the texts/materials in languages that the children speak.

Difficulties in multilingual classrooms arise mostly because of the lack of understanding regarding the potential multilinguality in the children's language, nature of multilingualism and the patterns of acquisition of multilingual codes. The teacher educators and teachers may not be familiar with this potential multilinguality in children and/or the possibilities of using multilingual pedagogy in classroom. The common assumption is that: every child needs to learn and acquire fluency in the target language or the textbook language for the classroom. Multilingual pedagogy proposes an alternative idea. The idea is to create a multilingual classroom where children can experience learning in different languages. In a typically

multilingual classroom children can use their familiar and known language(s) in the initial years of schooling and then start shifting to the school language. Balanced exposure to the different languages in classroom can help the children to maintain the pace with other children. It can be argued that simple and basic understanding of the multilinguality in the children's everyday language use and background of acquisition can be helpful for the planning part of the classroom. Planning of language lessons include planning for the first language classroom as well as classes for other content areas, as language is also the medium of instruction and explanation in other content areas like maths and science.

Assignment of school language in the schools of dense multilingual areas does not follow specific rules in terms of local language use. As a result, at times children are assigned to read completely different and out-of-context languages in school textbooks. For example, in Nepali-speaking schools, Bangla is often assigned as the school language. In a school comprising mostly Hindi speaking students, Nepali or Bangla can be found as the assigned school language. A class full of children from different minority linguistic groups are often given school texts in only one language. In these cases, classrooms promote homogeneous languages where there is heterogeneity of language use. Use of homogeneous languages in multilingual classrooms leads to problems related to incomprehension in children.

There is a common notion among teachers and educators that use of more than one language is harmful for children's learning process. As Cummins mentioned, 'Bilingualism has positive effects on children's linguistic and educational development. When children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. They have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality' (Cummins, 2001: 17).

It is often argued that it is practically not possible to use multilingual teaching methods and aids in classroom as the planning part is complex. It can be argued that the planning part of a multilingual classroom often becomes complex as there is lack of understanding regarding the nature of child's linguistic background. As Garcia and Flores mentioned, '…education must include, in some ways, the language practices of children. Although it is easy to understand how monolingual education is simply not enough to fulfil this criteria, it is more difficult to envision how to build on the language practices of all students, and teachers and children with different characteristics

work together in various geographical and socio-educational spaces' (Garcia & Flores, 2012: 232).

One way of doing this is the following: The textbook language shows a mismatch with the children's home language in many cases. Mostly, children with different minority languages are given textbooks in regional standard or some other prominent regional language. The textbook language creates a conflict with the home language of the children. The conflict can be controlled by using neutral texts like pictures, picture cards and picture books where the child himself/herself can construct texts by using his/her set of codes. For example, the picture from the first standard textbook *Amar Boi* (My Book) of the West Bengal Board of Primary Education (Pic. 1) affords the possibility of constructing text in any language or create multilingual texts for classroom use. But the potential use of pictures to construct multilingual texts for classroom use is not clear from any educational policy documents of the state.

There could be another way of building a multilingual pedagogy. It has been mentioned that earlier multilingual pedagogies were viewed as use of more than one language in a classroom. But presently, multilingual pedagogies use hybrid languages and techniques. In order to use hybrid techniques we can use dynamic multilingual heteroglossic instructions and texts in classroom. The creation of reading material for multilingual classrooms can be done by marking the conflict points between the languages. Conflict points or difference points between languages can be explained through the understanding of basic structures of the languages. In other words, the conflict areas can be found by analyzing the languages morphosyntactically. The following section will discuss in detail how marking language conflicts can be helpful in planning a multilingual pedagogy.

Marking Language Conflicts in Classroom can be Helpful to Plan a Multilingual Classroom

Children in multilingual classrooms have different home languages. These languages may structurally differ in various ways from the school language. Structural differences in phonological, morphological/morphosyntactic levels between different languages (home language and school language) are indicators of language conflict. Listing these conflict points between home and school languages brings out various problem areas in the classroom. The conflict points can be helpful in understanding the nature of difficulties in multilingual classrooms.

Pic. 1: A page from *Amar Boi*, textbook for standards 1st and 2nd, West Bengal

Ideally, finding the conflict points from the children's language use and the description of the school language can be done by following certain steps. The overall understanding of the conflict points can be used to design strategies for multilingual classrooms. Basic conflict points between languages can be listed from the narratives of the children, evident from the understanding from ethnographic account of children's speech[6]. It is possible to get some idea regarding the pattern of the children's talk through some designed tests as well. It includes:

- Record of spontaneous story telling by children where children freely use their preferred patterns of speech.
- Free writing samples of children collected: classroom task, home work or other task.

Collected narratives can be used to understand the types and patterns of conflict. Conflicts between languages may occur in terms of:

- Use of classifiers where either of the languages has classifier and the other language does not have it (e.g. Hindi *ek larka* 'one boy' vs. Bangla *ek-ta chele* 'one boy').
- Difference in agreement patterns also exhibit major conflict between languages. Agreement between subject and verb is reflected in terms of person, number and gender. Children's home language(s) and school language may have different patterns of subject-verb agreement. For example, one language may agree only in terms of person and the other language may agree in terms of both person and number. Also, one language may reflect change in verbal forms in terms of gender and the other may not have gender agreement.
- The nature of the subject of a sentence may have different semantic role and syntactic structure. For example, one language may have a subject with syntactically marked agentive role. The other language may not be marked with agentive role and have a different form. For example, Hindi has subjects with or without agentive roles (and ergative case markers in subject), but eastern Hindi languages like Maithili or other eastern Indo-Aryan languages like Bangla do not have agentivity marked on subject explicitly.
- Negative particles have different positions in a sentence in different languages. Negation can be either pre-verbal or post-verbal. If home language and school language have different positions of the negative particles, there is an evident conflict. For example, neg-X(verb) vs. X(verb)-neg in Bangla and Rajbanshi.
- There are different types of discourse particles in different languages. The home language may not have certain frequently used discourse particle in the school language or the regional standard. This may create a conflict.
- If a language has complex or compound verbs, the light verb may use a different form in the two languages to mean the same form. For example, *kha liya* (literally: eat taken) or 'eaten' in Hindi can be expressed as *kheye phello* (literally: eat thrown) in Bangla.

Marking different conflict areas based on the structures of different words and sentences (and sounds) have huge potential for developing teaching-learning materials for multilingual classrooms. Beginning the early years of teaching by using the mother tongues of children and gradual shift to the regional standard or school language has been suggested by the Odisha model of multilingual

classroom. For this gradual shift from mother tongue to regional standard, designing of the curriculum in different levels needs to be planned keeping in mind certain issues.

- Different languages present in a single classroom may have different structures and different types of conflict points with reference to the school language.
- After listing the conflict points of different languages, there is need to make a common conflict listing of all the languages in a classroom.
- After creating the common conflict point list, there is need to create teaching plans keeping in mind the conflict points.
- The conflict points can be used to develop tasks for classroom use. For example, conflict points can be used for tasks like fill up the blanks, match the following etc. where different linguistic items of similar type can be put together. The child can be allowed to use any of the listed forms.
- Conflict points can be kept in mind to create multilingual texts where, for example, nouns or pronouns in one language can be used with verbs of another language for explaining the basic structures of languages.

Teachers can keep in mind that the discourses of their students can be different discourses of the prescribed text languages. In practice, the varied discourses can help teachers to develop different kinds of tasks and activities for multilingual classroom.[6]

Concluding Remarks

Kumar has mentioned that children are given little space for hypothesis formation and search for meaning (Kumar, 1992: 5). It can be argued that unfamiliarity with the school language leaves no scope for the children to decipher meaning or form any hypothesis. Multilingual classroom can be a space for negotiating conflict, practising social justice and assertion of language rights of the children.

It has been discussed that multilingualism is neither a barrier for learning nor an impossible pedagogic practice to design. In reality, mere announcement of multilingual language rights cannot solve the learning difficulties of children with multilinguality as well as children in multilingual classrooms. Creation of strategies, development of teaching-learning materials and implementing them with systematic planning can actually build a real multilingual classroom.

Multilingual education has been viewed as a barrier for national unity. But recent trends have marked multilingual education not only as the key to social justice, but also as an investment in global market (Katznelson & Bernstein, 2017). It has been argued that multilingual education can add value to social mobility and global development. In recent days, multilingual classrooms are planned in the context of minority children and multilingual pedagogy is considered as a resource for the classroom. Since language is considered as a resource rather than only a right in present day world, multilingual education will probably be the global solution for designing education policies in future.

Notes

1. Simultaneous bi/multilingual children acquire two or more languages at the same time, while in sequential bi/multilingualism children acquire languages sequentially.
2. L1 is first language, L2 is second language, L3 third language, and so on.
3. A link language or Lingua Franca is a language that is used by members of different communities for communication.
4. The EGRaN (2016) scheme mentioned that it is important for the teacher to listen to the children of his/her class as the children are undergoing a shift from home language to school language gradually. Teacher should listen to the children carefully and decide the strategies for classroom accordingly.
5. *Prathamik Shiksha Karyakram* or Prashika initiative by *Eklavya* used survey of the linguistic features of certain languages to design classroom planning.
6. The story grammar is helpful to figure out the structural linguistic features of the children's language use.
7. Sharing of home-stories in classroom is also a potential activity for language classes. Different skills are related to the story-telling sessions. Students can tell stories, listen to them, and write down parts of the stories. They can also read stories written by each other. Children can also be asked to take home a book or a book-bag. Children can also be asked to find printed materials at home, then make a list and share at classroom.

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