

Athabasca University  Master of Arts - Integrated Studies

ANISHINAABEMOWIN REVITALIZATION IN ALDERVILLE FIRST  
NATION: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

By

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## ABSTRACT

Indigenous languages world-wide are at a crucial point at which their survival will depend on promotion, protection and revitalization strategies. Within Canada, only three Indigenous languages are expected to survive: Cree, Ojibwe and Inuktitut.

An investigation into the efforts of fluent speakers, teachers, and students of Indigenous languages, as well as linguists and activists working with Indigenous languages, can inform and provide direction to revitalize Indigenous languages on individual, family, community, and global levels. Applying theories within the disciplines of education, community development, and Indigenous language studies to the practical issue of Indigenous language revitalization, expands knowledge within each of these individual disciplines, as well as in interdisciplinary studies, and creates the potential for a more integrated and comprehensive solution to the global crisis of Indigenous language survival. Building upon existing knowledge within the field of Indigenous language revitalization, this paper explores what strategies would support the revitalization of Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe language) within the community of Alderville First Nation. This paper serves as a step toward successfully revitalizing Anishinaabemowin, particularly within the community of Alderville First Nation. Strategies identified within this paper may be adopted, adapted, and modified to be used as tools for the revitalization of Indigenous languages world-wide.

## Anishinaabemowin Revitalization in Alderville First Nation: An Integrated Approach

Encoded within a language is its people's distinctive cultural, spiritual and intellectual world view; the history and wisdom of their ancestors and their ways of life. When a language dies, so does the knowledge embedded within it. Language loss not only affects the individuals, families, communities and nations who have directly been affected by the death of their language, but is also detrimental to all human beings as it contributes to the decrease of the intellectual and cultural diversity of the planet. Leading language expert, Professor David Crystal brings awareness to the language survival crisis facing human beings, estimating that a language dies every two weeks (20). Indigenous and minority languages of the world are particularly at risk of endangerment. Indigenous languages in Canada are at a crisis point, as all but Cree, Ojibwe and Inuktitut are near extinction point with limited child and youth fluency (Hill 4). In 1993, the United Nations drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which stated:

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literature, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. Indigenous children have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State. All indigenous peoples also have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. (Cantoni x)

While acknowledging the importance of Indigenous language revitalization, this declaration raises the question, how do we revitalize Indigenous languages? Although there are vast differences among Indigenous peoples and communities, including language circumstances and

available resources, we can share, learn and borrow from each other the immense knowledge and experience gained through Indigenous languages revitalization initiatives.

The Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) community of Alderville First Nation, Ontario, is living proof of the urgent need to answer the question, how do we revitalize Indigenous languages? With approximately 300 band members residing on reserve and 900 living off reserve, there are no Anishinaabemowin-as-a-first-language speakers left in Alderville First Nation. Despite many initiatives that have brought in fluent speakers from nearby communities to teach Anishinaabemowin to community members of Alderville First Nation through the daycare, elementary school, and evening adult classes, no new fluent speakers have been created. Since about the age of nine years, it has been my goal to become a fluent Anishinaabemowin speaker and revitalize the language within my family and community. After years of taking evening language classes in the community, and post-secondary level classes during my undergraduate degree, I am still not a fluent speaker and Anishinaabemowin has not been revitalized within my family or community. My intention for pursuing the Master of Arts - Integrated Studies program at Athabasca University was to gain knowledge and skills that would assist me in achieving my personal, professional, and academic goal of language revitalization within my community. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the following paper examines successful Anishinaabemowin revitalization strategies; while drawing on knowledge relevant to Indigenous language revitalization within the disciplines of education, community development, and Indigenous language studies. Answering the question, what strategies would support the revitalization of Anishinaabemowin within the community of Alderville First Nation?, this paper is a step toward successfully revitalizing Anishinaabemowin, particularly within the community of Alderville First Nation. Strategies identified within this paper build upon existing knowledge within the field and may be adopted, adapted, and modified as appropriate to be used as tools for the revitalization of Indigenous languages world-wide. Applying theories found within the

disciplines of education, community development, and Indigenous language studies to the practical issue of Indigenous language revitalization expands knowledge within each of these individual disciplines, as well as in interdisciplinary studies, and creates the potential for a more integrated and comprehensive solution to the global crisis of Indigenous language survival.

### **Anishinaabemowin Revitalization Strategies: Individual, Family, Community, and Global**

Anishinaabemowin speakers, teachers, experts, and learners agree that language revitalization begins with individuals deciding to pursue the language and making a commitment to create and sustain a space in their lives to hear, learn, speak, and incorporate the language into daily life activities (Baloy 527; Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Hermes 134; Union of Ontario Indians, *How Do We Heal?* 7). Students of Indigenous languages agree that to learn to understand and speak, “it has to be your world”, you must “immerse your life in the language” (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014). The lifestyle of the individual learner and the resources they have available will determine which strategies will be practical and effective. Some Indigenous language activists encourage people to get out on the land and integrate knowledge with language, because our languages are directly manifested from our connections to our lands and territories (Baloy 524, Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014). Learning environments which capture, record, and document the natural flow of conversation in everyday dialogue is crucial for teaching second-language learners (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014). Such situations might include language immersion nests or schools, weekend or longer immersion language camps, all day language events, mentorships, ceremonies, and creating opportunities to have fun while engaging in role play, prayer, games, repetition, or visiting (Baloy 534; Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Union of Ontario Indians, *How Do We Heal?* 7).

Indigenous language revitalization experts agree that the home must be the central source of native language learning and language instruction in the home must commence at an early

age. Families must designate times to engage in language learning together, through meaningful inter-generational interactions within and outside the home (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Hermes 135; Cantoni vii). Languages will only survive if young people learn to understand and speak their Indigenous languages (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Jacob 182). Creating opportunities to engage in family language activities recognizes the importance of nurturing relationships and bridging generations for inter-generational Indigenous language transmission (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014). The most effective strategies for family language revitalization include storytelling, experiential learning through traditional culture and life, games, and spending time with Elders (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Kitchenham 360). Immersion schools, master-apprentice programs that pair speakers and learners, second language learning from documentation, and programs that focus on language revitalization within the home, socializing young children in a first language way, while the adults learn the Indigenous language as a second language, are the most effective methods of learning the language through applying it to everyday life routines within the home and community (Hermes 135 ).

Successful Indigenous language revitalization must consider all aspects of community life from child rearing practices and inter-generational communication, to economic and political development (Reyhner 4). The most important factor in establishing foundations for Indigenous languages survival is relationships with other committed individuals. Individuals must find ways to revitalize and stabilize, or build and maintain, speech communities through our relationships (Jacob 185; Reyhner 3). Language learning can also be the basis of meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous language learners (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Jacob 192). Studies have shown that effective community strategies used for language revitalization include encouraging seniors to use the language with children, language nests, preschool language programs, community seminars to promote language revitalization, using the language in everyday conversation, at cultural ceremonies, in churches, on radio and television, in

government reports, at community meetings, conferences, creating language programs for parents, families, and community members; creating libraries of learning resources and materials (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Burnaby 21). Research clearly shows those Indigenous communities which have the highest levels of fluency are those in which these services are provided in the Indigenous language (Burnaby 29-30).

To strengthen cultural and linguistic identity, to promote the importance of language, and to demonstrate their commitment to language revitalization, communities can use and display the language publicly in organizations, institutions, local greetings, newsletters, place names, already existing forms of cultural expression (Baloy 525-534), bumper stickers, tshirts, posters, (Crawford 50), signs, announcements, advertisements, radio broadcasts, theatrical performances, art shows, special events (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014), ceremonies and cultural activities (Union of Ontario Indians, *How Do We Heal?* 7). Community leaders can support language revitalization initiatives by promoting and protecting their languages through language use, encouraging others to use it, supporting language initiatives, creating language revitalization policies, developing language networks, and through the dissemination on the threats of language loss (Burnaby 29-30). Indigenous language activists recommend offering language instruction at all levels and for all ages, welcoming any interested learners to attend, focusing on integrating culture and language (Cantoni vii), creating incentives for people to learn to understand and speak Indigenous languages (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014), and allowing non-Indigenous people to benefit from studying Indigenous cultures and languages (Jacob 194).

A dimension of language revitalization for some communities involves creating new contexts for the language to be used and updating vocabulary to reflect current daily activities and lifestyle, a process which is sometimes met by resistance from other speakers within the community (Baloy 531). Some language experts insist the importance of learning the language orally as the 'sound based method' was the way fluent speakers learned it (Fuhst 34), while others

emphasize the importance of reading and writing in the language (Jacob 190). Language revitalization strategies in New Zealand and Hawaii take on a cradle to grave approach, ensuring birth to doctorate level immersion programs and schools (Hermes 134). Recommendations of fluent speakers, teachers, and learners include using English as a second language, encouraging children to learn the language, not engaging in dialect wars, not forcing anyone to learn, letting children lead their learning, decolonizing the language, removing English, and focusing on Anishinaabemowin, and how we live and relate to each other (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014). Common barriers to Indigenous language revitalization include the lack of opportunity to practice Indigenous languages at home; parents' lack of proficiency in the Indigenous language; teachers' criticism and tendency to correct learners whenever they make a mistake; anticipation of put-downs by non-speakers of the Indigenous language; the perception that English is more beneficial for economic success; the teaching of isolated vocabulary rather than communicative skills and (Cantoni vi), lack of resources (Jacob 183). By recognizing potential barriers to Indigenous language revitalization, individuals and communities can avoid these pitfalls and experience greater success.

In addition to bottom up grassroots initiatives, for language revitalization to be effective, it needs to be met with top down political support in the form of policy planning and implementation at the government level (Crystal 20; Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Jacob 195; Kroupa 2; McCarty et al. 16). On December 14-16, 2010 the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations met in Gatineau, Quebec, where they passed a draft resolution titled, *ACTIONS NECESSARY TO SAVE FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES FROM EXTINCTION*. The resolution states:

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Chiefs-in-Assembly:**

1. Recognize and affirm that urgent action is required to promote and protect



Indigenous languages.

2. Direct the Assembly of First Nations to:

- a. undertake a nation-wide campaign to raise awareness about the benefits and critical importance of mother-tongue medium education using a variety of strategies, including conferences, brochures, Internet, TV and radio ads.
- b. urge that the mother-tongue to be the official language in every First Nations territory or *community*.
- c. promote the development of immersion curriculum, and immersion teacher training for all First Nations across the country.
- d. support immersion programs not only for the young, but also for adults in communities with too few fluent teachers to support an immersion program for children.
- e. support a court challenge establishing the constitutional right of First Nations to educate their children in the medium of their own languages.

3. Urge federal and provincial governments to:

- a. work in meaningful consultation with First Nations Peoples to develop provincial and national legislation that not only recognizes and protects First Nations languages as an Aboriginal and Treaty right under Section 35 of the Constitution, but also mandates financial support for First Nations immersion programs equivalent to that enjoyed by French and English programs in Canada.
- b. implement the international human rights norms and legally binding standards that are part of general and customary international law in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to ensure protection, respect and justice for all Indigenous rights, including those in treaties. (AFN 2)

With the drafting of this resolution, we are reminded that urgent action must be taken to protect and promote Indigenous languages and pressure must be placed on the government to recognize and protect Indigenous languages legislatively and financially.

Indigenous language revitalization can benefit from communities seeking assistance and support outside the community. Interdisciplinary collaborations with non-profit organizations, language centres, researchers, linguists, biologists, natural and social scientists, and Indigenous experts can assist communities in preserving their Indigenous languages through workshops, publications, language nests, conferences, and the use of technology for recording and studying languages (Crystal 18; Kroupa 2; Maffi 391; Maffi 21-22; McCarty et al. 16; Purdie et al. 2; Woodbury 2). It is widely agreed that Indigenous research must be beneficial and give back to the community (Assembly of First Nations 1; Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. 106; Ermine et al. 22; Jacob 195; Kipp 6; Kovach 185; Kroupa 7; McGregor 28; St. Denis et al. 4). Language revitalization can have many benefits for individuals, families, and communities. Studies indicate that learning an Indigenous language can enhance a range of social and academic outcomes (Purdie et al.) including cognitive advantages of bilingualism and multilingualism as well as the contributions to individual, familial and community well being, tribal sovereignty, self-determination and cultural strength (McCarty et al. 16). A correlation has been found between the learning of Indigenous languages and higher completion rates of school, which is known to correlate with lower poverty rates, addictions, incarceration, and suicide. The benefits of proficiency in an Indigenous language, culture, and history include self-sufficiency, health and decolonization (Nicholas 1). In addition to the benefits to Indigenous communities, Indigenous languages contain knowledge of the environment which contribute to the understanding of the world (Maffi 385) and information regarding human cognition from a scientific perspective (Woodbury 2), which moves Indigenous language revitalization from being an isolated issue, and

positions it “as a vital part of an entire ecology of land and culture” (Hermes 137). Framing language diversity as “integral to biodiversity and social justice”, moves Indigenous language revitalization from beyond what could be seen as solely in the self-interest of Indigenous people saving their own languages, into a human-rights issue, which acknowledges its importance for all of humanity (Hermes 137).

Recognizing the importance of Indigenous language revitalization, collaborations between Indigenous communities and researchers will expand upon existing knowledge of effective strategies. Agreed upon by many scholars, is the necessity for Indigenous knowledge systems to be at the centre of Indigenous research (Assembly of First Nations 19; Brown 106; Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al. 105; Ermine 22; Kovach 176; Maffi 22; McCarty et al. 16; McGregor 28; St. Denis et al. 4). It is essential that the community be an integral part in every aspect of the research, to the extent that they wish to be throughout the planning, researching, analysis, and dissemination processes, and must be recognized for their contribution. Partnerships must “nurture the spirits of the people involved, as they connect their work to a broader vision of collective healing within the community” (Jacob 195). Although outsiders cannot lead the Indigenous language revitalization movement, they can serve as allies by providing resources, training, and encouragement (Crawford 58). There have been “long-standing efforts of change characterized by community building and collaboration with academics across disciplines, cultures, and ideologies” (Hermes 131).

### **Anishinaabemowin Revitalization: An Interdisciplinary Approach**

Hermes emphasizes, “Indigenous language revitalization is a world-wide, grassroots and interdisciplinary movement. Ideas ranging from bio-diversity, linguistics and cognition, linguistic anthropology, technology and language learning, political activism, and indigenous sovereignty all converge around this singular idea: The world's indigenous languages are important to all of us” (131). To ensure an interdisciplinary approach to Indigenous language

revitalization, it is crucial that community members become actively involved, bringing to the process, their diverse educational and life experience within various different disciplines and inter-disciplines and their visions of Indigenous language revitalization. An interdisciplinary approach will be advantageous as it will utilize areas of expertise within the community, within a wide range of areas such as education, leadership, politics, policy development, community development, economics, law, traditional knowledge, parenting, health, etc.

Complex problems require interdisciplinary and cross-domain solutions.

Understanding language revitalization as a part of sustainability and more generally, and as a complex problem, will generate interest from fields outside of linguistics and potential approaches that expand on documentation alone.

Seemingly unrelated problems may generate the need for local indigenous-language use beyond their communities of origin. The collaboration across different ideologies, cultures, users, and scientists of indigenous languages is bursting with possibilities for finding such solutions. (Hermes 139-40)

An investigation of the efforts of other Indigenous peoples to protect and promote Indigenous languages is important to examine what has been successful in other communities. Despite differences among Indigenous peoples, fluent speakers of Indigenous languages from other communities, Indigenous language teachers, Indigenous language students, linguists working with Indigenous languages, and others interested and knowledgeable about Indigenous language can share and learn from each other's efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages. Many scholars and language experts agree that language initiatives of Indigenous communities can be a valuable resource when shared between communities (Assembly of First Nations 1; Crystal 20; Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Kipp 6; Kroupa 1; Maffi 390; McCarty et al. 15; Purdie et al. 1; Woodbury 1).

The most difficult part of stabilizing a language is creating community (Fishman 80). Revitalizing Indigenous languages through inter-generational mother-tongue transmission requires building communities of speakers. Knowledge within the discipline of community development can assist individuals and communities engaged in this process. Through the process of joining together, people discover the problems they face stem from broader social, cultural, or economic forces. Development occurs when the personal and collective skills, resources, and self-confidence required to collectively undertake action are achieved, enabling people to take charge of improving their lives” (Rubin & Rubin 6). For some, community development means groups within the community becoming empowered to undertake action in pursuit of positive social change (Campfens 7). Within the tradition of social learning, theorists claim knowledge is derived from experience, validated in practice, and an integral part of action (Friedmann 81). Engaged research raises awareness of community life conditions, creating a platform of local experience and knowledge that informs social action (Campfens 115).

Several courses of action have been suggested for the maintenance of Indigenous languages: the fostering of community-based approaches; directing research efforts toward analyzing community-based successes; trying new approaches to maintaining languages through fostering communication and partnerships between communities and organizations; and promoting awareness of the catastrophic effects of language loss among Indigenous and mainstream populations (Reyhner 2). Social mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of building linkages between localized action in three ways: (1) functional, from home to work place, and between work places; (2) horizontal, building cooperation between communities, regions, and larger territories; and (3) vertical, from community to region, region to nation, and nation to groups of nations and the world (Friedmann 302). As individuals and communities share with each other, both the particular difficulties they face and the specific solutions reached, a process of social learning occurs.

## **Anishinaabemowin Revitalization in Alderville First Nation: An Integrated Approach**

Alderville First Nation community members learning Anishinaabemowin and working towards its revitalization are faced with the barrier of having a lack of fluent speakers within the community from which to listen to, speak with, and learn from. Due to the lack of everyday Anishinaabemowin conversation or dialogue within Alderville First Nation, community members must access fluent speakers from local surrounding communities; such as Mississaugas of Curve Lake First Nation, Mississaugas of Scugog First Nation, Mississaugas of Hiawatha First Nation, as well as local speakers living off reserve. Attending events and ceremonies within these communities will expose learners to Anishinaabemowin and provide the opportunity to hear and speak the language. Volunteering time at the senior citizens' complexes within these communities would allow learners access to many speakers at once, providing the opportunity to hear everyday conversation. Alderville First Nation community members may also travel further outside the community to attend conferences such as Anishinaabemowin Teg in Sault St. Marie, or Kenny Pheasant's immersion camp in Michigan. Planning all day language events, and weekend or longer immersion language camps within the community and inviting speakers and teachers from local communities would assist in bringing Anishinaabemowin back to Alderville First Nation.

Alderville Anishinaabemowin, is a grassroots community group that began with a conversation between two Alderville First Nation community members in the Spring of 2013; Keith Montreil and the author of this paper. Alderville Anishinaabemowin has been planning, organizing, and implementing language revitalization projects within the community for over a year. One such project included a five day language camp in the summer of 2013. Recognizing the importance of considering community members living off reserve, the second Alderville Anishinaabemowin project was a series of online language learning sessions connecting fluent speaker and teacher Helen Roy Fuhst with students from Alderville First Nation and surrounding

communities, using Spreecast as a platform. The Spreecast sessions are archived so that community members may access the lessons at any time. Live learning sessions are held at the Alderville First Nation Learning Centre to provide access to community members that do not have an internet connection at home.

To assist learners in incorporating Anishinaabemowin into their lives, the Alderville First Nation Library provides community members access to resources that have documented Anishinaabemowin; such as, dictionaries, videos, tape cassettes, DVD's, and CD's. Community members may also access online resources through the Alderville First Nation Learning Centre and Library. Incorporating traditional forms of knowledge with technology such as audio-libraries, online or handheld device apps, and Youtube, provide practical ease of storage and appeal to the younger generation (Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Jacob 185; Kitchenham 352). Language teachers and learners identified digital video cameras, interactive Whiteboards, and the internet, as the most effective technological tools available as they all encourage group learning, provide space and flexibility for student directed learning, and can bridge the distance between Indigenous peoples and their home communities (Baloy 533-34; Kitchenham 360). Alderville First Nation Learning Centre offers community members access to these identified tools. As Indigenous peoples are increasingly residing in urban settings, it is important to consider the urban dimension of language revitalization efforts, and create opportunities for speakers and learners to connect (Baloy 516) face to face or online.

Community members of Alderville First Nation must find ways to bring Anishinaabemowin into the home. Melody Crowe, a community member of Alderville First Nation has been teaching an evening class for individuals and families within the community and surrounding areas for many years. She recently created a DVD of over 100 community members of Alderville First Nation speaking Anishinaabemowin in their homes and in public spaces

within the community. Each household was given a copy of the DVD, as a way to bring the language into each home within the community. By learning together, families can take the language home to incorporate into their daily lives with each other. Families can connect with other families learning the language to support each other in creating time and space to use the language. Parents of young children can invite fluent speakers from local communities into their homes to participate in language immersion nests or master-apprentice programs, that will further language learning in a family setting and bring the language back into the home. The most important aspects of language revitalization is building a community of speakers and finding a way to incorporate the language into our daily lives. Alderville First Nation community members must join together to support each other in Anishinaabemowin revitalization efforts, both within the community, as well as connecting with fluent speakers, teachers, and other learners in other local communities.

There are many ways in which Alderville First Nation is currently promoting the importance of Anishinaabemowin through its use within the day care, local elementary school, and within the community. Most of the road signs within the community are now using Anishinaabemowin names. Many community offices within the community, such as the Band Office, Learning Centre, Library, Health and Social Services, and Student Services, display the language within public spaces. There is a monthly insert in the community newsletter which is dedicated to Anishinaabemowin. More could be done in the area of promoting the use of the language within the community, through the development of revitalization policies, language networks, and dissemination on the threats of language loss. With children and adults learning within school and community night classes, the creation of language immersion opportunities for community members of all ages and fluency levels is a necessary next step. Building partnerships focused on Anishinaabemowin revitalization with local First Nations communities, local organizations, and educational institutions such as Roseneath Centennial Public School,



Trent University, Sir Sandford Fleming College, and Loyalist College, may also be beneficial for Alderville First Nation and must be looked into further.

## Conclusion

Indigenous language experts agree that language revitalization efforts must begin on a personal level within the home, and then build out to connect the workplace, community, and school (Assembly of First Nations 1; Mississaugas of Curve Lake 2014; Kroupa 3; McCarty et al. 16; Purdie et al. 1; Burnaby 24-5). Ultimately, the fate of Indigenous languages survival lies in the hands of speakers, and will be determined through their attitudes and choices regarding language use. Whether families will speak the language in the home and teach it to their children and grandchildren; whether Elders will share their knowledge and speak the language within the community; whether community leaders will promote the language and accommodate its speakers in governmental, recreational, educational, and social services, are factors that determine the successful protection, promotion, and revitalization of Indigenous languages (Crawford 50). By acknowledging and building upon the knowledge, initiatives, and effective methods of language revitalization, recognition and protection of others, Indigenous communities can learn from each other to create strategic goals to revitalize language, at the individual, family, community and global levels. By integrating knowledge within the disciplines of community development, education, and Indigenous language studies, more comprehensive solutions may be found for the revitalization of Indigenous languages. Through language and culture revitalization, opportunities are created for the reclamation of Indigenous identity, pride, decolonization, and assertion of sovereignty (Baloy 518). Assisting in the revitalization of Indigenous languages, not only produces benefits for Indigenous peoples, but for all societies" (Reyhner 4). By implementing the strategies utilized by other communities outlined in this paper, Alderville First Nation will be one step closer to the revitalization of Anishinaabemowin.

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