

**Directions for Catholic Educational Leadership in the 21st Century:
The Vision, Challenges and Reality**

PEDAGOGY FOR NEOMILLENNIALS

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ANNA DICKINSON

&

KATE CLANCY

We need a new pedagogy, based on interactivity, personalisation and the development of autonomous capacity of learning and thinking...While at the same time strengthening the character and securing the personality. Castells (2000).

Introduction

Reconceptualising Pedagogy for schooling is an educational imperative of the 21st century. As the 'neomillennium' generation begins formal schooling, educators need to review their assumptions about the learner, learning and pedagogy to ensure that the schooling experience is appropriate for people whose lives will be affected by the most rapid global changes in human history. Many education practitioners, leaders and researchers are calling for a reconceptualising of pedagogy. Bruner (1986) reminds us that our traditions of pedagogy that looked at the processes of education as transmission of knowledge and values by those who knew more to those who knew less and knew it less expertly derive from other times. This paper outlines the processes being undertaken to develop a system-wide approach to pedagogy which reflects contemporary knowledge and understandings about the changing nature of the learner and the learning process in a Catholic system of schools.

Catholic Systemic Schools Sydney

The Catholic Education Office, (CEO) Sydney, administers 148 schools with an enrolment of 63,000 students in the Archdiocese of Sydney. This is one of the largest systems of schools in Australia, with 113 Parish Primary Schools and 35 Regional Secondary Schools. The students come from a wide range of socio-economic and language backgrounds with 52% speaking a language other than English as their first language. The enrolment includes 4.6% of students with a disability, well above the national average of 2.5%. The CEO is strongly committed to equitable outcomes from schooling for all students. The CEO is responsible for the Religious Education curriculum, staffing levels and monitoring compliance with the Commonwealth and State educational requirements. In 2004 the CEO Sydney underwent an external review of its services to schools. The purpose of the Review was to examine and report on the effectiveness of the CEO Sydney and the Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board. The focus was on the appropriateness, quality and effectiveness of services to the system of schools, informed by the Vision and Mission Statements and arising specifically from the published policies and related strategies.

The Review Panel comprised of four educational leaders external to the Archdiocese, from England, Scotland and New South Wales. It was evident to the Panel that the provision of quality learning programs was central to the work of the CEO and that this support is having an

appreciable impact on educational outcomes for students. It was from this position of strength the Panel recommended that:

A greater emphasis should be placed on promoting approaches to pedagogy in schools. A major development should be launched to promote innovative and more effective approaches to teaching and learning. (Rec. 4)

A Project Team was convened in late 2004 to take forward this recommendation supported by a reference group of Primary and Secondary Principals and Assistant Principals. At the outset the Project Team determined that to look at pedagogy in isolation would result in a simplistic approach to the task. It was understood that there are some common misconceptions about what teachers need to do in order to design effective learning environments. These misconceptions include the belief that teaching simply consists of a set of general methods that can be applied across the disciplines and stages of schooling. The team took the position that while there are common elements of effective teaching practice these generic pedagogies need to be interpreted in the context of the principles underpinning Catholic education, the emerging understandings of the learning process and the learner, and particular content knowledge. The team determined to revisit the beliefs and assumptions that inform education in a Catholic school and map them against the findings of contemporary research and practice into teaching and learning. This would provide the opportunity to develop a Learning Framework which would set the context for innovative and effective pedagogy in Sydney Catholic schools while acknowledging the strengths of the current practice.

The Learning Framework would elaborate on the Vision and Mission and relate directly to the Archdiocesan Strategic Plan 2006-2010.

The agreed outcomes of the Framework include:

- Enhanced shared professional vocabulary, understandings and approaches to teaching and learning;
- Improved quality of teaching and learning in all school for all students;
- Renewal of practice across the system of schools in light of current research; and
- Stronger alignment of beliefs, policies and practices.

To develop the Framework the team identified the following processes:

- Describe the current context of schooling;
- Review relevant Church teachings and Commonwealth and State requirements;

- Analyse the latest advances in research and practice into learning and pedagogy;
- Identify current good practice and map against agreed criteria;
- Consult key stakeholders, Principals, Assistant Principals, Teaching staff, Students, Parents, CEO personnel; and
- Engage academic mentors.

Extensive consultation, involving principals and assistant principals, focus groups of teachers and committees of the CEO, endorsed the elements of the Learning Framework as:

- Educational Context
- Foundation Statements
- The nature of the Learner
- Understanding Learning
- Dimensions and elements of effective pedagogy

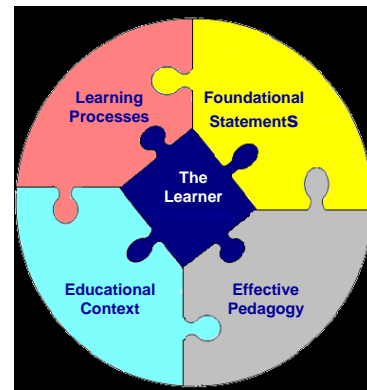


Diagram 1: Learning Framework CEO Sydney 2005

The Educational Context

Compelling global social, political, technological, environmental and economic forces of change are influencing Catholic schools in the Sydney Archdiocese. Commonwealth and State Governments set public policies which are contracted in financial agreements. In 1999 the State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met as the 10th Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and agreed on a statement of national goals, *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (MCEETYA) (1999). This declaration provides broad directions to guide schools and education authorities in meeting the challenges of our times.

At the State Government level the *Education Act 1990* sets out aspects of the curriculum for school registration and accreditation, including the Key Learning Areas for primary and secondary education. This Act established the Board of Studies, one function of which is to make recommendations to the Minister in regard to the registration and accreditation of non-government schools.

Beare (2001) states the funding of schools by governments as a powerful propeller of change. Education has become more expensive for governments and no longer seen as an automatic public good to be funded without question by the taxpayer. This in turn has resulted in increased accountability and reporting requirements including whole cohort testing in the areas of literacy, numeracy, computer skills and science.

Cultural, educational and legal changes have significantly influenced the range of students in regular classrooms at a time when there is a drive for higher standards and increased accountability. At the same time teachers are being called to a new professionalism as emerging understandings about how human beings learn, based on the findings of psychologists, neuroscientists and others, challenge the one dimensional view of learning and intelligence which has shaped classroom practice. The role of Information Communication/Digital Technology is fast moving beyond that of serving traditional model of schooling and is in fact changing the where, when, what and how of learning. The Church recognises these changes and in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1998) calls Catholic schools to courageous renewal in light of new challenges that are the result of new socio-political and cultural contexts. This time of profound change invites us to revisit the foundation of our educational philosophy, our beliefs about the purpose of schooling and the implications for learning and teaching.

Foundation Statements

The Vision and Mission of Sydney Catholic systemic schools are public and well integrated into the policies and practices affecting all aspects of the organisation's operation. There is a vibrant and very strong sense of Catholic identity throughout the system. As Catholic educators we have a rich history to call on, from 'Go teach all nations' (Mt 28:19) and a pantheon of witnesses to the importance of education down through the ages. The message of one of the earliest Christian theologians, St Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon (ca 130-200) who wrote to Christian educators urging them to be empowering catalysts in learners' lives because "the glory of God is the human person fully alive" is consistent with contemporary Catholic understandings of the human person. Catholicism's core understanding of the human condition, its anthropology, is positive. Groome, (1998) reminds us that we hold a positive and hopeful sense of ourselves. This means that life matters and for Christians it is the person of Jesus who gives meaning to life and learning. This

leads to an understanding of learning that is more than just acquiring information or formation, but transformation. Starratt (2004) promotes an integrative view of education in that all learning is potentially transformative and that this is the core work of Catholic schools. This has implications for all aspects of the teaching/learning dynamic not just the Religious Education program. Recognising that all educational practice is governed by values any discussion about teacher practice had to start with the core values that give meaning to the lives of teachers.

In developing the Foundation Statements the project team identified five values to underpin the Learning Framework:

- Dignity, We are all created in the image of God and as such are active and creative participants in our learning.
- Sacramentality, We recognise and celebrate life as sacred. We strive to educate people to respond with faith and imagination as we shape our shared future.
- Community, We strive to create an inclusive community where people learn to live and learn together.
- Transformation, We are called to integrate life, culture and faith. Through education we can be transformed and can work to transform our world.
- Truth, Each person is called to seek truth. The search for truth invites us to be reflective, imaginative and active in making meaning and critiquing our world in the light of faith.

These understandings of the human person have the potential to powerfully influence our view of the learner.

The Nature of the Learner

Developments in redesigning pedagogy must acknowledge the role and nature of the learner. Tensions are at play in classrooms today as we have 21st century students being taught by teachers formed in the 20th century in schools designed in the 19th century. Learners are presenting with 'new identities' having their entire lives mediated by technology developed in the last decades of the 20th century. Loader (2006) describes these learners, with their mobile phones, mp3 players seeking learning that's experiential, immediate, visual and social, as the neomillennials. It is now recognised that one of the most important characteristics of human beings is that we are wired to learn. Psychologists believe that we are also programmed, at least to some degree, to help the young learn successfully. Learning is at the core of our being,

as individuals and collectively. It is widely recognised that the process of making sense of the world begins at a very young age and that from early infancy children are active learners who have dispositions to learn and construct new knowledge and understanding. We now know that learners are to some degree like all others, some others, like no other and that the one size fits all approach to learning fits no-one. Rose and Meyer (2002) state that 'the notion of broad categories of learners-smart, not smart, disabled not disabled, regular, not regular-is a gross oversimplification that does not reflect reality' Each student brings an assortment of strengths, preferences, prior experiences to the classroom.

Teachers need to apply what they know about the diversity in their student's strengths, weaknesses, cultural and home backgrounds, learning styles and stage of development to their teaching practice for effective learning to take place. Hargreaves (2004) believes "If students are to become better learners, it is essential for teachers to become better at what they do".

The learner comes to hold a concept of themselves as a learner from their earliest experiences. It is acknowledged that this concept can and does influence learning success in schooling. It is becoming increasingly evident that the learner should have a voice in the learning process, that s/he can play an active role in their schooling, monitoring the quality of her/his own performance and contributing to the teaching/learning dynamic.

Accepting this position challenges traditional roles of the learner and the teacher and teaching practice based on transmission. Recognising the nature of the learner leads us to re-examine what learning means in a school setting.

Defining Learning

In the last decades of the 20th century, understandings of learning have advanced significantly. Learning is of interest to a wide range of people including psychologists, neuroscientists, cognitive scientists and anthropologists as well as teachers. Knowledge about learning is increasing as these scientists use powerful research tools which allow access to healthy, live human brains.

Many branches of science are converging to develop deeper understandings of cognition, learning, the affective domain of learning, the role of culture in learning and the place of

teaching. It is now well understood that human beings are able to learn, unlearn, share their learning and pass learning on to those who follow; that intelligence is multi-dimensional, plastic and learnable not mono-dimensional, immutable and innate. The emerging science of learning underscores the importance of rethinking what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed. As Pace Marshall (1996) states, the science of the times shapes our institutions. The schooling structures we have today are fundamentally rooted in seventeenth century science and limited conceptions of how the brain works and learning occurs. Between Descartes and Newton reason and rationality became the primary way of knowing and learning was seen as logical and linear. Scientific advances providing insights into complex adaptive system theory have fundamentally reframed the discourse on learning and schooling. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the paradigm of learning shaping schooling is no longer working for us.

The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century published a report entitled *Learning: The Treasure Within* (1996) which argued that the traditional quantitative and knowledge based approach to schooling would no longer serve students who will live out their lives in the new millennium. The Report proposed 'four fundamental types of learning which, through a person's life, will in a way be the pillars of knowledge';

- Learning to know
- Learning to do
- Learning to live together and
- Learning to be.

Traditionally formal education has explicitly concentrated on the first two, with less emphasis on the others. We need, as Pace Marshall (1999) states, to develop principles for the new story of learning, moving from the old culture of acquisition, independence and competition to the new story of learning, a culture of inquiry, interdependence and collaboration.

This has led to attention being focused on the higher order processes of learning. Our knowledge of meta-learning, making sense of one's own learning is still primitive but evolving at a rapid rate. Most teachers lack confidence about meta-learning as it often requires them to question some of the assumptions underpinning their current professional practice. A key strategic direction for the Catholic Education Office is to provide opportunities for teachers to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the learning processes as they seek to renew their pedagogical practice.

Dimensions and Elements of Effective Pedagogy

The changes in understanding the learning process calls for a new learning environment culture to emerge. This culture requires different capabilities and dispositions towards young people and the need for teachers to re-examine their practice. It is widely recognised that within the possibilities of schooling it is teachers and their practices that have the most effect on student learning. But what is this practice?

Most teachers see what they do as an art, one honed over their experience through trial and error. Few attribute their effective practice to research evidence; some describe it as 'common sense' knowledge. Teachers often look to their peers for ideas for improving their practice which raises the issue of a shared language and vocabulary to talk about what it is teachers do and with that a set of agreed criteria for justifying 'best practice'. One of the first questions asked by and of the project team was What is pedagogy? A comprehensive literature search indicated that many researchers and theorists shy away from attempting to define pedagogy. The definition most cited is *pedagogy is the art and science of teaching*.

Hargreaves (2004) argues that 'pedagogy should at its best be about what teachers do that not only help students to learn but actively strengthen their capacity to learn'. For Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) pedagogical understanding is about putting understanding learning and content knowledge together to develop effective teaching. 'Expert' teachers apply their knowledge of pedagogy to what they know about the diversity in students' strengths and weaknesses, cultural experiences, stages of learning and the classroom context. Schulman (1987) argues that teachers need pedagogical content knowledge, which is different from knowledge of general teaching methods. Studies conducted by the Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning demonstrate that teachers need to develop an understanding of pedagogy as an intellectual discipline that reflects theories of learning, including knowledge of how cultural beliefs and the personal characteristics of learners influence learning.

Newmann (1996) defines pedagogy as the combination of assessment and teaching practices used by a teacher. His studies showed that school reform activities, such as active learning alone, offer no guarantee of high quality student achievement. He argued that teachers must ensure that new approaches to learning must be rooted in a primary concern for high standards of intellectual quality. Authentic pedagogy, as described by Newmann and Wehlage (1995),

determined criteria for identifying effective teaching and high-quality student achievement which has influenced State wide approaches to pedagogy in Australia. The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Queensland Department of Education, 2001) drawing on Authentic Pedagogy, found that four dimensions of practice, intellectual quality, connectedness, supportive classroom environment and recognition of difference within a lesson will contribute to productive pedagogy.

In 2000 the New South Wales Department of Education and Training engaged Dr James Ladwig and Professor Jennifer Gore to develop a model for pedagogy that can be applied from Kindergarten to Year 12 and across all key learning areas. They identified three dimensions of pedagogy, intellectual quality, quality learning environment and significance as the basis of the model for pedagogy in NSW Government schools. Each of the three dimensions is described by a number of elements.

Other Australian studies, including those conducted by Lingard et al (2003) show teacher effects can be maximised by pedagogies and assessment practices that are aligned with curriculum purposes and that are simultaneously intellectually demanding, connected to the world, supportive but with high expectations, and that engage productively with differences. This study showed practice based on these principles produce good academic and social results. This still raises the question of teacher agency in the application of these principles and practices.

Honan, (2004) uses the term 'bricoleur', a term drawn from Derrida, to describe the intricacy and complexity of teachers' work. A bricoleur uses the means at hand to construct meaningful assemblages of classroom practice. It appears that effective teachers draw on a repertoire of theories, practices and ideas to create meaningful classroom experiences.

Redesigning pedagogy is powerfully influenced by emerging technologies. The versatility of digital media provides the opportunity to accommodate individual needs and preferences. Loader (2006) argues that the 'neuroplasticity', that is the way the brain organises itself around the inputs it receives is being shaped by the technology. That is why neomillennials want learning that involves immersion in virtual environments and augmented realities. If this is correct technology has the potential to transform the learning process, enabling teachers to structure activities in different ways and for students to have options for demonstrating their learning. Therefore teachers need considerable support to develop pedagogic knowledge and

skill to include ICT in school learning experiences. This raises the issue of what technology is really needed to support learning as it is not just a case of filling spaces with the latest equipment. The advances in technology also compel us to re-examine school design given the current models were designed in a different age. The 19th century school building designs are best suited to students as passive receivers of knowledge. New learning environments must be places where students are drawn to a love of learning.

Winston S. Churchill said

There is no doubt whatever about the influence of architecture and structure upon human character and action. We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.

Defining the dimensions and elements of effective pedagogy cannot ignore the location and design of the learning space and the perceived constraints.

Case Study

A Case-study in the development of a culture of learning using the Catholic Education Office, Sydney 'Learning Framework'

This Case study describes the implementation of policies and practices developed at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College Kensington, with reference to the CEO Learning Framework. These policies and practices take advantage of the framework's attempt to quantify, and to put into beneficial practice, current understanding of the learner, the learning process and effective teaching in the contemporary Catholic context.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College Kensington (OLSH) is a secondary Catholic systemic school in the Eastern Region of the Archdiocese of Sydney. The members of OLSH College form a diverse educational community descending from 43 different national backgrounds (approximately 80% having English as their Second Language) and 4% funded as students with special educational needs.

Prior to 2001, the college's reputation was strongest as a school catering for the pastoral care needs of students. Despite the recognised strength in pastoral care, the enrolments at the

college had been steadily decreasing, which was being interpreted as a loss of community confidence. The college's five year strategic management cycle had come to an end, which provided a timely opportunity for the college to reflect on its strengths and areas of challenge. This process of self-reflection included a comprehensive survey of the community regarding all aspects of college life and enabling the college to identify and address the issues of highest priority and greatest relevance to the community. Concurrently, extensive international and national research was being conducted about teaching and learning. Findings drawn from this research informed the development of the CEO Learning Framework. The OLSH community drew on this framework to develop its Strategic Plan and school wide vision for learning.

Although the College met all registration and accreditation requirements, the key findings from the college self-review process were that:

- academic performance at the college was steadily decreasing, demonstrating that the college was struggling as an authentic learning community, which was contributing to a loss in community confidence
- the use of data and other available information to set targets and benchmarks assisting in school effectiveness was limited
- student learning was based on a dependency model, with limited evidence of students taking responsibility for their own learning
- there was no whole-school approach to delivering pedagogy to meet the diverse needs of students
- staff professional development was ad hoc, with limited focus on the school as a learning community.

As a result of these findings, the college developed a strategic plan which addressed six key priorities. These included; *creating a culture of learning, aligning staff professional development to the college plan to develop a school-wide pedagogy, promotion of the college and raising the expectations of students.*

The principal and leadership team developed a 'Hopes and Dreams' statement which eventually became part of the fabric of the college and was titled the '*College Hopes and Dreams*'. Therefore the vision of the leadership team became the vision of the school community and included the following:

- A College that continues to *promote and give witness to the OLSH Charism and to Catholic values* and that establishes strong and supportive partnerships with other OLSH and local parish communities
- A College community that continues to *proclaim the Good News of Jesus through Word and Witness*, providing excellent opportunities for its members to engage in the life of the church.
- A College community that is committed to supporting the *spiritual and faith development of students, staff and parents*.
- A College that continues to employ *professional, passionate and highly competent* teachers and support staff. Staff members who are highly trained, who love teaching or working in the secondary school, and who love working with young people, and with each other.
- A staff that has a *deep knowledge* and comprehensive understanding of *differentiation and higher order thinking*. A staff that engages in creative delivery and critical reflection on content, process and product to facilitate the learning needs and interests of students.
- A College that has a *culture of learning*, engaging students in a wide variety of learning strategies that encourages students' enjoyment of learning and equipping them with skills to be successful learners
- A College that continues to be *innovative*, using contemporary resources such as ICT to improve learning outcomes.
- A College whose members are *full of hope for the future, confident in themselves and striving for continual, sustainable school improvement*. A community which advocates for the school.
- A College that *maximizes school improvement* by *strategic alignment of resources*. A college that continues to care for and preserve its resources.
- A College that creatively delivers *professional development*, ensuring a *balanced approach*, minimising interruption to student learning and routine
- A College whose members continue to *share a high level of trust, acting collaboratively and offering mutual support*
- A College that sets high expectations, where students are *challenged to take responsibility for their learning and to work harder and smarter*.
- A College community fully engaged in *promoting well-being, resilience, persistence* and which continues to challenge students to be *independent and interdependent learners*. A

community that develops effective habits of learning to enhance problem solving, to maximise student potential and to *promote life-long learning*.

- A College that *promotes the role of parents* in knowing, understanding and sharing in the education of their daughter, ensuring structures and processes are in place to *support parent involvement*.

To achieve this vision, the college addressed the recommendations and commendations from its self-review. It established a self-generating model of annual auditing and ongoing reflection as the college community recognised the importance of taking responsibility for its own quality assurance.

The college invested resources in analysing results, setting targets for the following year and applying targeted intervention strategies which were developed from a 'think tank' involving staff and students.

There was an investment in resources in professional development focussing on pedagogy and creating a culture of learning by exploring 'thinking curriculum', differentiation' and 'gifted education'. Professional development was delivered using a variety of models, including engaging an on-site professional learning facilitator and establishing a cross-curricular professional learning team to support school-wide engagement in professional development. These professional development models were documented as part of an AGQTP action research project. To ensure sustainability of this culture of learning a comprehensive staff induction process was implemented

Staff members were also encouraged to engage in marking public examinations, and as a result joined examination committees, accepted posts as senior markers and judge markers for the HSC.

Fortuitously, the college was constructing and refurbishing learning spaces concurrently with the changes in pedagogy that the school-wide professional development was bringing about. As a result, the design of these new learning spaces allowed for maximum flexibility in teaching and learning and for the innovative use of ICT.

Independent and interdependent learning of staff and students was reinforced through the establishment of a culture of taking responsibility for one's own learning. Student leadership was developed empowering students to make decisions about and to take responsibility for their own learning. The college also created opportunities for leadership development for staff with mentors for younger staff, as well as creating opportunities for models of shared leadership and distributing the leadership within the college.

Within a few years, there was evidence of improvement, which the college community celebrates and which is publicly recognised. Evidence of this improvement includes:

- Academic performance significantly improved. Students achieving learning gains in all subject areas, students attained first place in the state in a number of courses, students achieved premier awards and the college was recognized in the media for academic excellence.
- The success of OLSH and the development of a culture of learning was reported recently in 'About Catholic Schools' in an article titled "Culture of Learning and Student success".
- The college is visited regularly to view the innovative use of ICT to support student learning, distributive leadership and processes in strategic planning.
- College administration acknowledges, is receptive to, and acts upon student initiatives, which are now having an impact on curriculum offerings, cross-curricular initiatives and the College Annual Plan.
- The College has a substantial waiting list in all year groups with enrolments at maximum capacity.

The efforts at OLSH are directed towards practical interpretation of the CEO Learning Framework and the research findings upon which it is based, so that outcomes from this implementation can be repeated and built upon, to the benefit of the community of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, and that of others travelling the same path.

Conclusion

Teaching has always been a challenging profession. The sense of challenge is particularly acute today as we negotiate the educational context. Teachers in classrooms face an increasingly diverse range of students with the expectation of achievement for all. In the past we

educated about 20-25% of students for what Darling Hammond calls 'thinking work', now the demand is for us to assist all students to learn about learning. At the same time the last two decades of the twentieth century have produced revolutionary insights into how human beings learn challenging long held beliefs and practices.

Reconceptualising pedagogy to meet the learning needs of the neomillennials in schools in the first part of the twenty-first century is not about identifying a set of generic practices or a set of technical steps that teachers simply implement. Rather it is about viewing teachers as 'bricoleurs' making professional decisions about the assemblages of practices informed by their knowledge of the learners, their content knowledge and their beliefs about learning.

In some educational circles it would seem that the more the paradigm fails to work the more we try to make it work, we polish yesterday's paradigm (Peters 1999). The call goes out for 'back to basics', more testing, teacher-proof programs when in reality we need a new paradigm. The Sydney Catholic Education Office accepts the challenge and the opportunity to redesign pedagogy to ensure the educational mission meets the needs of the learners who will shape the world in the 21st century.

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