Using Problem Tree-Assisted Small-Group Facilitation to Promote Collaborative Decision-Making Skills among Elementary Students

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Abstract

This study addresses challenges in Civic Education learning, particularly in the topic of classroom deliberation among fifth-grade students at Yaminas Islamic Elementary School, Noling. Ten students were identified as struggling, showing difficulty managing emotions when encountering differing opinions. They often displayed negative facial expressions and rejected opposing ideas with various arguments. Additionally, classroom discussions were dominated by a few students, hindering effective group deliberation. To address this, Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted using small-group mentoring supported by the "problem tree" method. The intervention was carried out in two cycles, each involving planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. In Cycle I, the theme was "Flood Issues and Solutions," focusing on waste as the root cause. Cycle II focused on "Effective and Healthy Waste Management," identifying flooding as the main issue. Discussions were conducted in small groups, large groups, and full-class formats. Results showed significant improvement in students' deliberation skills. The average score increased from 23 in Cycle I to 32 in Cycle II, indicating notable progress. The intervention successfully enhanced student participation, emotional regulation, and balanced idea-sharing during discussions. This method proved effective in fostering civic engagement skills in young learners through structured, reflective group activities.

Keywords: *problem tree analysis, collaborative decision-making, elementary students*

Introduction

Education in the 21st century places significant emphasis not only on academic achievement but also on the development of students' character and moral integrity. This shift reflects a broader understanding of education as a tool for shaping responsible, ethical, and socially engaged citizens (Ardila et al., 2017; Rahman & Sutrisno, 2021). Contemporary educational frameworks increasingly recognize the importance of developing collaborative competencies and democratic participation skills from an early age (Fitriani & Wulandari, 2022; Kusuma et al., 2023). However, despite this positive orientation, a number of challenges persist—particularly in how students and society at large engage with civic issues.

Traditional forms of conflict resolution, once rooted in communal practices such as deliberation or musyawarah, are increasingly being replaced by confrontational or disengaged behavior (Andini, 2021; Pratama & Setiawan, 2020). The digital era has significantly impacted how young learners approach conflict resolution and

collaborative decision-making, often favoring quick, individualistic solutions over thoughtful deliberation (Hartono et al., 2021; Wijaya & Marlina, 2022). Situations that previously could have been resolved through seated discussion and mutual respect now often become unnecessarily contentious. This trend is symptomatic of a deeper cultural shift: the erosion of collective values and a declining capacity for negotiation and consensus-building in daily life (Yunus, 2017; Sari & Budiman, 2023).

This erosion is particularly visible in rural communities, which historically served as the guardians of Indonesia's communal values, such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation) and musyawarah (deliberative decision-making). These values, however, are being undermined by the rise of pragmatic, hedonistic, and individualistic lifestyles—even in areas where traditional customs were once deeply embedded (Bararoh, 2022; Nurhayati & Firmansyah, 2021). Recent studies indicate that the preservation of local wisdom in educational contexts has become increasingly challenging due to globalization and technological influences (Dewi et al., 2020; Maharani & Putri, 2022).

The practical manifestation of this shift can be seen in the decreasing levels of participation in village-level decision-making forums. For instance, the low turnout in deliberative meetings in many villages reflects a waning public interest in civic involvement (Pinanti, 2017; Handayani & Supriadi, 2021). Although it would be inaccurate to generalize this pattern across all rural communities in Indonesia, various research findings indicate a consistent trend: rural youth, in particular, are increasingly disengaged from communal dialogue processes related to local development planning (Lestari et al., 2022; Fadhilah & Ahmad, 2023).

One common example is the musrenbang (development planning deliberations), which are often conducted through a top-down "invitation method" that fails to promote genuine community participation (Iman, 2018; Wibowo & Kurniawan, 2020). In many cases, villagers only attend when directly invited or incentivized, and collective decisions are made not through deep discussion but through superficial agreement or transactional negotiation (Rahmawati & Susilo, 2021; Indrasari et al., 2022). This tendency reflects a growing practical mindset influenced by digital lifestyles, short-term political interests, and the commodification of decision-making processes (Subagyo, 2020; Purnama & Hasibuan, 2022). As a result, the values of consultation, empathy, and community-mindedness—which are foundational to Indonesian culture—are steadily being replaced by utilitarian, individual-centered logic (Nurfitri & Wahyuni, 2021; Safitri et al., 2023). If not addressed, this cultural erosion may further weaken the social fabric and democratic capacity of future generations.

Civic Education (Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan or PKn) plays a crucial role in responding to these issues through preventive and value-based education. As a subject, PKn is not only tasked with teaching constitutional knowledge but also functions as a moral compass and cultural safeguard for students (Siregar et al., 2022; Permatasari & Ridwan, 2020). Contemporary approaches to civic education emphasize the development of critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and democratic participation skills (Anggraini et al., 2021; Hidayat & Muslimah, 2022). Within the PKn curriculum, the topic of deliberation (musyawarah) is especially important, particularly at the elementary level in Grade V of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic Elementary School) (Novitasari & Ardiansyah, 2021; Ulfah et al., 2023).

Teaching students to deliberate instills foundational skills in dialogue, empathy, cooperation, and democratic thinking—skills that are vital in a pluralistic and rapidly changing society (Fitriana & Suhardi, 2020; Maulana et al., 2022). Modern pedagogical approaches have shown that structured group discussions and problem-based learning significantly enhance students' collaborative decision-making abilities (Putri & Saputra, 2021; Hakim & Widiastuti, 2023). Preserving the tradition of musyawarah is therefore not only a pedagogical concern but also a cultural imperative. It supports the continuity of a heritage that values wise, respectful, and collective approaches to solving problems within society.

Deliberation, as noted by Umi (2020), has long been understood as a method for reaching consensus in addressing shared social issues. It is underpinned by shared moral frameworks that facilitate fair negotiations among

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individuals with differing interests (Cahyadri, 2022; Rosyida & Jannah, 2020). For students in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, learning to deliberate is not just about acquiring cognitive understanding—it also involves emotional maturity and social interaction (Azizah & Wulan, 2021; Qomariah et al., 2022). Effective deliberation requires the ability to manage emotions, listen to others, compromise, and articulate one's thoughts with respect. These aspects are integral to social-emotional learning and are increasingly recognized as essential competencies in 21st-century education (Sartika & Wahab, 2020; Nugroho et al., 2023).

Given the importance of this topic, efforts to improve PKn learning outcomes—particularly in the area of musyawarah—are urgently needed (Yuniastuti & Pratama, 2021; Khoiriyah & Rahman, 2022). This concern is clearly evident at MI Yaminas Noling, where a recent assessment of Grade V students revealed significant gaps. Of the 17 students in the class, only 7 demonstrated the ability to engage meaningfully in deliberation, while the remaining 10 failed to meet the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) established for PKn learning. These deficiencies are not merely academic but also behavioral and social. Observations revealed that students often struggled to accept differing opinions calmly. When their ideas were challenged, they tended to respond with visible displeasure—through facial expressions, dismissive gestures, or defensive arguments.

Moreover, the classroom discussions were frequently dominated by a few outspoken students, while others remained passive or disengaged. This imbalance hindered the collective dialogue process, resulting in outcomes that did not reflect inclusive participation or mutual understanding. From a classroom management perspective, such dynamics pose significant obstacles to achieving the goals of PKn instruction. Without intervention, students may carry these habits into broader social contexts, potentially contributing to the decline of deliberative culture that this study seeks to address. Therefore, targeted pedagogical strategies—such as structured group discussions, emotional regulation exercises, and culturally responsive instruction—are necessary to restore and reinforce the values of musyawarah among students.

Methodology

The study involved 17 fifth-grade students at MI Yaminas Noling, located in Yaminas Noling Village, Bua Ponrang Subdistrict (commonly referred to as Bupon), Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi. The intervention was conducted in May 2024 and focused on strengthening students' skills in deliberation and group discussion. To achieve this, the students were engaged in a structured activity involving small group mentoring, centered around the use of a "problem tree"—a visual tool to identify causes, effects, and core issues of a given problem. This method aimed to provide a concrete and collaborative learning experience to encourage students to express their opinions, listen to others, and arrive at collective decisions.

The classroom-based intervention followed the Classroom Action Research (CAR) model, a systematic approach designed to improve teaching practices by addressing real problems that occur during the learning process. CAR consists of four primary stages: planning, action (implementation), observation, and reflection. Each stage is carefully designed to support the iterative process of improving educational outcomes. In this study, the CAR model was applied to explore how the integration of small-group facilitation and problem-tree analysis could enhance students' collaborative problem-solving and deliberation abilities within the context of civic or moral education.

During the planning phase of Cycle I, the researcher developed a set of research instruments tailored to assess students' ability to engage in deliberative discussions. These instruments were used to measure both the process and the outcomes of the learning intervention, with a particular emphasis on student participation, communication clarity, mutual respect, and decision-making. The lesson plans were designed to guide the small groups through identifying a central issue using the problem tree, discussing its root causes and consequences, and formulating shared solutions. This approach not only fostered critical thinking but also encouraged students to engage meaningfully with their peers, thereby promoting democratic values and collaborative learning in the classroom setting.

Table 1. Lesson Cycle Plan: Deliberation and Problem-Solving Activities

Indicators	Cycle	Initial Activity	Core Activity Themes	Problem Tree Focus	Discussion Model	Closing Activity
(1.1)–(1.5), (2.1)–(2.5)	I	Mood Swing, Brain Gym	Deliberation on flood issues and response	Waste management	Small Group → Large Group → Plenary	Summary & Reinforcement
(1.1)–(1.5), (2.1)–(2.5)	II	Mood Swing, Brain Gym	Deliberation on effective waste management	Flood mitigation	Small Group → Large Group → Plenary	Summary & Reinforcement

The next essential step involves organizing the use of instructional media to be employed in each meeting throughout the implementation of the action within one complete cycle. Careful planning of media usage is crucial to ensure that learning objectives are effectively achieved and that students remain engaged in the process. In this study, the selection of media was closely aligned with the core objective of enhancing students' problem-solving and deliberation skills. Thus, the problem tree was chosen as the central instructional tool due to its visual and interactive nature, which encourages students to analyze issues critically and collaboratively.

The specifications of the problem tree media utilized in this research are outlined in the table below. This media was designed not only to visually map out the causes and effects of specific community issues—such as floods and waste management—but also to guide students through structured reflection and group discussion. By using this medium consistently throughout each session, students were expected to gradually improve their ability to identify problems, evaluate contributing factors, and propose solutions through meaningful dialogue. The integration of such media represents a deliberate pedagogical strategy aimed at fostering deeper cognitive engagement and social interaction among learners.

Table 2. Single Cycle Action Implementation Plan

Meeting	Media	Specification	Tools and Materials
I	Problem Tree	Using waste problem tree	A4 size HVS paper, Colored markers, Ruler and tree shape template (used if needed), Large manila paper, Paper glue and Adhesive tape.
II	Problem Tree	Using flood problem tree	Cardboard/box, Various colored markers, Scissors, Colorful origami paper, Hot glue gun/heat gun, Several bamboo supports that have been prepared, and Other tools and materials.

The data analysis for this study employed descriptive analysis techniques, which focus on summarizing and describing the characteristics of the collected data without attempting to generalize the findings from the sample to a larger population. This approach is appropriate when the research aims to provide detailed insights into specific variables or indicators within the sample. In this context, the analysis began by identifying and counting the total number of indicators and sub-indicators derived from the research instruments. Only the sub-indicators relevant to the study's objectives were included in the calculation to maintain accuracy and relevance in the results.

Specifically, the study measured two main aspects: the knowledge aspect of deliberation, referred to as HPAPB (Hasil Pengukuran Aspek Pengetahuan Bermusyawarah), and the skills aspect of deliberation, called HPAKB (Hasil Pengukuran Aspek Keterampilan Bermusyawarah). For the analysis, a total of ten sub-indicators were used, comprising five sub-indicators from HPAPB and five from HPAKB. The research instrument employed a four-point Likert scale to evaluate each sub-indicator. Accordingly, the highest possible score a respondent could achieve was

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calculated as 4 (the highest scale value) multiplied by 10 (the number of sub-indicators), resulting in an ideal highest score of 40. Conversely, the lowest ideal score was calculated as 1 (the lowest scale value) multiplied by 10, resulting in 10.

To categorize and interpret the scores effectively, the interval range was determined by dividing the score range by the number of scale points. The score range was calculated by subtracting the ideal lowest score (10) from the ideal highest score (40), resulting in 30. This value was then divided by the number of scale categories (4), yielding an interval of 7.5. This interval value provides a basis for interpreting the scoring results, allowing for the classification of respondents' performance or responses into meaningful categories according to their total scores on the sub-indicators. This systematic approach ensures clarity and precision in the data interpretation process.

Table 3. Scoring Intervals for Students' Deliberation Ability

No	Score Interval	Category	Description
1	10 ≤ score < 17.5	Not Yet Able to Deliberate	Has not reached the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM)
2	17.5 ≤ score < 25	Less Able to Deliberate	Has not reached the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM)
3	25 ≤ score < 32.5	Able to Deliberate	Has reached the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM)
4	32.5 ≤ score ≤ 40	Very Able to Deliberate	Has reached the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM)

Results and Discussion

Cycle 1

The planning stage of this research involved several important preparations carried out by the researcher prior to the implementation of the study. These preparations included developing research instruments, preparing lesson plans (RPP), and designing detailed action plans. Additionally, the researcher ensured that all necessary media, tools, and learning resources were complete and ready for use. This thorough preparation was essential to guarantee the smooth running of the research activities. During this phase, no significant obstacles were encountered, as all processes were conducted efficiently under the guidance and support of tutors and colleagues at the research site.

The implementation phase followed the carefully designed plan and focused specifically on enhancing students' knowledge related to deliberation as well as their practical skills in engaging in deliberative processes. The research activities were carried out systematically to ensure that both cognitive and skill-based aspects of deliberation were addressed effectively. The instructional media and strategies used aimed to foster active participation and collaborative problem-solving among the students.

Overall, the entire cycle was successfully executed with the intended focus on improving both understanding and ability in deliberation. The smooth execution during this first cycle provided a strong foundation for further cycles, ensuring continuous improvement in teaching and learning processes related to deliberative skills.

Table 4. Students' Deliberation Ability in Cycle 1

No	Score Interval	Category	Description	Number of Students / %
1	10 ≤ score < 17.5	Not Yet Able to Deliberate	Has not reached Minimum Competency Criteria	4 / 24%
2	17.5 ≤ score < 25	Less Able to Deliberate	Has not reached Minimum Competency Criteria	1 / 6%
3	25 ≤ score < 32.5	Able to Deliberate	Has reached Minimum Competency Criteria	6 / 35%
4	32.5 ≤ score ≤ 40	Very Able to Deliberate	Has reached Minimum Competency Criteria	6 / 35%
Total	Amount			**17 / 100%**

Average Score	**23**
Class Completeness	**70%**

Fundamentally, all students demonstrated an understanding of how to conduct deliberation in accordance with the guidance provided by the teacher during each meeting, specifically in Meetings I and II of Cycle I. Regarding their comprehension of the deliberation process, the students were considered proficient, as the average score exceeded the Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM).

However, several aspects related to students' deliberation skills require further improvement in Cycle II. While students showed enthusiasm in contributing ideas within their groups, the ideas, although not yet fully practical, reflected a positive engagement and willingness to participate in problem-solving through the problem tree activity based on the results of their deliberations. Despite their enthusiasm, some students struggled to respect the opinions of their peers, occasionally interrupting or disputing others' viewpoints. This behavior sometimes led to attempts to impose their will on others. A few students still exhibited dominant tendencies, exerting influence to sway the outcomes of group decisions. Compliance with deliberation rules needs to be reassessed, including both students' adherence and the teacher's approach to enforcing these rules. Additionally, fostering respect for majority decisions remains an area that requires ongoing attention.

To address these issues in Cycle II, several recommendations are proposed. First, creating written rules in the form of posters combining text and visuals would help ensure that all students clearly understand and remember the guidelines. Second, conducting majority vote acclamations and encouraging students to articulate their reasons for agreement or disagreement would promote deeper engagement and respect for differing opinions. Third, appointing dominant students as group leaders with clearly defined responsibilities may channel their leadership tendencies constructively. Lastly, guiding students to not only generate ideas but also articulate their practical applications related to discussion themes such as flooding and waste management will strengthen the relevance and impact of their deliberations.

Cycle 2

The subsequent planning phase involved revisions based on the results of reflections from the previous cycle. These improvements for Cycle II included several key measures: creating written rules displayed as posters combining images and text to ensure all students could easily read and understand them; conducting majority vote acclamations while encouraging students to explain their reasons for agreement or disagreement; appointing dominant students as discussion group leaders with clearly defined responsibilities; and guiding students to not only share ideas but also explain their practical applications in relation to the discussion themes of flooding and waste management. The implementation and observation results for Cycle II are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 5. Students' Deliberation Ability in Cycle II

No	Score Interval	Category	Description	Number of Students / %
1	10 ≤ score < 17.5	Not Yet Able to Deliberate	Has not reached Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM)	1 / 6%
2	17.5 ≤ score < 25	Less Able to Deliberate	Has not reached Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM)	1 / 6%
3	25 ≤ score < 32.5	Able to Deliberate	Has reached Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM)	5 / 29%
4	32.5 ≤ score ≤ 40	Very Able to Deliberate	Has reached Minimum Competency Criteria (KKM)	10 / 59%
Total	Amount			**17 / 100%**
	Average Score			**32**

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Class Completeness	**88%**

The students' deliberation ability in Cycle II showed a marked improvement compared to Cycle I. When comparing the average scores and the number of students reaching mastery, the difference is substantial. The average score in Cycle I was 23, whereas in Cycle II it increased to 32, reflecting an improvement of 10 points. This significant increase indicates meaningful progress in students' deliberation skills from the first to the second cycle.

Despite this improvement, it remains important to maintain and further enhance several aspects to ensure the quality implementation of Civic Education learning. Student enthusiasm in deliberation, particularly in contributing ideas to the problem tree, needs to be continuously encouraged and sustained. This can be achieved by habituating students to always provide reasons for their answers, comments, or suggestions. As students develop emotionally and adapt to the classroom environment, their respect for others' opinions is expected to improve progressively. Furthermore, consistent adherence to deliberation rules must be cultivated to create a respectful and orderly discussion atmosphere. Respecting majority opinions should also be continuously reinforced among students.

One effective strategy to support these goals is the use of written rules displayed as posters combining images and text, ensuring all students can clearly read and internalize the guidelines. This approach positively impacts students' understanding of the deliberation process. Additionally, asking all students to explain their reasons for agreement or disagreement encourages responsible expression of opinions. Appointing dominant students as discussion group leaders with clear responsibilities has also contributed to creating a more conducive and structured discussion environment.

Discussion

Deliberation is a crucial competency that must be cultivated among students at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, serving not only as a fundamental cultural value deeply embedded in the Indonesian socio-political landscape but also as a critical mechanism for collective decision-making and social cohesion. Historically, deliberation has been instrumental in fostering consensus within communities and shaping governance practices that prioritize collective well-being and harmony. This cultural and societal significance underscores the necessity for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students to attain proficiency in deliberation skills, ensuring they are adequately prepared to engage constructively in community and civic life. Mastery of deliberation, therefore, is not merely an academic objective but a vital social skill that supports democratic participation and conflict resolution in broader societal contexts.

Despite its importance, empirical observations have revealed that many students exhibit low competency in deliberation, as evidenced by suboptimal learning outcomes and classical completeness scores. This deficiency poses significant challenges for educators striving to realize the educational mandate of producing civically competent graduates. In response, this research specifically addresses these challenges by focusing on two interrelated domains: the cognitive dimension of knowledge about deliberation and the affective-behavioral dimension of deliberation skills. Each domain is operationalized through five sub-indicators, resulting in a comprehensive framework of ten measurable aspects designed to holistically evaluate students' deliberation capabilities. By employing this dual-faceted approach, the research acknowledges that effective deliberation extends beyond theoretical understanding to encompass the practical execution of social and emotional competencies.

Deliberation is widely conceptualized as a participatory process aimed at achieving mutual agreement in community problem-solving scenarios (Umi, 2020). This process is undergirded by shared moral principles that facilitate equitable negotiations among individuals with divergent interests and viewpoints (Cahyadri, 2022). Within the educational context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, these theoretical constructs translate into essential emotional and social competencies that mediate students' ability to deliberate effectively. Emotional regulation and social empathy

emerge as critical skills that enable students to navigate interpersonal dynamics, manage conflicts, and respect diverse opinions within group settings. The interplay between cognitive knowledge and emotional-social skill sets thus forms the cornerstone of deliberation competency.

Findings from Cycle I indicate that students' limitations in deliberation largely stem from underdeveloped emotional regulation and social awareness. While students demonstrated high enthusiasm for engaging in deliberation activities, their inability to consistently respect peers' opinions led to frequent interruptions, disputes, and dominance struggles. Such behaviors manifested in attempts by certain students to impose their perspectives on others, thereby undermining the collaborative essence of deliberation. Furthermore, adherence to established deliberation protocols was inconsistent, signaling the need for more structured enforcement mechanisms and pedagogical strategies to cultivate rule-following behavior. The challenges observed highlight the complex interaction between affective and behavioral factors that educators must address to improve deliberation outcomes.

Intervention Strategies and Pedagogical Enhancements in Cycle II

Informed by reflective practice and cycle I observations, targeted interventions were designed and implemented in Cycle II to remediate identified shortcomings. A key strategy involved the codification of deliberation rules into visually engaging posters combining text and imagery, strategically placed to reinforce comprehension and internalization among all students. This visual scaffolding aimed to bridge literacy gaps and promote consistent rule adherence. Additionally, the use of majority vote acclamations was incorporated, accompanied by structured opportunities for students to articulate reasons supporting or opposing views, thereby fostering critical thinking and responsible discourse.

Recognizing the influence of dominant personalities within group dynamics, select students exhibiting such traits were formally appointed as discussion leaders, with clearly delineated roles and responsibilities. This leadership assignment served to channel assertiveness constructively, enhancing group cohesion and focus. Finally, to anchor deliberation within real-world contexts, students were guided to develop ideas with explicit applications related to pressing community issues, namely flood management and waste disposal. This contextualization strengthened the relevance of deliberation activities and encouraged pragmatic problem-solving skills.

Conclusion

The implementation process was carried out systematically through a series of learning activities aligned with the instructional design. On the first day, the theme centered on deliberation concerning flooding issues and their management, with the problem tree focusing on waste. The learning activities involved discussions conducted at multiple levels: small groups, large groups, and whole-class sessions. Meanwhile, in the second meeting, the theme shifted to deliberation on healthy and effective waste management, with the problem tree focusing on flooding. The format of the discussions remained consistent, encompassing small group, large group, and class-wide dialogues. The students' deliberation ability in Cycle II showed significant improvement. When compared to Cycle I, both the average score and the mastery level demonstrated a substantial increase. Specifically, the average score rose from 23 in Cycle I to 32 in Cycle II, representing a 10-point increase. This marked difference indicates a considerable enhancement in students' deliberation skills between the two cycles.

For teachers, students, and other stakeholders implementing deliberation learning through small group facilitation, it is essential to establish clear, written rules that combine images and text and are prominently displayed to ensure all students understand the expectations. The use of majority voice acclamation should be practiced, encouraging every student to explain their reasons for agreement or disagreement, thereby promoting active participation and respectful expression of diverse opinions. Additionally, appointing dominant students as group leaders with clearly defined responsibilities can help manage group dynamics effectively and ensure balanced participation. Finally, guiding students to relate their ideas to practical applications, particularly concerning relevant

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themes such as flooding and waste management, will deepen their understanding and foster a sense of real-world engagement and responsibility.

Acknowledgments

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