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ABSTRACT

The emerging middle school movement throughout the United States today is in part an effort to rediscover, redefine, revamp, and reintroduce the basic pedagogical principles of adolescent learning upon which the junior high school was established almost seventy years ago. Proponents of the middle school support the rationale that children 10 to 14 years old constitute a distinct stage of development involving similar physical, emotional, social, and mental characteristics. Since there are no specific or mandated middle school policies, many middle schools or transformed junior highs have the opportunity to become unique institutions. Individualized instruction and team teaching are two techniques that are successfully utilized. The uniqueness of the middle school is reflected in the various duties of the classroom teacher which may include serving as a teacher-advisor, resource person, tutor, curriculum planner, seminar director, and teacher of large and small group sessions. Middle schools have both the responsibility and the opportunity to develop career education for student investigation and exploration. When advance planning is possible, most school districts develop a step-by-step procedure or master plan for the construction of a new middle school building and the implementation of a middle school program within the facility. A preliminary planning questionnaire for a middle school action workshop and a general planning outline for a school district are provided in the appendixes. Also given is a list of selected research references.
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The Middle School: A Bridge Between Elementary and Secondary Schools

by Sylvester Kohut, Jr.

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What Research Says to the Teacher

The Middle School: A Bridge Between Elementary and Secondary Schools

by Sylvester Kohut, Jr.



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INTRODUCTION

The emerging middle school movement throughout the United States today is, in part, an effort to rediscover, redefine, revamp, and reintroduce the basic pedagogical principles of adolescent learning upon which the junior high school was originally established almost seventy years ago.

A middle school may be defined as the school which stands, academically, between elementary and high school, is housed separately (ideally in a building especially designed for this purpose), and offers at least three years of schooling beginning with either grade five or six. A middle school functions as a separate intermediate school that combines one or more of the elementary grades with the lower secondary grades, and there is general agreement among educational planners that the ninth grade should be omitted from all definitions of the middle school. (15)*

The establishment of a new middle school or the transformation of a junior high school to a middle school program or philosophy within a school district provides a unique opportunity for professional rededication and cooperation between elementary and secondary classroom practitioners. Unfortunately, studies indicate that this ongoing reorganization of the grades in the intermediate or middle schooling years has been attributed to such basic reasons as eliminating crowded conditions in other schools within a district, justifying the construction of a new building to the school board or voters, moving the ninth grade into the senior high school, and facilitating a desegregation plan or court order. Curricular and instructional reasons for developing a middle school program often seem to be cited as secondary criteria. (1, 19, 22, 44, 54)

*Numbers in parentheses appearing in the text refer to the Selected Research References beginning on page 26

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Many variables influence a middle school. Trausecke and Mooney identify the following as extremely important organizational considerations:

1. A middle school takes full cognizance of the dynamic physical, social, and intellectual changes that are occurring in young people during the 10- to 14-year-old span, and provides a program with the major purpose of creating a facilitative climate so that the transescent can understand himself and the changes that are occurring within and around him.

2. Middle schools generally locate the ninth grade, with the awesome influence of the Carnegie unit, in senior high school settings. The rationale supporting this decision is usually that ninth graders are more like tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students than like seventh and eighth grade students.

3. Middle schools provide opportunities for innovation. Such innovations might include team teaching, individualized instruction, flexible scheduling, and some form of continuous progress. Flexible rearrangements of time, space, materials, and people give evidence to the value of the true middle school.

4. Middle schools de-emphasize the sophisticated activities that are commonly found in the junior high school, such as marching bands, interscholastic athletics, and sophisticated dances. The program of activities which is provided permits each child to participate and is based on the personal development of the student rather than the enhancement of the school's prestige.

5. Middle schools provide opportunities for exploratory study and enrichment activities earlier than do conventional elementary schools.

6. Middle school instructional staffs combine the usual talents developed by teachers trained and oriented in the elementary school with the ability to specialize in a given field, so often a "characteristic" of a secondary teacher. (53)

Profile of the Middle Schooler

Proponents of the middle school support the rationale that children 10 to 14 years old constitute a distinct stage of development involving

similar physical, (47, 42) emotional and social, (17, 49, 48, 18, 8) and mental characteristics. (6)

Eichhorn introduces the term of "transescence": "Transescence is the stage of development which begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence." (17) On the average, the transescent child is taller and healthier than her/his group in past generations. Although performance does fluctuate, the transescent is an eager and able learner. While often displaying somewhat emotionally erratic, inconsistent, and unpredictable behavior, the transescent is highly dependent on peer group acceptance and praise rather than adult approval.

Grade Organization

According to a 1963-64 NEA survey (50), only 20 of 433 school systems reported schools organized on a grades 5-6-7 or 6-7-8 pattern. In 1967, Cuff (10) identified 599 middle schools in the United States, and in his 1967-68 survey, Alexander (1) identified 1,101 middle schools in the nation classified solely on the basis of grade organization. During 1969-70, Kealy (28) identified 2,298 operational middle schools. By 1976, based on grade organization and/or stated program philosophy, there will be over 5,000 middle schools throughout the nation.

Approximately 60 percent of middle schools include grades 6-7-8; 30 percent have a 5-6-7-8 vertical organization; and the remaining 10 percent include grades 4-5-6-7, 5-6-7, 6-7-8-9, or 4-5-6-7-8. (1) The most appropriate grade organization cannot be determined from the available research. According to Creek (9) and Ducas (12) sixth-grade pupils are more like seventh graders than fifth graders because of the early onset of puberty in most sixth and seventh graders, while fifth graders behave more like children than early adolescents. Ducas (12) and Myers (39) in separate studies concluded that ninth graders are more like tenth graders than eighth-grade pupils in terms of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual maturity. These studies would tend to support the 6-7-8 grade organization for the middle school, but other studies counter that it makes no significant difference to the educational achievement, (24) self-concept, (37) or attitude toward school (52) whether fifth- and/or sixth-grade pupils attend an elementary or a middle school. This is definitely an area in need of additional research.

In many districts a 6-7-8 grade organization is called a junior high and in other districts a 7-8-9 grade pattern is called a middle school. According to McGlasson, (34) because of this semantic confusion and labeling problem, the grade level organization and the actual title of a school building offer no real clues as to the real curricular program or educational philosophy. Therefore, educators must address the critical question, "What is a middle school program?"

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

In many states, aside from general standards and administrative guidelines, there is no specific or mandated middle school policy. Thereby, many new middle schools or transformed junior highs have the opportunity to become unique institutions. Regardless of the type of staffing pattern or the scope and sequence of the course offerings, the two most dominant innovative features involve some form of individualized instruction and team teaching. (1)

Individualized Instruction

An integral curricular component in the middle school is the *unipac*. Although it is called by many names, basically the unipac is an individualized learning package for student self-directed study requiring the use of a multi-media resource center or laboratory. The unipac, with many organizational formats is a teacher-constructed, subject-oriented, self-instructional unit containing an overview or introduction, general and specific learning objectives, content outline, student activities section, pre- and post-unit evaluation instruments, and additional requirements dictated by a particular discipline or the interests and abilities of the student. (14)

Many middle schools attempt to provide for individual differences to some degree by introducing minicourses in the curriculum, (13, 28) while some schools even incorporate phased elective course offerings in selected English and language arts programs. (30) The establishment of a minicourse program within the middle school is a refreshing alternative to the traditional or more conventional program. Minicourse offerings vary from three to twelve weeks in length, allowing the teacher and the student

sufficient time to investigate important topics selected from the pure social sciences, English, or related arts. Dupuis (13) suggests that most minicourse programs that falter do so because of a lack of commitment in terms of in-service training and continuous provisions for ongoing evaluation. His studies reveal that minicourse programs are justified because of their relevance to the "real life" curriculum, their flexibility in programming and scheduling, their tendency to encourage the use of teacher expertise and input, and their ability to meet the individual needs of adolescent learners.

Team Teaching

Team teaching maximizes teacher talent and provides opportunities for the interdisciplinary approach. The team usually provides services which include counseling, evaluating, diagnosing, teaching, and planning. Team members usually represent subject fields such as language arts, reading, social studies, mathematics, and science. (35)

Flexible and modular scheduling within the team teaching structures permits maximum planning and implementation by all team members. (21) Tobin, (51) concludes that in grades five and six teaming can be achieved by all teachers teaching all subjects who are cooperatively planning specific units as a group. While in grades seven and eight, the staff can group themselves into subject areas that cross grade lines or, as in grades five and six, group themselves by grade level and assist each other in all subjects regardless of teacher specialization. School specialists in guidance, art, music, physical education and recreation, industrial arts, vocational arts, modern foreign languages, and home economics should be included in teams or should be available to meet with all groups to assist in planning and assessment.

Some teams may be composed of all elementary certified teachers and other teams may be composed of all secondary school certified professionals. Of course, staff organization is often dependent upon district or state requirements. There is no available research indicating the most desirable staffing organization for team teaching in the middle school.

Smorgasbord of Instructional Practices

In Davis' survey middle school teachers demonstrated the use of more innovative practices when compared to junior high school teachers. In

terms of student educational and personal development factors, innovative teaching and organizational practices produce more beneficial results than traditional or conventional practices. (41) No two middle school programs are identical although independent and individualized instruction and team teaching are common middle school features. Innumerable instructional and modern teaching techniques are reflected in hundreds of middle school curriculum guides and brochures including small and large group instruction, closed circuit television, self-contained classrooms, intramural programs, flexible scheduling, videotaping and audio/feedback and storage units, special tutorial programs, interdisciplinary teaching, and partial and total departmentalization. (16, 32, 27, 4)

Koslick was essentially concerned with an analysis and comparison of the instructional modes employed by social studies teachers in middle and junior high schools. His study has ramifications for all middle and junior high school educators. Also a concern in his study was the effect of teacher certification upon the instructional modes employed in the classroom, the use of certain verbal behaviors on the part of both teachers and students, and the perceptions of junior and middle school teachers toward the middle school organizational philosophy, objectives, and goals. Statistical analysis of the results of his investigation reveal the following:

1. Middle school teachers did not display a use of instructional modes in the classroom that differed from those used by junior high teachers.
2. Middle school teachers did use significantly more eliciting verbal behaviors when teaching, compared to the junior high school teachers.
3. Middle school teachers with elementary certification displayed a greater use of a variety of classroom instructional modes compared to middle school teachers with secondary certification.

4. There was no significant difference between middle school and junior high school teachers in terms of understanding the philosophical purposes, goals, and actual practices of the middle school. (32)

Based on the results of his study, Koslick (32) recommends that teachers in all organizational plans should be encouraged to employ a variety of instructional modes in the classroom with special emphasis on the cognitive levels of examination and open exploration or discussion. Furthermore, school districts planning to introduce the middle school organizational scheme should provide a complete in-service program for teachers and parents so that everyone understands the basic intent of the new program.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF

The Teacher

The uniqueness of the middle school is reflected in the various duties of the classroom teacher which may include serving as a teacher-adviser, resource person, tutor, curriculum planner, seminar director, and teacher of large and small group sessions. The potential middle school educator must adequately demonstrate competencies that reveal special understandings, skills, and attitudes necessary in order to work successfully with the transescent in an open student-oriented climate. (38, 39) There is a definite need for expanded preservice and in-service programming for principals, teachers, counselors, and para-professionals within the middle school community. (5, 20) While the middle school movement represents a positive option for public school adolescent education in the United States, many educators have established middle school programs with almost complete disregard for preservice and in service training for faculty and staff. In-service workshops, summer seminars, and graduate level courses for the middle school and junior high school practitioner are of paramount importance in maintaining effective programs. (32, 46) Teachers should have the opportunity to identify specific curricular and instructional problems during in-service educational sessions and this should be the basis of investigation and study. A brief pre-workshop or pre-course questionnaire should provide valuable input for program planning as illustrated by a continuing education questionnaire from The Pennsylvania State University for prospective middle school workshop teachers. (See Appendix A.)

The Principal

If the traditional role of the teacher has changed within the emerging middle school, then the role of the principal has been drastically altered even more. As the educational leader of the school building, the principal in many middle schools actually serves as a part-time team member or subject matter resource person in addition to the more traditional duties involving management, finance, community and parent relations, supervising para-professionals and non-teaching staff, and teacher perfor-

mance, evaluation, and supervision. Bobroff, Howard, and Howard have investigated the professional preparation of principals and submit the following conclusion:

"... the principal of the junior high and middle school has seldom had specific training for the position. She/he clearly sees the need for such preparation and is particularly aware of the need for studying adolescent psychology and understanding the characteristics of this age group." (3)

Slate (43) suggests that a special training program for all middle school principals include a supervised internship based on performance objectives, use of simulation techniques, and definite plans for continued in-service training.

The Guidance Counselor

Because of the ambivalent natures and varying rates of maturation among emerging adolescents, they are good subjects for counseling services. Adolescents are more in need of and more receptive to the advantages gained from personal guidance than any other age group.

Lambrook (46) and Ryan (43) are critical of the lack of coursework in counseling and guidance in intermediate teacher training. Either in specific coursework or as part of their overall professional education, middle school teachers and teacher candidates should develop an understanding of the basic skills in counseling middle schoolers. This is of paramount importance because of the teacher-advisor role of the classroom teacher.

The counselor's duties must include close cooperation with the teaching teams since students in the middle school are now beginning to consider career choices. Therefore, middle schools have both the responsibility and the opportunity to develop career education for student investigation and exploration.

The career education program in the middle school is threefold:

1. Opportunities in the subject areas to investigate many of the major careers associated with each subject area.
2. Activities outside of organized instruction which can serve as investigative opportunities concerning careers—clubs, hobbies, sports, part-time jobs, and school projects.

3. Counseling, testing and educational planning in terms of self-concept, self-awareness and career choice. (50)

Recommendations based on Arhelger's research regarding guidance services for the adolescent are enlightening and reinforce the earlier findings of Wogaman: (55)

1. Teachers, parents, pupils, and other persons in the communities should have a greater share in planning the guidance programs of the junior high schools. Teachers should participate more extensively in planned guidance activities.

2. Counselors should be relieved of responsibility of an administrative or supervisory nature, including duties connected with attendance and discipline.

3. When the number of qualified guidance personnel has been increased and greater teacher participation in the guidance program has been assured, many schools may profitably give more emphasis to heretofore neglected sources of pupil information, such as, sociograms, autobiographies, and some types of tests.

4. Group guidance activities should be augmented and subsequently integrated with the entire curriculum. The schools should utilize community resources. (2)

Neher's survey of middle school teachers reveals the need for more counselor-teacher interaction especially in matters dealing with occupational information and methods used to teach it:

1. Since the middle school system of grade grouping is flexible and adaptable to various types of exploratory programs, a broad base of occupational information should be presented to children at this stage of educational development before they are channeled into some specific type of training program at the high school level.

2. More information should be available concerning each student's occupational interests and abilities. Many kinds of career kits, tests, and even computer aids are available to ascertain the occupational aptitudes of students. The resulting data should be recorded in the cumulative records and made available to each teacher and counselor.

3. Curriculum revisions should be continuous, so that subject matter is not static or outdated, and so that it can be enriched to fit students' needs, abilities, and interests. Occupational changes related to subject matter should be considered in current curriculum studies.

4. Occupational literature and materials should be more widely avail-

able in the library, guidance departments, and classrooms. Additional occupationally oriented programmed learning units, textbooks, career kits, games, audio visual aids, and literature could be a valuable supplement to each teacher's course content.

5. Teachers would be well advised to place more emphasis on employment facts and attitudes, requirements, skills, and wages associated with the cluster of occupations related to their subject areas.

6. Follow-up studies should be made available concerning each former student's occupational history. Repeated changes in a choice of occupations following graduation may indicate a lack of occupational information and preparation. Recent graduates should be used as resource speakers to discuss problems in employment and the importance of completing high school training.

7. An increasing number of courses and workshops in occupational information should be offered to middle school teachers. Career oriented programs should be developed with supervisors and teachers of nearly all subject areas involved in the planning.

8. There is an indication of a need for more coordination between the counselors and middle school teachers in the exchange of occupational materials and information concerning individual student's specific occupational interests and abilities. It would also be advantageous to increase the number of conferences between parents, teachers, and counselors concerning students' occupational possibilities. (40)

EVALUATION

In this age of accountability it is not advisable to invest time, money, and energy into an educational enterprise unless an ongoing assessment and evaluation is provided that is based on established objectives and clear-cut goals.

Hines provides the following list of hypotheses for longitudinal research concerning all aspects of the middle school movement:

1. Pupils in the middle school become more self-directed learners than pupils in the control (traditional) schools.
2. Pupils in the middle school will have fewer and/or less intense social and psychological problems than pupils in conventional schools.
3. Achievement of middle school pupils on standardized tests will

equal or exceed that of pupils in conventional schools.

4. Middle school pupils will achieve as well as or better on standard measures of physical fitness and health as pupils in conventional schools.

5. Pupils in the middle school will hold more favorable attitudes toward school and schooling than will pupils in conventional schools.

6. Middle school pupils will hold more adequate self-concepts than will pupils in the conventional schools.

7. Social acceptance among middle school pupils will be higher than among those in conventional schools.

8. The average daily attendance record of middle school pupils will excel that of pupils in conventional schools.

9. Measures of creativity among middle school pupils will show an increase rather than a decrease during middle school years.

10. Middle school graduates will compile better academic and social records in the ninth grade than will ninth-graders from the control schools.

11. Middle school graduates will drop out less frequently from senior high school than will pupils who follow the traditional pattern.

12. Middle school teachers will more often use practices which experts generally recommend as superior.

13. Teachers in the middle school will experience a higher degree of professional and self-satisfaction than teachers in conventional schools.

14. Teachers in the middle school will utilize greater variety of learning media than will teachers in conventional schools.

15. Teacher turnover will be less in the middle school than in conventional schools.

16. Teachers in the middle school will be more open to change.

17. Teacher absences will be less frequent than in conventional schools.

18. Patrons of the middle school will hold more positive attitudes toward objectives and procedures of the school than patrons of conventional schools.

19. Principals of experimental and control schools will have similar operating patterns within each school system. (26)

While Hines' hypotheses are suitable for legitimate and scholarly study, Georgiady and Romano (23, 41) provide less scientific criteria but an equally important practical checklist for evaluating a middle school program:

- Is continuous progress provided for?
- Is a multi-materials approach used?
- Are class schedules flexible?
- Are appropriate social experiences provided for?
- Is there an appropriate program of physical experiences and intramural activities?
- Is team teaching used?
- Is planned gradualism provided for?
- Are exploratory and enrichment studies provided for?
- Are there adequate and appropriate guidance services?
- Is there provision for independent study?
- Is there provision for basic skill repair and extension?
- Are there activities for creative experiences?
- Is there full provision for evaluation?
- Does the program emphasize community relations?
- Are there adequate provisions for student services?
- Is there sufficient attention to auxiliary staffing?

TRANSITION FROM JUNIOR HIGH TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

With the construction of many new middle schools and given the growing enthusiasm for this movement, there is a widespread feeling among some zealous middle school advocates that the junior high school is obsolete and antiquated. This is a false and unsupported assumption. Although the physical environment is important in the middle school—and everyone enjoys air-conditioning, carpets, and soft music in the halls, some of the most successful middle school programs have been implemented in old junior high school buildings with little or no renovation.

When advance planning is possible, most school districts develop a step-by-step procedure or master plan for the construction of a new middle school building and the implementation of a middle school program within the facility. The plan adopted by the Carlisle Area School District in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, represents a model middle school planning guide. (See Appendix B.) Depending on the time and resources available, a school district contemplating the transformation of a junior high school to a middle school normally develops a modification of this type of model or planning guide.

CONCLUSION

Generalizations suggested to teachers by middle school research indicate some definite trends:

1. While the 6-7-8 grade re-organization is the most common pattern, there is no available research to support any one kind of grade organization.

2. Although there are some conflicting studies, most middle school students show improvement in achievement, self-concept, and attitude toward school when exposed to innovations associated with the middle school program or when compared to students enrolled in more traditional learning programs or junior high schools.

3. There is a definite need for more pertinent research related to all facets of the middle school program in terms of curriculum, instruction, and communication.

4. There is a definite need for expanded middle school oriented preservice and in-service teacher training.

5. Middle school teachers seem to demonstrate the use of more student oriented modes of instruction and learning strategies and actually implement more innovative techniques in the classroom, when compared to teachers in more conventional junior high schools.

The middle school represents a refreshing and viable alternative to the modern educator desiring a meaningful voice in the destiny of her/his students academic experiences. With improved teacher preparatory programs at both the undergraduate and graduate level (46) and relevant preservice and in-service teacher training, the middle school teacher will be better prepared for successful teaching.

The middle school is now a reality. It has finally emerged as possibly the most exciting educational enterprise in decades, for educators and students alike.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

The Pennsylvania State University (29)
Continuing Education
Delaware County Campus

MIDDLE SCHOOL ACTION WORKSHOP PRELIMINARY PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRE

Years of Professional Teaching Experience
Years of Middle School Teaching Experience
Total Credit of Graduate Level Course Work in the Middle School

The generic statements refer to curricular and instructional concerns, educational community cooperation, communication dynamics, and psychological aspects of middle school teaching.

DIRECTIONS *Select and rank in order of your professional priority the topics which should be included in an action workshop for middle school practitioners. Rank the topics from 1 through 18. The most important topic should be ranked 1 and the least important 18.*

Identification, construction, implementation, and evaluation of individualized learning materials and activities

Open education

Interdisciplinary planning and cooperation

Organization of a nongraded, continuous progress program

Curricular innovations in the separate subjects

Interaction analysis and systematic observation—improving classroom climate

Behavioral objectives and competency-based instruction

Responsibilities of the administrator, teacher, paraprofessional, student, and parent

Staffing patterns and organizational grouping of teachers and students

Writing research grants for middle school teacher-oriented programs

Junior high school—friend or foe

Trends and exemplary programs in the middle school movement

Community participation—a public relations task

Introduction to the middle school—theory and practice

Psychology of the adolescent learner

Teacher as the counselor

Physical and emotional growth of the adolescent learner

Certification requirements for the middle school teacher—elementary or secondary orientation

Identify other major topics and activities which should be included in a middle school action workshop from your professional viewpoint on back of form

APPENDIX B

MIDDLE SCHOOL(S) (7)
General Planning Outline
Carlisle Area School District

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Area of Concern</i> | <i>Activity</i> | <i>Personnel</i> | <i>Leader(s)</i> |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|
| 1974-75 | Middle School Philosophy for Carlisle (Curricular and Instructional Patterns) | Read Visit Discuss Propose Alternatives | Board Central Office Teachers (6-7-8) Architect Consultant(s) Patrons Students Elementary and Secondary Administrators | Associate JHS Principal |
| 1975-76 | Educational Specifications A. Objectives B. Instructional Organization C. Curriculum D. Facilities | Committee | Teachers (6-7-8) Central Office Architect Students Patrons Consultant(s) | Middle School Principal |
| 1976-77 | Community Information Facilities | PTA Newspaper Clubs Begin construction | Board Members Staff Architect Contractor | Communications Coordinator Architect |

| | | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1976-77 (Cont) | Curricular Guidelines | Committee | Teachers (6-7-8) | Dept Chairperson & Coordinator |
| | Instructional Mode | Experimentation | Teachers (6-7-8) | Dept Chairperson & Coordinator |
| | Pupil Progress Reports | Committee | Teachers, Students and Parents | Middle School Principal (full-time) |
| | Daily Schedule | Committee | Teachers | Middle School Principal |
| | Athletic Program | Committee | Teachers, Students and Parents | Coordinator of Health, Physical Education |
| | Guidance | Committee | Counselors and Teachers | Coordinator |
| | Media Center | Committee | Teachers, Librarians & Students | Library Coordinator and Media Specialist |
| 1977-78 | Total Program | Simulation | Staff of Middle Schools | Middle School Principals (2) |
| | Parent Orientation | | Staff of Middle Schools | Middle School Principals and Communications Coordinator |
| 1978-79 | Open Middle Schools | | | |

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