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ABSTRACT

         The development and implementation of a program to
facilitate communication and improve working relationships between
elementary school staff members is described. Methodology involved
observation of inservice faculty training sessions and a participant
survey. The program was based on three components: a series of
faculty inservice workshops, additional team leader training, and
concrete communication mechanism adjustments. Findings indicate that
the level of communication and quality of collegial relationships
improved, but did not achieve program objectives. Recommendations are
made for increasing shared decision-making in the form of teacher-led
committees, awarding teacher recertification credit, and providing
flexible scheduling. Appendices include the survey, a list of need
indicators, program syllabus, and staff distribution. (24 references)
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IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIPS

WITHIN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STAFF

by

Carolyn E. Reynolds

A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the Advancement of Education at Nova University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Educational Specialist.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a National Database System for reference.

May, 1990

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Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Signed *Carolyn E. Reynolds*

ABSTRACT

Improving Communication and Collegial Relationships
Within an Elementary School Staff. Reynolds, Carolyn
F., 1990:   Practicum Report, Nova University, The
Center for the Advancement of Education.
Descriptors: Communication (Thought Transfer)/
Communication Research/Communication Skills/Group
Communication/Decision Group Dynamics/Effective Schools/
Group Behavior/Interpersonal Relationship/Leadership/
Listening/Organizational Climate/Organizational Culture/
Organizational Effectiveness/Problem Solving/Team
Training/

        The author developed and implemented a program to
facilitate communication and improve working
relationships between members of an elementary school
staff.   The program consisted of three three components:
1) a series of inservice workshops for faculty to
strengthen self- knowledge and understanding of others
and to introduce effective communication skills; 2)
additional training in team building for team leaders
and 3) concrete adjustments in communication
mechanisms.   The results were mixed.   The level of
communication and collegial relationships improved,
but not to the extent that had been set up in the
design objectives.   Appendices include communication
survey, list of indicators used as measure of need, and
outlines of inservice sessions and mechanical
improvements put in place.

CHAPTER I

Purpose

The setting for this practicum is an elementary school in a mid-sized county (150,000 pop.) on the west coast of Florida. The school is located in a middle to upper middle class neighborhood that has traditionally been considered a preferred school district. The homes in the community range in value from $75,000 to $200,000 with a sprinkling of more expensive homes. The majority of the student population of 700 comes from families in this income level. Recently, there has been an influx of students from a large apartment complex built near the school. The families of these students are more transient and slightly less affluent than the more permanent population. In addition, the target school has approximately seven percent Black and Hispanic students who are bussed in for integration purposes. The school is also home to one class of emotionally disturbed children who are mainstreamed into the regular classrooms, and two Pre-K handicapped units serving approximately 15 children.

The school structure, built in 1956, has been well

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maintained through the years, but is inadequate in size to accommodate the current population. Fourteen classes are presently housed in portables. A three million dollar renovation/enlargement project was begun in April, 1990 and is due for completion in late October.

The faculty is very well-trained and experienced. There are 38.5 teaching units and two administrative units in the building. (The organization of the staff is presented in Appendix A.) The staff also includes seven aides, three secretaries, five lunchroom workers and four custodians.

Among the teaching staff of 38.5 professionals, only three have taught less than three years. The average length of teaching experience for the faculty is 16 years. Twenty two have advanced degrees. Roughly 50 percent of the teachers have taught at the target school for 10 years or more. While this situation makes for a very stable staff; it also, in some instances, presents resistance to change and fosters isolation.

The writer of this paper has taught music in the district since 1968 and has been employed at the target school for the last nine years. The music

schedule includes 30 minutes of weekly instruction
for every class in the school, weekly group sings for
second and third grade classes, and choir and special
recorder classes for fourth and fifth grade students.
This schedule requires the music specialist to interact
with each of the classroom teachers weekly, as well as
working with them in preparing special programs for
school and P.T.A.

In addition, the writer serves as team leader for
all of the special area teachers--all those teaching
units not assigned to regular K-5 classes. An
additional assignment for the past four years has been
the construction of the master schedule for "rainbow"
classes (art, library, music and P.E.). Duties at the
target school have made the writer keenly aware of the
necessity for good communication between individuals,
between groups of individuals, and between
administration and staff in order for a school to
function effectively as an educational unit.

Although the target school deservedly enjoys an
excellent reputation in the community, it is presently
undergoing a period of change that is causing
considerable stress to the persons affected by it.
Evidence of such stress is apparent in the teachers at

the target school, especially those (including the writer), who have taught in those periods where the individual teacher had much more freedom teacher to structure the content and agenda of the classroom day. As more and more emphasis is placed upon achievement as reflected in test scores, teachers feel pressure to focus their attention on basic subjects. At the same time, outside forces (such as the state legislature) are requiring the inclusion of many extra areas of study into the curriculum. All teachers are feeling the pressure of too much material to cover in too little time.

Added to this pressure is the frustration felt by many of the school's teachers who now find themselves teaching a completely different type of student than those with whom they have previously dealt. Teachers are also encountering a generation of parents whose values are far different from their own in respect to educational practices. The old ways of dealing with problems are often ineffective. Accustomed to the traditional isolation of the individual classroom, teachers are often reluctant to seek solutions outside of themselves or the school office. Lack of effective

communication and collaborative efforts between and within different grade levels strengthened feelings of isolation and intensified the stress which inevitably accompanies any change.

Traditionally, teachers in the target school had secured information concerning school business in a weekly faculty meeting led by the principal. As the school staff increased in both size and in diversity of responsibilities, and as district assignment of extra duties necessitated the principal's spending more time off campus, the weekly meeting often become difficult to schedule. As a result, the need for an effective system of communicating with the school staff became more noticeable.

The principal, in an effort to improve communication and to involve faculty members in decisions requiring immediate responses, initiated a weekly team leaders meeting. Information was then relayed to faculty members by their representatives, and meetings involving the entire faculty were held less often (usually once a month). Although this system did provide teachers with some input (through their team leaders) into decisions affecting them, it did little to build esprit de corps. Information not

passing through this structured communication system
was usually transmitted by campus gossip. Those
teachers who were not privy to information lines simply
were not informed.

Also contributing to the communication problem
within the professional staff (the target group in this
practicum) was the lack of consensus as to a commonly
held educational goal or school mission. The younger
teachers who have become a part of the staff often hold
philosophical views concerning education that differ
from those held by some of the more mature personnel.
Lack of communication and understanding between those
holding differing views resulted in misunderstandings,
not only between individuals, but also between groups
of different persuasion.

In addition, there also seemed to exist among the
staff a general lack of knowledge as to the purposes
and functions of the support programs--the enrichment
programs (art, media, music, P.E.) and the Exceptional
Students Programs (emotionally handicapped, gifted,
pre-K handicapped, severe learning disabilities, and
speech). Consequently, many of the staff members
working in these areas often felt alienated. More
importantly, the scheduling of students into these

areas occasionally became a source of friction among
staff members.

All of the above problems—feelings of isolation,
misunderstandings arising from differences in educa-
tional philosophies and methods, and disputes over
the importance of different programs affected the
faculty morale, and consequently the students'
educational progress. Barth (1986) maintains that:

> the nature of the relationships among the adults
> who inhabit a school has more to do with a
> school's quality and character, the accom-
> plishments of its pupils, and the professionalism
> of its teachers than does any other factor. ——
> (p.122).

The psychic energies of the staff, which should be
centered on student learning, were being partially
depleted by the presence of the problems. This
situation resulted in decreased productivity by
teachers and students.

In an ideal situation an entire staff would reach
consensus concerning a schoolwide educational vision
(mission) for the school, and then work to make it a
reality. Each staff member's contribution to the
overall educational process would be understood and
appreciated. In addition, every school employee would
have immediate access to information necessary for
successful job performance. Communication would become

be a unifying force as well as an important link in the
school's performance system.

That such an ideal situation was not in place in
the target school was documented in a survey of the
professional staff of the school completed in March
1989. The survey, given district wide, was the New
York State Effective Schools Consortium Survey of
Professional Staff Perceptions of School Program
(NYS, 1987). The items in the survey are statements
relating to 11 characteristics which current research
shows are an essential part of effective schools.

Subjects were asked to rate each item as to its
importance, and the degree to which the condition
described in the item existed in the target school. A
mean discrepancy was then computed for each item. The
11 characteristics were rank ordered (1 through
10 in decreasing degree of their existence), as were
the individual items within each characteristic. The
result was a profile of the school, as perceived by the
professional staff, in relation to the effective
schools criteria. This profile was intended for use as
a planning tool by the school leadership team in its
efforts to effect school improvement.

After studying the results of the survey, the
principal organized a school improvement team
(S.I.T.), composed primarily of grade level team
leaders, to discuss and propose solutions for
schoolwide problems that the profile pinpointed. Lack
of a coordinated discipline policy and the evidence of
a poor school climate (especially faculty morale) were
the two areas that had, according to the survey,
generated most concern among the staff. As its first
task, the group undertook and successfully completed
the development and implementation of a schoolwide
discipline policy. Then the committee turned its
attention to the problem in the area of communication
and collegial relationships.

In reviewing the survey, the writer of this
paper (a member of the committee) found seven items
that seemed to be indicators of the level of
communication and collegial relationships within the
school, and consequently, of the school climate. A
tabulation of these items is included in Appendix B.
These items ranked from 0.43 to 1.21 below the desired
3.80 Existence Mean. (E.M.) The survey designers had
defined a 3.8 E.M. as a measure of the indicator being
in existence. The average E.M. of the seven items was

3.19.   The mean discrepancy (M.D.) between the
respondents' perception of the indicator's importance
and its existence ranged from 0.67 to 1.34 (average
M.D.=0.91).

Some steps were taken to improve the situation.
1) A weekly bulletin outlining activities for the
coming week's was prepared by the primary specialist
and distributed to the faculty. 2) The guidance
counselor provided teachers with a weekly memo that
reported status of students referred for placement in
special groups or programs. 3) The weekly grade level
team meetings were restructured so that they functioned
not only to conduct team business, but also to give
some feedback to the school improvement committee and
the administration.

In spite of these efforts, there still existed
many gaps in communication channels, especially
concerning matters that affected more than one grade
level. Many things simply did not get reported to the
bulletin editor. Even though some grade level teams
seemed to be more cohesive than in the past and began
to engage in some team-wide activities, all teams
continued to give evidence that they could benefit from
improving interpersonal skills.

In January, 1990 the New York Effective Schools
Survey (Kelly, 1988) was administered county wide for
the second time. In comparing results of this survey
with the 1989 survey, the writer discovered that while
the area of discipline had improved significantly, the
seven items concerned with communication and
collegiality showed no marked improvement. Comparison
of the individual items and of the composite scores for
both years is shown in Appendix C. The writer
initiated the practicum described in this report as
another attempt to find solutions to continuing
communication problems and to put into place strategies
that would provide strong and open communication
channels for the future.

The outcome objectives for this practicum fell into
two distinct categories: 1) attitudinal and 2)
practical.

> 1) It was the hope of the writer that a series of
>   staff development sessions would result in
>   members of the target group (the professional
>   staff) having a better understanding of them-
>   selves and their patterns of interacting with
>   others, as well as gaining an increased
>   appreciation (or at least tolerance) for other

individuals on the staff. Such attitudinal

changes should result in more productive team

meetings and planning endeavors.

2) By making further improvements to the

mechanisms of communication, the writer sought

to facilitate the transmission of clearer,

more timely information to all staff members.

Evidence that change had occurred would be

demonstrated by the following:

1) At the end of the implementation period,
    80 percent of the staff participating in
    the inservice training sessions will indicate
    a level of "C" (satisfactory) or better when
    completing a survey designed to ascertain the
    level of communication within the school and
    feelings concerning it.

2) When given a portion of the New York State
    Effective Schools Consortium Survey (NYS,
    1987) in the spring of 1990, the staff will
    indicate a more positive perception of the
    selected indicators (Appendix B) being in
    place. A decrease of 0.15 in the average M.D.
    (0.83) will verify that a change in perception
    has occurred.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

In seeking ways to improve communication in the
target school, the writer turned to the literature
dealing with the topic and found that the term
"communication" had a multiplicity of meanings.
Communication is defined by Webster (1984) as the
"giving or exchanging of information, messages, etc."
CareerTrack literature (CareerTrack, 1989) defines
it as "the act of expressing oneself in a way that is
readily and clearly understood." Cegala (1987) states
that communication is "a social phenomenon in that it
entails conscious intention and attention to self,
others and the evolving circumstances" (p. 82).

Countless books and studies, both popular and
scholarly, published in the the last fifty years attest
to the importance of communication in any endeavor
which involves more than one person. A nationally
recognized educational program, Parent and Teacher
Effectiveness Training, based on the writing of Gordon
(1970), emphasizes the importance of developing
communication skills if one is to be effective in

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interpersonal relationships. Cegala (1987) maintains
that an individual's communication tendencies, which
remain reasonable stable throughout life, affect his
competence in various situations.

The importance of the role of communication in
achieving success in group related tasks in the work
place is also widely acknowledged. Hersey and
Blanchard (1988) state that written and oral
communication skills are critical in performing
effectively on the job. They quote a senior executive
who said:

> The best business plan is meaningless unless
> everyone is aware of it and pulling together
> to achieve its objectives. Good communications
> are the lifeblood of any enterprise, large or
> small. Communications are essential to keep our
> entire organization functioning at maximum levels
> and to make the most of our greatest management
> resource--our people (p.306).

In the same reference they also cite Shapiro who

contends :

> It sounds banal to say that a CEO is first and
> foremost in the human relations and communication
> business- what else could the job be?-- but the
> point is too important to leave to inference. No
> other item on the chief executive's duty list has
> more leverage on the organization's prospects
> (p.316).

Communication in the workplace, in both interper-
sonal exchanges and in group settings, was chosen as
the focus of this writer's inquiry.

Interpersonal Communication

Although communicating is an activity in which most people spend a great deal of time, the average person receives very little training in this important area. The following table (Hersey & Blanchard, p.308) illustrates this clearly.

Table 1

Communication Skills Training
(average person)

===

Skills	Years of Training	Extant Used in Adult Life
Writing	14	Little
Reading	8	Some
Speaking	1	Quite a bit
Listening	0	A great deal

The process of communication is a complex phenom- enon involving far more than simple semantics. According to LaBorde (cited in Hersey and Blanchard, p310), in interpersonal communications, the listener perceives seven percent of a person's meaning from the words actually spoken, 38 percent from the way the words are spoken, and 55 percent from the speaker's body language. An individual's values and perceptual

filters, as well as the preferred sensory
rapresentational systems of both speaker and listener,
play a part in the communication effort. (Brack,1980)

The meaning that an individual gives to an event
or communication is based, not on absolute reality, but
on his own perception of reality. The process of
giving meaning depends on the set of values, attitudes,
motives, and experiences that an individual brings to
the event. Barone (1986) suggests that an open
discussion of members' personal values would increase
mutual trust within a working group.

Skills which could be introduced and practiced
with the idea of enhancing interpersonal communication
could include: 1) analysis and sharpening of self-
concept, 2) development of bridge building techniques
for handling emotions, 3) learning to employ
defensiveness-minimizing behaviors such as
tentativeness and empathy, 4) developing techniques for
bridging perception gaps, 5) becoming skilled at active
listening, 6) understanding the role of the axiom
regarding meanings being in people, 7) developing a
sensitivity to the importance of non-verbal
communication, 8) developing an awareness of the four
preferred sensory systems used in communication and

seeking to alternate among them and 9) understanding
something of the importance of a person's basic values
and how they influence perception (Owen, 1981). In-
service sessions concerning any or all of these could
be helpful to the target school staff.

Group Communication

Many of these same topics could be applicable to
improving group communication within the school.
However, the added complexities associated with dealing
with several people simultaneously create new oppor-
tunities for additional learning. Among these is the
development of skills in 1) group problem-solving and
decision-making, 2) consensus building, and 3) conflict
resolution.

The current emphasis in the business world and in
schools on empowering the worker through shared
decision making makes the need to possess these skills
most urgent. Although there are still some decisions
best made by individuals, many scholars, including
Fisher and Shaw, (cited by Cegala, 1987) agree that in
complex tasks, and tasks involving values, group
decision-making and problem-solving is advantageous.
Burleson (Burleson et al., 1984) cites Taylor and

Faust who suggest that communication among group members helps to catch and remedy errors that might slip by one individual. Collins and Guetzkow, cited by Hirokawa (1983), maintained that in the group decision process an "assembly effect" occurs. That is, the quality of group outcomes exceeds what would be expected from a simple sum of individual contributions. Hall and Watson, quoted by Burleson (1984, p.558) call the same phenomenon, "the group synergy hypothesis". Wolfe and Box (1988) refer to the research of Shaw who found this benefit along with others, which include 1) greater interest in the task by the group involved and 2) a greater amount of information available to the group.

Efforts to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of group decision making have led to many studies of small group dynamics and group communication. Cegala (1987) credits Bales and Cohen with the development of "SYMLOG", a theory and methodology for attempting to study simultaneously, a group member's individual behavior and the interacting behavioral patterns of group dynamics. Using this system, one can predict how well a group will function in regard to degree of conflict and satisfaction. Since the groups

within the target school were for the most part a given, the writer of this report rejected the use of this method.

A more promising approach for use in schools was found in LOGS, a repertoire and language of group skills, that facilitates collaborative group problem solving and decision making. This seemed to offer promise in that it allows the group to be self-directed, to identify and name its learning, and to practice it of its own accord. (Herman, 1983) According to Bednar and Battersby (as cited by Herman), this direct approach is one effective way to influence group participants to behave in new ways.

Hirokawa (1983) investigated the importance of certain task-achievement functions in group problem-solving effectiveness. The functions examined were: 1) establishment of operating procedures, 2) analysis of the group problem, 3) establishment of criteria for evaluating alternative solutions, 4) generation of alternative solutions, and 5) evaluation of alternative solutions. He found that the establishment of procedures (during the discussion) had a negative effect on the problem-solving effectiveness, while the amount of time spent analyzing the problem had a

positive effect. This finding lends support to the idea of establishing ahead of time a common language of skills and procedures, including those for reaching consensus.

One of the tenets of LOGS is the rejection of fictitious consensus and the creative use of conflict. For this to occur, group members must feel secure enough within the group to take risks. Rothwell (1986) cites Fisher who states that "engaging in risk, increasing vulnerability to fellow members of a group, is prerequisite to an effective group process." (p.182) Rothwell (1986) developed an exercise, which he called "Building Blocks", to use in developing a spirit of trust and esprit de corps within a group. It could also serve as a form of social pleasure which Shaw, cited by Wolfe and Box (1988), maintains is, along with task accomplishment, a necessity for a successful working group.

Another requirement for such a group is the presence of clear and shared goals. Goodlad (1984) cites the clarification of goals as a necessary first step in school improvement. A shared goal or clear focus is cited as essential for an effective school. (Squires, et. al., 1983). Schermerhorn (1986) says that

clear written goals are necessary for workers to do an
effective job. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) contend
that a set of common goals is part of the criteria for
effective groups. They urge that subordinates parti-
cipate in setting goals and the criteria for their
evaluation, since doing so increases both the
subordinates' commitment to the goals and their
ownership of them. In light of the evidence, it seemed
to the writer that the formation of a school mission or
goal would be an appropriate activity.

In addition to providing opportunities for staff
members to upgrade their communication skills through
inservice training, it seemed important to the writer
to give attention to the mechanics of facilitating
communication within the target school. The problem
here appeared to be finding ways to do this that would
not make too many demands upon the time of already
overburdened staff members.

Herman (1983) suggests including climate setting
activities in each meeting of a group. Their purpose
is to create a condition for mutual support and
interdependence. In situations such as that in the
target school where individuals know each other at
least superficially, he suggests 1) improving the

comfort of the physical environment (for example, providing coffee in the room) and 2) allowing time for each member to share some work-related success experienced since the last meeting.

Bird and Little (1986) stress the need for teachers to have more time with their colleagues within the school day. They suggest that the time could be made available by adding to the length of the day, or by eliminating selected activities. This time would be used, among other things, for the study and improvement of the professional relations in the school.

A suggestion made by Barth (1986) is that the site for faculty meetings be rotated among the classrooms of different teachers. During the first 20 minutes of the meeting, the host teacher would share something of the activities that take place in the classroom (curriculum, grouping practices, etc.) and some of the special characteristics of the class.

While it is not within the power of the writer to influence the use of time during the school day or year, it did seem to be possible to request that faculty and team meetings be held in different places, and that individual teachers or grade level teams be given time to explain their activities.

Lambert (1988) recommends that a weekly letter to the staff be the carrier of broad information and include a weekly calendar, information about the whole school, board and district decisions, interesting ideas and practices used by the staff, congratulations, and so forth. The author also advocates the use of a school-initiated master calendar, the circulation of research studies, articles, and books, as well as open lines of communication between administration and staff. Finally, Lambert suggests the use of routinely held annual interviews with individual staff members, not for evaluation purposes, but simply to discuss professions and work at school in regard to aspirations and goals for the future.

In the writer's school, a weekly letter already existed but was not so inclusive as Lambert suggests. Many things simply did not get included because the editor was not informed of them. For the letter to become effective, it seemed that a concentrated effort must be made by teachers, and especially by team leaders, to see that events are reported, whether they seem to be of importance to others or not.

Executives of MCI (a very successful communication company) demand that, without overburdening workers

with memos and other written communication, everyone who would be at all affected by an item of information must be made aware of it.   They also maintain that all information should be available if staff members want to examine it (Peters, 1990).   Since, in a school situation, it is often difficult to ascertain who this will be, the writer believes it is better to err on the side of overcommunicating.

The school improvement team sought to develop strategies for dealing with those communication problems concerning which the writer could find no possible solutions in the literature.   Office personnel in the target school were often besieged with calls concerning details of events of which they had not been informed.   One suggestion was to designate one person in the school to serve as co-ordinator of communication.   A file could be maintained in the main office which would contain a copy of each communication sent to parents.   The individual initiating the message would be responsible for placing it in the file.

Another suggested strategy was a short intercom message to teachers at the beginning of their workday to remind them of the day's events and make them aware of changes in posted plans.

Proposed Strategy

From the activities reviewed in the literature and
suggestions made by the staff, the writer developed the
following implementation plan.

1) Use of a personality preference inventory
(specifically, the Myers Briggs Inventory, 1962) and
follow-up explanatory sessions. Cooper and Ploor
(1986) point out that a style indicator allows
participants to look at "styles they and others use to
take in information, process it, make decisions,
communicate and solve problems"(p.32). The use of this
tool could contribute to a better understanding of
self, other individuals and the total group.

2) Workshop sessions built around video or audio
tape series. "What You Are Is Where You Were When."
(Massey, 1986). The tapes point out that the decade in
which an individual forms basic life values has an
influence on what those values are. For the rest of a
person's life those values act as filters through which
one perceives the world. Follow up activities to the
tapes should allow participants to develop a better
understanding and appreciation of other people. The
writer felt that in light of the wide range of ages
that exists in the staff, such sessions would be most

helpful.

3) <u>Training sessions in "Listening Skills" and Non-Verbal Communication.</u> As pointed out earlier, most adults have little or no training in this area of communication. Training sessions could be easily arranged since the school district has two certified instructors who are available to conduct sessions.

4) <u>Use of an exercise to build trust and esprit de corps.</u> The writer would lead the entire staff in the exercise, "Building Blocks" (Rothwell, 1986). This particular exercise was chosen because it can be completed in less than an hour, and should accomplish the desired results while providing an enjoyable and social activity for the group.

5) <u>Additional training sessions for team leaders in team building skills, especially consensus development and conflict resolution.</u> This group was chosen for special training because they are the ones who interact most intensely with staff members. After receiving training, they would automatically have opportunities for practicing learned skills.

6) <u>Implementation of certain improvements in the mechanics of communication within the school.</u>

a) Revision and revitalization of weekly letter.

b) Establishment of a master calendar for the
   remainder of the year.

c) Formation of a central information file in the
   main office.

d) Daily "Update" announcements.

e) A school bulletin board featuring different
   curriculum items on which all grades would post
   activities they were pursuing.

f) Rotation of faculty and team meeting places with
   hosts sharing their programs of instruction.

7) A school-wide effort at constructing a school
   mission statement.

CHAPTER III

Method

Initial Plan:

The implementation of the proposed strategy consisted of two distinct areas of activity. The first was a series of inservice activities which were offered to the entire school staff. An additional component of this training area was a more intensive training session in "Team Building Leadership Skills" for the school improvement team and grade level chairpersons. Original plans called for a ten week implementation period, but scheduling problems caused this to be lengthened. The schedule of the inservice training sessions for the entire faculty is given below and in Appendix D.

SCHEDULE OF INSERVICE FOR PRACTICUM PROJECT

==

Week 1 -Introduction to Improvement project,
           especially the Myers-Briggs Personality
           Indicator.

Week 2 - Implementation of Myers-Briggs Indicator.

Week 3 - Inservice on "Active Listening" and "Body
           Language."

Week 4 - Inservice: "Follow-Up to Myers-Briggs".

Week 5 - Inservice: "Follow-up to Myers-Briggs."

Week 6 - Inservice: "Final Follow-up on Myers-Briggs."

Week 7 - Grade Level Team meetings to discuss
           implication of Myers-Briggs for teamwork.

Week 8 - Inservice: "Values Formation"- Video cassette,
           Massy Triad, Part I: "What You Are Is Where
           You Were When".

Week 9 - Inservice: Discussion and Group Activities
           related to video cassette shown previous week.

Week 10 -Inservice: "Building Blocks" Exercise for
           developing esprit de corps and developing
           trust.

Week 10 -Schoolwide brainstorming session to develop
           school mission statement.

Week 11 -Continued group work on developing mission
           statement.

Week 12 -Completion of mission statement.

The second area of implementation was the improvement of the mechanics of communication within the school setting. These have been outlined on page 28 of this paper and in Appendix D. The writer had the primary responsibility for this area. Supplemental agents were the administration, who provided empowerment for the improvements, and the team leaders and school improvement committee members, who were responsible for providing, on a regular basis, information on school activities. The mechanical improvements to the school's information system were to be put in place during the first two weeks of the implementation period.

The writer recognized that in any endeavor of this magnitude there would be constant need for adjustments and revisions. The weekly meetings of the School Improvement Committee were to be used for making any necessary changes and for receiving regular feedback as to the reception of the strategy by the school staff.

Resources

With the exception of the exercise, "Building Blocks", and the sessions on value formation, the inservice workshops were led by resource people from

fist task was securing permission and funding from the
Teacher Education Council. Contacting and scheduling
the clinicians proved a time consuming task that
involved many telephone calls. The video cassette was
borrowed from a local utility firm's library.
Supplies, other than the cassette and the materials for
the Myers-Briggs Inventory, were easily available
within the target school. They consisted of an
overhead projector and screen, VCR, copiers, building
blocks, chart paper, markers, and many reams of
duplicating paper for handouts. The office staff and
aides were most helpful in taking care of the routine
paper work associated with the project.

Monitoring

The weekly meetings of the School Improvement
Committee provided regular opportunities to get
feedback concerning the implementation process. At
approximately the same time that implementation began,
the membership of this committee changed. Team leaders
were replaced by representatives chosen by grade level,
with an additional member representing the para-
professionals on the staff. The administrators and
three members of the original committee remained to

outside the school. The fees for these clinicians were paid by the Teacher Education Center of the district or by local school funds. The writer secured the video cassette, <u>What You Are is What You were Then</u> (Massey, 1986) and conducted the "Building Blocks" Exercise. Another teacher on the staff, who had experienced constructing a mission statement in another school, was the facilitator for this endeavor.

The inservice sessions that involved the entire staff took place before school in the time usually reserved for faculty meetings. Consequently, the the sessions had to be only forty-five minutes in length in order for teachers to be in their classrooms when students arrived. This time period was still longer than that available after students had left for the day. The additional training sessions for the team leaders and school improvement team were held in the afternoon on two consecutive Thursdays and were each one and one half hours in length. In order to stay within the provisions of the contract between the School Board and the local bargaining unit, those attending were given compensatory time.

The writer had the responsibility for arranging and co-ordinating all of the inservice sessions. The

provide continuity. This committee, along with the
team leaders, who also met weekly, were invaluable to
the implementation process because of their input and
support.

The most serious problem encountered by the writer
was the scheduling of sessions. Although the principal
had set aside time on the school calendar for the
inservice sessions, they often had to be canceled and
rescheduled. Most of these changes were necessitated
by deadlines or agendas imposed by the district office
and beyond local school control. Often one or more
weeks would pass between sessions. As a result the
inservice sessions were pushed beyond the dedicated
time period, an action which put the implementation in
conflict with other previously scheduled school
activities and caused further delay. The implemen-
tation period actually covered a calendar period of
fifteen weeks.

The only other problem that surfaced was criticism
by a few faculty members of some of the "adult"
language used in the video tape. Most staff members
felt that the messages contained in the tape were so
important that the criticism, while noted, should be
ignored. Many expressed a desire to view the remaining

tapes in the series. The presence of the potentially
offensive language had been discussed by the School
Improvement Committee when the use of the tape was
being considered for inclusion in the practicum. Prior
to the actiual showing of the video those present had
been made aware of the video's content. The offended
faculty members were assured that their criticism had
been noted, and they apparently were somewhat
satisfied. They continued to participate in the
inservice.

Evaluation

A full evaluation of the results of the practicum
implementation is contained in the next chapter.
However, the writer feels that an evaluation (by the
School Improvement Committee and this author) of the
activities used should be a part of this report. The
administration of the Myers-Briggs Personality
Inventory and the follow-up inservice sessions proved
very valuable. They provoked much enthusiastic
response from faculty members, including requests for
the inventory to be given to spouses of faculty
members. In formal and informal conversations the
characteristics and implications were widely discussed
and provided improved understanding of the target

group.

The session on "Active Listening" was also well
received, as was, for the most part, the video tape on
value programming. Staff members expressed the desire
to have more sessions like these. The two sessions on
team building and conflict resolution were less enthu-
siastically received, although all of the participants
acknowledged that the information gained was most
helpful and that the handouts were excellent. It is
the opinion of this writer that the time when the
sessions were held (after a full workday), the person-
ality of the consultant, and his method of presentation
were deterrents to its success. The second session
which involved participants in actual exercises in
reaching consensus was better received than the first.

The target group's first endeavor at working in
teams across grade levels was also less than
successful. In the implementation of the "Building
Blocks" exercise, in which two grade levels worked as a
team, there was much evidence of fierce competition and
the influence of strong personalities within groups.
In addition, the corporate group personalities of the
grade level teams seemed to affect the outcome.

When preparing the sessions devoted to developing a school mission statement, the writer and the facilitator decided to employ smaller groups (no more than four or five members at the most) with only one member, chosen at random, from a grade level team in a group.   Reaching consensus required three sessions. The first week each group generated a list of behaviors, skills and attitudes that students should possess upon completing fifth grade.   These group lists were compiled into a master list.   The second week the staff, working in a different configuration of groups, separated the list into areas of conceptual, behavioral and affective learning domains and eliminated overlapping statements.

The third session was one in which the entire staff worked to complete a mission statement from the lists formulated in the second session.   Teachers, working individually or in groups of two or three, were asked to choose one of the three domains and generate a sentence that summarized the items on their list. These sentences were then read aloud.   Several were selected to combine into a mission statement, which was displayed with the use of an overhead projector.   This statement was then altered until the group seemed to be

fairly pleased with the wording. A rough draft of the statement was later circulated to the entire faculty, along with a request for additional corrections or a statement of agreement. The School Improvement Team collected these, considered the proposed changes (of which there were only three or four--all minor) and resubmitted the statement to the faculty for their approval.

This final group endeavor was much more successful than the "Building Blocks" exercise had been. It is the opinion of the writer that several factors probably accounted for this success. 1) Steps were taken to insure that members of the target group worked with different individuals than those with whom they do on a daily basis. (Therefore, established group response patterns became inoperative as individuals were subjected to various points of view). 2) The groups were much smaller in number and therefore increased the individual group member's responsibility for involvement. 3) The knowledge that other schools in the district had already formulated a mission statement and were using it in planning curriculums made this activity generally acceptable to the target group. 4) Finally, the topic being discussed was one concerning

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which the participants have strong opinions and interest.

The proposed improvements in the mechanics of communications met with differing levels of success. The weekly calendar letter was made more effective through additions of dates of future activities and the inclusion of items of general information needed by the staff. Constant encouragement and reminders to staff members to get needed information to the editor were necessary to make this improvement possible. Though not able to facilitate the publishing of a master calendar for the remainder of the school year, the writer was successful in compliling a handwritten one from which dates could be transferred to a large monthly calendar and given to the newsletter editor. Unfortunately, schedule changes had to be made weekly, sometimes daily, so that the calendar was never completely accurate. Daily "update" announcements were not able to be instituted on a daily basis, but were given for changes that were occuring that day.

The formation of a central information file in the main office proved more successful. Most teachers were relatively consistent in putting notices of activities into it, and the office staff had access to information

when asked for it. Rotation of places for faculty meetings seemed satisfactory to the staff, although it did not take place on a regular basis. There was one attempt at a schoolwide effort to construct multiple bulletin boards featuring topics that grade levels were studying in the social studies area. It was quite existensive and required much teacher preparation time. A more reasonable approach would probably be one board with captions identifying grade level topics.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The writer had formulated two objectives (recorded on page 12 of this report) with which to measure the success of this practicum. The summative evaluation took place at the end of the Implementation period. It consisted of two parts:

1) The Administration of a Survey designed to assess the staff's perception of the level of communication within the school. (Appendix D)
   The survey was distributed by the School Improvement team to those members of the staff who had participated in the inservice sessions. After the staff completed the survey, the writer tabulated the results to determine if 80 percent of the staff perceived communication within the school to be satisfactory. (A response in column A, B, or C would indicate satisfaction.) If this criteria had been met, the writer's first objective would have been satisfied.

2) The administration and evaluation of selected items from the New York State Effective Schools Consortium Survey of Professional Staff Perceptions of School Program. (NYS,1987) Teacher perception of these designated indicators (items) was then compared with their perceptions of the same items from the survey completed by the staff in January 1990. A decrease of 0.15 in the average of the D.M. of these items in the post-implementation survey would indicate that a significant improvement had occurred and that the second objective for the practicum had been met.

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Upon analyzing the data, the writer found that the
first objective had been successfully met. Eighty
seven percent of the target group indicated a
satisfaction level of C or better. Sixty-two percent
of the responses lay within the level of A or B
(indicating greater satisfaction). Thirteen percent of
the target group found the level of communication
within the school to be less than satisfactory.

A study of the responses to individual items
(tabulated in Tables II and III below) revealed a more
detailed picture. Ninety-three percent of the
respondents indicated a high level of enjoyment when
working on team projects, and 83 percent felt that
staff members were generally willing to listen to each
other. Seventy-three percent of those surveyed felt
strongly that the administration made a deliberate
effort to the staff informed. The writer sees in this
response some understanding on the part of the staff
that efforts to keep the staff informed of critical
matters are being made by the administration.

The lowest percentages (31% for columns A+B, 66%
for columns A-C) indicating satisfaction or agreement
with a statement were generated by item seven which
addressed willingness of staff members to deal directly

with other staff members with whom they had conflict.
This situation seems to imply that the staff needs
further training in conflict resolution techniques.
The fact that eight of the 24 individuals who responded
to item 12 acknowledged that there were four or
more individuals on the staff with whom they did not
communicate well seems to lend support to this
conclusion.

Table II

Results of School Communication Survey
Raw Data

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Question Number	Reponses				
	A	B	C	D	E
1	6	10	11	2	1
2	9	13	5	3	0
3	7	7	10	5	0
4	5	11	8	3	2
5	1	8	10	10	0
6	5	10	10	4	0
7	13	8	8	1	0
8	11	14	5	0	0
9	12	8	5	4	1
10	12	15	1	0	1
11	3	13	9	5	0
12	6	5	5	1	7
* Totals =	84	117	82	37	5
	26%	36%	25%	11%	2%

Column A indicates strong satisfaction.
Column E indicates strong dissatisfaction.
* Totals do not include question number 12.
For question 12: A=0 to 1, B=2, C=3,
    D=4, E=5 or more.

Table III

Results of School Communication Survey
Totals and Percentages

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=====================================================================
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Question Number	Totals (A+B)	(A+B+C)	(A+B+C+D+E)	Percentages (A+B)	(A+B+C)
1	16	27	30	53%	90%
2	22	27	30	73%	90%
3	14	24	29	48%	83%
4	16	24	29	55%	83%
5	9	19	29	31%	66%
6	15	25	29	52%	86%
7	21	29	30	70%	97%
8	25	30	30	83%	100%
9	20	25	30	67%	83%
10	27	28	29	93%	97%
11	16	25	30	53%	83%
Totals =	201	283	325	62%	87%
Percent=	62%	87%	100%		

The second objective of the practicum was to
achieve a reduction of the average Mean Discrepancy of
seven selected items from the New York State Effective
Schools Consortium Survey of Professional Staff
Perceptions of School Program (NYS, 1987).
Specifically, the objective was a reduction of 0.15 of
the average M.D. (0.83) that resulted from the January
1990 administration of the survey. This objective was
not achieved. Although there were marked differences

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in the individual items, their average M.D. of 0.83
remained the same in both the January and May survey.

When these results were compared item by item with
those of the two previous surveys, the writer found
that a reduction in the M.D. had occurred between the
April 1989 and January 1990 survey. A decrease of 0.11
(from 0.94 M.D. to 0.83 M.D.) was evident. A
comparison of the data from all three surveys is
displayed in Table IV.

According to the creators of the survey, positive
change is indicated in three measures. They are: 1)
increased existence, 2) decreased need (Mean
Discrepancy), and 3) increase in both importance and
existence (even though it increases in a rise in the
M.D.). This third measure is regarded as positive
because of the belief that heightened perception is
necessary for positive change to occur. Although the
writer had utilized only the second of these measures
in formulation of an objective, it seemed prudent to
analyze the individual items in relationship to the
other two measures.

Item one showed a positive change according to all
three measures, as did items three, six and seven. The
largest gain in Existence Mean occurred in item three

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which dealt with recognition of individuals for service to others. Item seven, concerning existence of a school mission statement, presented the largest decrease in M.D. (from 1.05 to 0.74). Item one, concerned with the presence of collaborative planning and shared decision making, exhibited a gain of 0.22 in E.M. Since all of the above items had been addressed in the practicum implementation, the writer viewed them as having been somewhat influenced by it. Although the responses to item six indicated only insignificant gains, the writer did note that in the period between the initial survey of April 1989 and that given in January 1990, the staff morale, as perceived by the staff, had improved (from M.D.1.34 to M.D.0.93). This perception may have been affected positively by the initial efforts toward improvement made earlier in the school year.

Items two, four and five did not show any statistical improvement. However, all three did indicate a gain in the Importance Mean, perhaps indicating that at least a heightened perception of importance had occurred. The fact that all three of these involve collegial working relationships seems to indicate that the staff needs to have more training in

Table IV

A Comparison of Perceptions of Selected Items
(from New York State Effective Schools
Survey) over a 15 Month Period.

Question Number		Results			Gains and losses *		
		Apr 89	Jan 90	May 90	Apr-Jan	Jan-May	Apr-May
1	I.M.	3.97	4.15	4.20	.18	.05	.23
	E.M.	3.30	3.15	3.37	-.15	.22	.07
	M.D.	.67	1.00	.83	-.33	-.17	.16
2	I.M.	4.10	4.18	4.37	.08	.19	.27
	E.M.	3.32	3.54	3.47	.22	-.07	.15
	M.D.	.78	.64	.90	-.14	.26	.12
3	I.M.	3.58	3.38	3.76	-.20	.39	.18
	E.M.	2.59	2.92	3.55	.33	.63	.96
	M.D.	.99	.46	.21	-.53	-.25	-.78
4	I.M.	4.29	4.18	4.30	-.11	.12	.01
	E.M.	3.33	3.39	3.30	.06	-.09	-.03
	M.D.	.96	.79	1.00	-.17	.21	.04
5	I.M.	4.15	4.22	4.47	.07	.25	.32
	E.M.	3.37	3.34	3.30	-.03	-.04	-.07
	M.D.	.78	.88	1.17	.10	.29	.39
6	I.M.	4.57	4.46	4.47	-.11	.01	-.10
	E.M.	3.23	3.50	3.53	.27	.03	.30
	M.D.	1.34	.96	.93	-.38	-.03	-.41
7	I.M.	4.26	4.28	4.43	.02	.15	.17
	E.M.	3.22	3.23	3.69	.01	.46	.47
	M.D.	1.04	1.05	.74	.01	-.31	-.30

I.M. = Importance Mean
E.M. = Existence Mean
M.D. = Discrepancy Mean
* A negative M.D. indicates improvement.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

Although this practicum was not completely
successful, in that only one of the stated objectives
was achieved, the implementation did provide impetus
for school improvement and helped to create a climate
in which it can take place. As a result of its limited
success in improving communication and collegial
relationships in the target school, the School
Improvement Team is planning to implement inservice
training that will build upon the skills that the staff
has acquired. Topics that have been suggested for
study include "Teaching to Students' Learning
Preferences", "Conducting Successful Parent
Conferences", and "The Effects of Teacher Expectation
on Student Achievement".

In addition to this training the improvement team
is recommending to the faculty the expansion of shared
decision making through the extensive use of teacher-
led committees composed of members from the entire
school community, including parents and non-
instructional staff. A document has been prepared

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which gives the following for each committee: the
proposed membership, the purpose and responsibilities,
and the anticipated time frame in which it will
operate. As soon as teaching assignments have been
announced for next year, the plan will be presented to
the faculty along with the request that individuals
sign up for the committee (or committees) of their
choice. Such small group involvement should provide
many opportunities for collegial relationships to
improve.

The entire practicum project could be transported
to another school site where similar needs exist.
Its implementation would be enhanced if the
administration and a large number of staff members have
a deep commitment to school improvement since the
project will require at least ten hours of staff time.
Securing the early support of the school district in
regard to providing inservice resources would be
advantageous. The support of the faculty will be
gained more easily if arrangements can be made for them
to receive credit toward recertification for the
inservice. A final recommendation would be that those
in charge of the practicum realize that the dynamics of
a school will necessitate many schedule changes and

prepare themselves to be very flexible in regard to a time frame. The earlier in the school year that implementation begins the less likely it will be to encounter conflicts, since activities seem to escalate during the spring quarter.

An extension of this project which might prove helpful to other schools and fill a need in the school district would be a compilation of community resource people qualified to conduct training in the area of communication, interpersonal relationships and small group dynamics. This could be accompanied by a printout which would contain a description of the inservice workshops, a list of materials needed, and samples of evaluation instruments used. An annotated summary of improvements suggested for enhancing the mechanics of communication within a school setting could also be included.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Distribution of Target School Staff

Appendix A

Distribution of Target School Staff

Administrators:	1 principal
	1 assistant principal
Kindergarten:	5 teachers
	1 aide
Junior First:	1 teacher (shares kindergarten aide.
First Grade:	5 teachers
	1 aide
Second Grade:	5 teachers
	0.5 aide
Third Grade:	4 teachers
	0.5 aide
Fourth Grade:	4 teachers
	0.5 aide
Fifth Grade:	4 teachers
	0.5 aide

Support Staff

    Art teacher
    Guidance Counselor
    Media Specialist
    Music teacher
    P.E. teacher
    Primary Specialist

Exceptional Student Services

Emotionally Handicapped Class: 1 teacher, 1 aide
Gifted Class: 1 teacher
Pre-kindergarten Handicapped: 2 teachers, 2 aides
Specific Learning Disabilities Class: 1.5 teachers
Speech Therapist

Non-instructional

3 secretaries
5 lunchroom workers
4 custodians

Appendix B

Appendix B

Selected Items from New York State Effective Schools Consortium Survey of Professional Staff Perceptions of School Program

Teacher/Staff Effectiveness

36. Collaborative curriculum planning and decision making exist within the building.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
3.97	3.30	0.67

59. Collegial working relationships exist among all professional staff.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.10	3.32	.78

119. Rewards for teachers and students recognize service to others as well as personal achievement.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
3.58	2.59	0.99

Planning Proces

14. At the principal's initiative, teachers work together to effectively coordinate the instructional program within and between grades.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.29	3.33	.96

15. Planning is a collaborative process involving administrators, teachers, and other professional staff.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.15	3.37	.78

Climate

3. There is evidence of high staff morale.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.57	3.23	1.34

12. There is a clearly articulated mission of the school through which the entire staff shares an understanding and commitment to learning goals.

I.M.	E.M.	M.D.
4.26	3.22	1.04

Appendix C

School Communication Survey

Appendix C

School Communication Survey

This is an effort to assess the communication level
within the school. Please respond to the statements
below. A check in column A indicates strong
agreement that the statement is true. A check in the
column E indicates strong disagreement.

Statements   Response

                                              A B C D E

1. I feel adequately informed   __ __ __ __ __
    of most activities that
    take place in the school.

2. The administration makes a   __ __ __ __ __
    deliberate effort to inform
    the staff of matters that are
    of importance to them.

3. The talk in the faculty lounge   __ __ __ __ __
    is usually positive and con-
    structive.

4. When staff members have a   __ __ __ __ __
    concern with the administra-
    tration, they usually go
    directly to the person and
    express it.

5. Staff members who have   __ __ __ __ __
    concerns with other personnel
    usually go directly to the
    person involved.

6. Support staff (secretaries   __ __ __ __ __
    aides, custodians, and lunch-
    room workers) generally feel
    accepted and communicated with
    on a equal level with teachers.

7. Staff members generally show   __ __ __ __ __
    concern for each other.

8. Staff members generally are   __ __ __ __ __

    willing to listen to each other.

9. Staff members frequently praise   __ __ __ __ __
    each other.

10. I enjoy working on projects with   __ __ __ __ __
    other members of my team.

11. Other staff members are aware of   __ __ __ __ __
    and appreciate my contribution
    to the school's success.

12. There are approximately   1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or more
    (circle one) staff members with whom I do not
    communicate well.

Appendix D

SCHEDULE OF INSERVICE FOR PRACTICUM PROJECT

Appendix D

SCHEDULE OF INSERVICE FOR PRACTICUM PROJECT

==

Week 1 – Introduction to Improvement project, especially the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator.

Week 2 – Implementation of Myers-Briggs Indicator.

Week 3 – Inservice on "Active Listening" and "Body Language."

Week 4 – Inservice: "Follow-Up to Myers-Briggs".

Week 5 – Inservice: "Follow-up to Myers-Briggs."

Week 6 – Inservice: "Final Follow-up on Myers-Briggs."

Week 7 – Grade Level Team meetings to discuss implication of Myers-Briggs for teamwork.

Week 8 – Inservice: "Values Formation"– Video cassette, Massy Triad, Part I: "What You Are Is Where You Were When".

Week 9 – Inservice: Discussion and Group Activities related to video cassette shown previous week.

Week 10 – Inservice: "Building Blocks" Exercise for developing esprit de corps and developing trust.

Week 10 – Schoolwide brainstorming session to develop school mission statement.

Week 11 – Continued group work on developing mission statement.

Week 12 – Completion of mission statement.

END

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