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The bridge from teacher preparation to beginning teacher: helping NESB beginning teachers enter a community of teaching practice

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Abstract

Australia is a multicultural country. In the ten years to November 2007, there were 647,000 migrants who entered Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Of these migrants 76%were born in countries other than those identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2008) as main English speaking countries (the United Kingdom, The United States of America, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa) (ABS, 2008). The composition of the teaching workforce in Australia reflects this multiculturalism. Communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1997) provide a clear and logical space for assisting those who are from a non-dominant culture to transition into and develop knowledge and identities within a workplace. Little research has been conducted into teachers of a non-English speaking background (NESB) teaching in an English speaking context. While some research related to overseas-trained teachers working in Australia (see for example Kamler, Santoro & Reid, 1998; Seah & Bishop, 2001), and NESB pre-service teachers during their practicum in Australia (see for example, Han, 2005; Han & Singh, 2007; Hartley, 2003) has been carried out there is little evidence of research into beginning NESB teachers who qualified as teachers through universities in Australia. This paper focuses on this specific group of beginning teachers.

Social interaction in the community of practice provides opportunity for the sharing of tacit knowledge between established members and those who are new to that community of practice. It also allows for new members to develop their practice. Therefore, the sociocultural theoretical framework of communities of practice was used to determine the positioning of new members of the teaching profession, specifically those of non-English speaking backgrounds, in their respective communities of practice.

This paper presents outcomes from a qualitative study involving beginning teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds which investigated the positioning of these teachers with respect to their communities of teaching practice. The teachers in the study were prepared as teachers in an Australian university. Participants' accounts were collected through focus groups, interviews and electronic diaries. These accounts generated the data used in the study. The major theme of *interaction* emerged as the macroproposition in the data. Five sub-themes were identified as recurring across the accounts: skin colour, appearance, worldliness, conversational participation and acceptance. Each of these sub-themes affected the interactions of the beginning teachers with their colleagues. The accounts were interrogated using critical discourse analysis adapted from van Dijk (2001) and Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter (2000). Critical discourse analysis was supported by positioning theory in the analysis of the data (Davies& Harré, 1990).

The positioning of the beginning teachers either by themselves or by others impacts on the provision of access to the professional learning opportunities through their communities of teaching practice. In many cases, this positioning was found to be at *the edge* of the community of practice. The implications that emerged from the research impact not only the workplace (school environments) but also the teacher preparation programs. In both instances the need for provision of opportunities for beginning teachers of a non-English speaking background to develop confidence in interacting with established members of communities of teaching practice in which they are professionally located must be made. This can begin at the university stage during the teacher preparation program.

Keywords: non-English speaking background (NESB), communities of practice, teacher preparation, beginning teachers.

<u>Introduction</u>

Australia is a multicultural country. In the ten years to November 2007, there were 647,000 migrants who entered Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Of these migrants 76%were born in countries other than those identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as main English speaking countries (the United Kingdom, The United States of America, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and South Africa) (ABS, 2008). The composition of the section of the workforce that makes up the teaching profession reflects this multiculturalism.

The research to which this paper refers has investigated, through a qualitative study, the positioning of beginning teachers who are of a non-English speaking background (NESB) in their English speaking Australian workplaces. For the purpose of this paper, NESB beginning teachers are considered to be those teachers for whom their primary language is one other than English and who have undertaken their teacher preparation programs in Queensland. These teachers are either completing internships or are beginning work in the profession of teaching. The theoretical lens used in the study was that of communities of practice. The data collected were in the form of accounts of the experiences of the beginning teachers and these were analysed using critical discourse analysis to determine the positioning of these teachers in their various communities of teaching practice.

The findings of the research revealed that the beginning teachers positioned themselves or accepted positioning by others at the edge of the community of practice or were positioned as legitimate peripheral participants (accepted new members (Lave & Wenger, 1991)) of their communities of teaching practice. From the findings, there are implications that impact on the teacher preparation institutions, the employing authorities and the professional bodies such as teacher registration authorities.

This paper will outline the context in which the research is situated, and the framework and methodology used. Following that will be a discussion on the outcomes of the research and their implications. A suggested strategy will be presented for building the bridge between the teacher preparation programs and entry into the teaching profession that may enable positioning as a legitimate peripheral participant rather than at the edge of the community of teaching practice.

<u>Context</u>

While it is acknowledged that NESB teachers provide a valuable resource to the teaching profession (e.g. Becket, 1998; Seah and Bishop, 2001; Waldschmidt, 2002), the thread of the traditional deficit model of cultural diversity runs through the literature. Approaches to address this deficit model have been implemented in the form of courses in diversity offered in university preservice teacher education courses (for example in Capella-Santana, 2003; Gallavan, 2005; Gay, 2005; Sleeter, 2001). These courses have been designed to prepare future teachers more appropriately for culturally diverse classrooms. Yet the delivery of these courses themselves implicitly supports the deficit model. The literature demonstrates that the preservice students with cultural backgrounds different from those students who make up the majority are taught and treated as the majority. The literature also demonstrates that the students did not believe that they had been adequately prepared for their future roles as teachers of multicultural classrooms. While some research has been conducted overseas to explore the needs of a diverse teaching workforce little has been done in Australia. The studies of Han (2005), Hartley (2003) and Santoro (1997) focused on NESB preservice teachers on their first practicum and the study by Kato (1998) focused on NESB first or

second year teachers who had completed a one year qualification in education in an Australian university. These studies also considered the role the universities' teacher preparation programs should play in better preparing NESB students for teaching in Australian schools. In an Australian context it was shown for example, through the above studies, that the expectations of NESB preservice teachers with respect to students, schools and education differed from the realities they faced with little or no preparation to cope with these differences in values, attitudes and beliefs provided in their teacher preparation courses. Despite identified difficulties arising within the school context, the onus for addressing these issues for Australian prepared NESB teachers appears to have been placed on the university teacher preparation courses. Moving from the preservice educational context to the professional context, Seah and Bishop (2001) and Kamler et al. (1998) identified that extra support is necessary for overseas-prepared teachers teaching in Australian schools. In Queensland it was identified by Oliver (1998) that support for teachers who have *graduated* from teacher preparation courses *overseas* was necessary. Oliver acknowledged that such support was provided, in Queensland, in the form of courses offered at a university prior to employment, and from the teacher registration authority. There is no evidence to show the provision of such specific assistance for NESB teachers who have graduated from *Queensland* universities to work in *Queensland* schools.

The theoretical framework

The theoretical framework used in this research is based on the foundational work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) and further work conducted by Etienne Wenger in 1997. Lave and Wenger (1991) have named informal interactions that promote the development of practice in an organisation, communities of practice. Accordingly, interaction is understood to involve discussions and actions that allow for the transference of knowledge from one coparticipant to another in an organisation in order to develop and improve practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1997, 1998). The importance of communities of practice in any sphere of work is most marked in the transfer of unwritten operational knowledge that assists in improving the practice of the members of that community. Interaction between workers which allows for an informal transfer of knowledge is an essential element of any effective organization (Wenger, 1997) to promote the development of practices that will achieve the organisational goals (Wenger, 1998).

Positioning within a community of practice is derived from the building of an identity within that community of practice. That identity is built from experiences of interactions with members of the community of practice during the course of fulfilling commitments of a particular job role (Wenger, 1998). The individual's interpretation of interrelationships with other members of the community of practice shapes and represents that individual's self identity within that community (Wenger, 1998). Participation in the community of practice provides the means of learning and development of the practices that constitute that community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Therefore the "lived experience of participation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 151) and resultant individual's position with respect to that community of practice is contextual and unique to that community of practice.

Underlying any community of practice is the need for informal interaction between and among members of that community of practice. The very existence of a community of practice relies on the interaction between and among the members of that community of practice. Interaction needs to extend to newcomers to the organization to facilitate their growth and development. The promotion of collaborative efforts to meet organizational goals can be achieved through interaction and it is the positioning of a member in reference to the interaction that can indicate positioning in that particular community. Without this interaction there can be no community of practice.

The position of the beginning teacher in the school can be related to that of Lave and Wenger's (1991) "legitimate peripheral" participant in the community of practice made up of colleagues who are progressing through the "life-cycle" of teaching to become the more experienced teachers or "old-timers". Social interaction provides a means of equipping the learner with the "tools for thinking" (Renshaw, 1992) made available to the learner by those more experienced in the ways of that community (Rogoff, 1990) and allows the learner to appropriate, interpret and manipulate knowledge to assist in future problem-solving relevant to tasks related to that community (Renshaw, 1992). Sociocultural theory considers development and learning as patterns of change towards active participation in communities of practice (Lim & Renshaw, 2001). Interaction enables the newcomers to socially construct the knowledge needed for that role and therefore is vital to any community of practice.

Methodology

Data were collected over a fourteen month period via one-on-one interviews, three focus group sessions, and electronic diaries. The ten participants accounted for their experiences over two to three years including final practicum or internship experiences and their early years of teaching. All of the participants were prepared as teachers in Queensland and all identified themselves as coming from a non-English speaking background. None of the participants was born in Australia. All completed their initial schooling (pre-tertiary) in their home countries and some had studied at university level also in their home countries. Participant information is contained in Appendix A.

The data were interrogated using critical discourse analysis supported by positioning theory. A critical analysis of the language or discourse used allows a means for identifying relationships that exist in a social situation (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 1997). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue that critical discourse analysis views discourse or language as used in a specific way to suit a specific situation or social relationship. Therefore it shapes and is shaped by, that situation or relationship (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Gee, 1999). It is this two way relationship that produces the "social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). These interactional relationships can produce situations of social power, a "specific *relation between social groups*" (van Dijk, 1997, p. 17, original emphasis). Critical discourse analysis provides a way of identifying inequitable distribution of power in a given social situation (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

Extracts that exemplified the sub-themes pervading the data were interrogated using critical discourse analysis supported by positioning theory and tools such as small stories (Bamberg, 2004a, 2004b, 2006), noun and pronoun use (Fairclough, 2001), reported speech and thought (Holt, 1996, 2000) and attributed thought, speech and feelings, acknowledgement tokens (Schegloff, 1982; Wong, 2000) and discourse markers (Schiffrin, 1987). Further "tools" from sociolinguistic narrative analysis and conversation analysis were used to intensify the analysis of how language constructs the social world of the participants. A sympathetic theoretical approach to use in conjunction with critical discourse analysis is positioning theory. Positioning theory allows the investigation into relationships within the community of practice by focusing on the agency and power of those doing the positioning and those being positioned respectively.

Davies and Harré (1990) have identified positioning as a phenomenon arising from conversation, a social interaction that demonstrates the interpersonal relationships of the interactants (Davies & Harré, 1990). Through conversational interactions, the social realities of the interactants are produced (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991) and the discursive practices used to create those realities position the interactants within the interactions (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1991; Van Langenhove & Harré, 1994). The accounts of the participants in this study represent the participants' realities of the social interactions in their

communities of teaching practice. Through the use of critical discourse analysis the accounts were interrogated to determine the positionings of the actors in the social world that makes up these particular communities of teaching practice.

Discussion

The analyses revealed, through investigation of the interactions accounted for, the (re)positioning of this group of beginning teachers with respect to members of their communities of teaching practice. The analyses showed both interactive and reflexive positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990) of the NESB beginning teachers.

The accounts of the beginning NESB teachers were centred on their accounted experiences revolving around interactions with colleagues. The major theme that arose from the data was that of interaction. The analysis of the data revealed five sub-themes that ran through the accounts of the participants. These sub-themes: skin colour, appearance, conversational participation, worldliness and acceptance were accounted for as affecting the interactions the beginning teachers had with colleagues. "Worldliness", for the purpose of this research, was used to describe the situation where someone had overseas travel experience. A summary of the findings under each of the five sub-themes follows.

Sub-themes

Skin colour
Skin colour was identified as affecting the interaction with other members of the community of practice and influencing the positioning the NESB beginning teacher with respect to that community. An analysed extract from one of the focus group sessions exemplified this. The NESB teacher was unable to imagine herself as a colleague of the other teachers in that particular community of practice. The account of interaction indicated a positioning of the teacher by her colleagues on the edge of that community due to her skin colour. The positioning was shown to be taken by up the beginning teacher in her wish for a different skin colour "…I wish I was white at least to camouflage myself for blend with these people" (focus group 3). Furthermore, the use of "these people" sets this teacher apart from those not of her colour and in so doing has emphasized the space or distance she found between herself and the other teachers thus positioning herself on the edge of, or outside that community of teaching practice.

Appearance
The sub-theme of Appearance refers to physical characteristics, separate from skin colour, which the participants accounted for as impacting their interaction with members of the community of teaching practice and therefore contributed to their positioning with respect to their communities. Two extracts were analysed in detail under this sub-theme. From the analyses the beginning NESB teachers reasoned that their non-inclusion in their communities of practice, identified through topics of feelings and discomfort, was linked to their physical features that marked them as different from the majority of their colleagues. Through the analysed accounts, the participants self-positioned at the periphery of their communities of practice, powerless to participate more fully as legitimate peripheral participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991) due to their physical appearances.

Conversational participation
Interaction through conversation between members of a community of practice is essential for the learning of knowledge which is tacit and which will develop practice (Wenger, 1998, 2004). Across the data, three of the participant NESB teachers felt welcomed into casual interactions with members of their communities of practice, yet only two accounted for positive interactions. One drove taxi cabs during university studies in Queensland (interview data) and the other redid her final three years of schooling in a Queensland school to improve

her English and increase her opportunity of attending university in Queensland (interview data). These life experiences may have contributed to their ability in facilitating a level of ease in social interactions not experienced by other participants who felt they could only interact comfortably with colleagues who had overseas travel experiences, or who accounted for overt exclusion from interactions that were occurring between other members of their communities of teaching practice. This was exemplified in one comment requesting "the secret" (focus group 1) to interacting with colleagues.

The willingness and ease of participating in interactions indicated a power vested in the beginning teacher to contribute to the community of teaching practice and engage in the learning and development of practice. These two NESB teachers were each positioned by colleagues as a legitimate peripheral participant of their communities of practice. This positioning was taken up by the beginning teachers in their accounts of interactions. The other NESB beginning teachers in the analysed accounts self-positioned, or were positioned by established members of their communities of practice, on the edge of their communities.

Worldliness
As identified earlier, Worldliness relates to having had travel experience to other countries or having migrated from one country to another. This sub-theme recurred across the data and across the analysed extracts and a consistent message emerged. That message was that the NESB beginning teachers accounted for acceptance into communities of practice where members of that community had Worldliness. If Worldliness was present, then the beginning teachers of the study accounted for a sense of comfort and confidence in their interactions in their communities. This comfort was demonstrated through accounts of caring and guidance provided by colleagues with Worldliness. The established members of the community of practice who had Worldliness were accounted for as having positioned the beginning teachers as legitimate peripheral participants.

Acceptance
The extract that was analysed in detail under the sub-theme of Acceptance identified that the expectation of the beginning NESB teachers necessarily need to be different from other beginning teachers who are of Australian English speaking backgrounds. The data showed that that the participants of the study identified themselves as a distinct group that shared the knowledge and realisation that established members of their communities of teaching practice would be expecting more from them if they were to be accepted into those communities. That is, the extract exemplified the self-positioning by the NESB beginning teacher at a different "starting" point: behind that of a native Australian beginning teacher and thus at the edge of a community of teaching practice with the self-expectation that "we need to work harder" (focus group 3) to demonstrate worthiness of acceptance as legitimate peripheral participants of their communities.

Outcomes

The outcomes from a critical discourse analysis of the data showed that the positioning of the beginning NESB teachers, prepared in Queensland universities as teachers, was as:
- Self-positioned on the edge of the community of practice
- Positioned by members of the community of practice, and a take up of that position, at the edge of the community
- Positioned as legitimate peripheral participants and a take up of that positioning by the NESB beginning teacher.

The positioning with respect to the communities of practice with which the participants of this research found themselves in contact could be interpreted as having resulted in either non-membership or placement at the *edge* of the particular community, or as legitimate peripheral participants. No definitive statement regarding the positioning of the participants, as a group, with respect to membership of their communities of teaching practice can be made because

each account is a unique reality peculiar to a specific participant. For the same reason, the causes of the positionings are not able to be generalised. There is evidence through the accounts, that the care and concern and nurturing expected by the participants was evident where established members of the community of practice had overseas travel experience or the casual conversational skills of the participant were exercised. The lived experiences of the teacher participants of this study, seen through the analyses of the extracts, provide an opportunity to align their experiences with global expectations of teachers. These global expectations were identified as drawn from the policy documents informing employers and systems in Queensland education – forming the macrostructure of the analysis (van Dijk, 2001). Policy documents that guide the profession of teaching, for example, the National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching (Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce, 2003), the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme: Cross-sectoral Strategic Plan 2006-2009 for Queensland (Francis, Newham, & Harkin, 2005), and the Queensland College of Teachers Code of Practice (Board of Teacher Registration, n.d. (in use at the time of the research)) specify the importance of members of the profession supporting and guiding those new to teaching. Logically, it follows that *all* new teachers can expect collegial support. A discourse of Care is evident through these policy documents and as such would be expected to be emulated at the local level in the schools. This in fact was found to be the case where members of the communities of practice had overseas travel experience. These colleagues were recounted as engendering a feeling of comfort in the NESB newcomers of that community of practice and in so doing enabled informal interaction for discussion and development of practice. In other communities of practice where the beginning teachers of this study had positioned themselves, or taken up positions on the edge of the community, opportunities for involvement in professional dialogue and reflection on practice with colleagues became restricted.

Implications

The implications that emerged from this research are crucial if the retention of a valuable element of the teaching workforce is to occur. The approach that should be developed is one that involves three levels: the university teacher preparation programs, the employing authorities and the registering authorities.

The universities

Future teachers who are of a non-English speaking background need to be better prepared for working in an English speaking working environment. Attention should be given to the preparation of the NESB teachers especially in relation to their readiness for *effective* participation with colleagues. This is particularly so given the increasing trend toward "Internationalisation" in universities. It is not enough to expect that the practicum experiences embedded in teacher preparation programs provide the link to the reality of membership of the profession. This is only one level in the development of the bridge from preparation to readiness – if the preservice teachers pass the practicum.

It is through the practicum that the NESB preservice teachers experience their first "working" relationships with experienced teachers. NESB students in the secondary teacher preparation program at The University of Queensland are provided with support in developing socio cultural strategies and knowledge to help in the practicum courses.

The support group that has been developed provides a forum in which ideas can be freely exchanged, fears expressed and solutions to problems reached collaboratively. Discussions are held to develop an understanding of Queensland's unique system of education, school culture and work culture in schools. This group is outside the normal coursework of the program and is fee free, assessment free and is voluntarily attended. Through the support group, the attendees have found that their self-confidence in their own abilities to interact

with experienced teachers has improved. Such a group though provides one more level in the bridge to entering a community of teaching practice for the NESB teacher.

The employing authorities

The analysed data highlighted the impact of the *worldliness* or overseas experiences of members of the community of practice on the positioning of the beginning NESB teacher and the take up of that teacher's professional identity. Where worldliness was encountered, the professional identities of the beginning teachers could begin to develop. In these communities of teaching practice, the beginning NESB teacher felt as if he/she was understood, listened to, cared for and accepted. A community of practice is a logical place in which a beginning teacher can learn from those with experience to develop her own practice and look to experienced colleagues for support and advice.

Employers *need* to be active in putting into place structures that will encourage *all* employees to share knowledge and to accept newcomers into their communities of practice as legitimate peripheral participants, particularly those newcomers from other cultures. This is the second level in the building of that bridge from teacher preparation to beginning teacher for the NESB graduate.

The model that emerges from the research is one in which a mentor is assigned to the NESB newcomer/s to the community of teaching practice. This mentor would have worldliness. If no one in the immediate work area is available with worldliness, then a second mentor from another sector of the school could be found. This group would become a mentoring community of practice in which the NESB newcomer/s would be legitimised as peripheral participants. The essential element in this community of practice is the "old timer" with worldliness. This community of practice would provide a comfortable forum for the social construction of knowledge in which the newcomer/s could develop professional practice, growth and identity (Palincsar et al., 1998; Wenger, 1998).

It is anticipated that the interaction that occurs in the above worldliness community of practice would provide the newcomers with the opportunity to develop the shared references needed to avoid non-membership of their communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). With developed confidence in interactional situations, the transition from the edge to legitimate peripheral participant in their individual communities of practice would occur in a faster time frame than currently indicated by this research study.

A community of practice consisting of all NESB newcomers to the organisation should also be established by management in the organisation. This community of practice would enable the NESB newcomers to share experiences and learn from each other, particularly regarding skills of interaction with established members of their workplace.
The notion of membership of more than one community of practice is not unreasonable given the positioning on the *edge* of a community that has been shown to occur through this study and the possibility of that positioning proving an impediment to professional growth and development of professional identity. Once the newcomer has developed a sense of belonging to the staffroom community of practice, albeit as a legitimate peripheral participant, the mentoring community of practice may dissolve as its task has been completed (Wenger, 1998).

The professional bodies

The final level in the bridge from teacher preparation to beginning teacher should be considered by the professional bodies relevant to teaching. As mentioned above, assistance is provided for those NESB teachers who have been overseas-trained yet none is available for locally prepared NESB teachers by the registering authority in Queensland. Therefore, the

registering authorities should provide specific sessions to assist these young teachers into the profession. Any assistance that may be provided to help in the access of knowledge and development of practice should be a priority for any registering body. The issue of course that would arise lies in the self identification as NESB by the beginning teacher.

Conclusion

A culturally diversified workforce is vital in sustaining a culturally diversified nation. Due care and attention needs to be afforded to the needs of those who enter, or are preparing to enter, the teaching profession, particularly those who are from a non-English speaking background. The notion of communities of practice provides a clear and logical space for a smooth transition into a workplace. Employers and professional bodies need to ensure they are providing a "fair go" for all teachers. From this research, it is evident that unless all of the effecting bodies: the universities, employers and professional bodies ensure they are putting in place strategies to build the bridge for NESB graduates to effectively function as beginning teachers, then there is a high risk of losing a very valuable portion of the teaching workforce. Further research is needed to facilitate productive transitions into the workplace especially for those teachers who are from a cultural and linguistic background different from the dominant group.

Appendix One

Participant Table

Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	NESB	Background and previous fields of study	Teaching Areas
David	Taiwanese	Engineer (Taiwan),Masters IT (Qld)	IT 8-12, Maths 8-12, Chinese
Justine	Taiwanese	Business (Qld)	Accounting, Japanese, Chinese
Ian	Indian	Chemist (India), Masters IT (Qld)	IT 8-12, Science 8-12, Maths 8-12
Michelle	Japanese	Business (Japan), MBA (Qld)	Japanese, IT 8-12, Business 8-12
Susan	Taiwanese	Business (Qld)	Business 8-12, Accounting, Chinese
Kelly	Portuguese	Arts (Portugal), Masters App. Linguistics (Qld)	ESL, SOSE, Study of Society, Italian
Sheree	Sri Lankan	Architecture (Sri Lanka), BA Indigenous Studies (Qld)-not completed	Science 8-12, SOSE, Maths 8-12
Alyson	German	Business (Germany)	German (primary & secondary), Business 8-12
Rachel	Indonesian	Science (Qld), Masters in Science (Qld)	Science 8-12, Indonesian Immersion classes in science and maths
Alicia	Taiwanese	Business (Qld), Masters Finance (Qld)	Chinese, Accounting

Note.   IT = Information Technology. MBA = Masters of Business Administration. ESL = English as a Second Language. SOSE = Studies of Society and the Environment. BA = Bachelor of Arts.

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