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THE POSSIBILITIES OF IMPLEMENTING THE CROATIAN NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARD IN TEACHING MUSIC TO PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Abstract

The work elaborates the possibilities of working with pupils with special needs in music teaching foreseen by the Croatian National Education Standard. The assumptions in realizing contemporary approach for pupils with special needs, implies, among other things, changes in terminology, introduction of various contents and types of work, teachers' competence and changes within the provisions of the law. The upbringing and education of children with special needs in regular elementary schools is the right of a child guaranteed by the Pre-school Education Act of the Republic of Croatia, and regulations linked to that act. It must be said that CNES presumes a competent teacher. Namely, guidelines are given but not clear instructions on how to realize the educational contents in working with children with special needs.

Key words: Croatian National Education Standard, pupils with special needs, teacher, music culture teaching

Izveček

Možnosti implementacija Hrvaškega nacionalnega izobraževalnega standarda v pouk glasbe za otroke s posebnimi potrebami

V delu so predstavljene možnosti dela z otroki s posebnimi potrebami pri pouku glasbene kulture skladno s predvidevanji Hrvaškega nacionalnega izobraževalnega standarda. Predpostavke za uresničevanje sodobnih pristopov pri delu z otroki s posebnimi potrebami posledično vplivajo na spreminjanje terminologije, uvajanje novih vsebin in oblik dela, na učiteljeve kompetence in na spremembe v veljavni zakonodaji. Pravico otrok s posebnimi potrebami do vzgoje in izobraževanja v rednih osnovnih šolah zagotavljata Zakon o predšolski vzgoji in Zakon o osnovnem šolstvu Republike Hrvaške ter spremljajoči podzakonski akti. Izpostaviti je potrebno, da Hrvaški nacionalni izobraževalni standard predpostavlja kompetentnega učitelja. Kljub danim smernicam pa ni jasnih napotkov o tem kako realizirati vzgojno-izobraževalne vsebine pri delu s otroki s posebnimi potrebami.

Ključne besede: Hrvaški nacionalni izobraževalni standard, otroci s posebnimi potrebami, učitelji, pouk glasbene kulture

Introduction

The Croatian National Education Standard (CNES) as one of the possibilities of implementing change in the educational and teaching activities in schools, the entire implementation of which started by accepting the new Teaching Plan and Program for Elementary Schools ¹ (Hrvatić, Piršl, 2007) has, among other things, given in its guidelines to teachers recommendations for pupils with special educational needs in regular elementary school.

A pupil with special educational needs is considered every child with difficulties in studying (quite greater than his peers) due to which he needs particular educational support. According to the valid orientation in the List of Types and Degrees of Developmental Difficulties (Regulations for Elementary School Education for Children with Special Developmental Needs, Official Gazette no. 23/1991.) the types of developmental difficulties are:

1. eyesight impairment (partial eyesight and blindness),
2. hearing impairment (deafness and partial deafness),
3. speech and voice communication disorders and specific difficulties in studying,
4. physical disability and chronic diseases,
5. mental retardation,
6. behavioural disorders,
7. autism,
8. existence of numerous types and degrees of difficulties in psychophysical development.

The greatest number of pupils with particular educational needs is completely integrated in regular class sections so as to have at most three pupils with special educational needs in one class. The Croatian National Education Standard (CNES) gives clear instructions on teaching contents, but not on the possibilities of their implementation. When speaking about children with special needs, messages are given but precise instructions are missing. We all know that the teacher has to be the moderator and creator of the teaching process, the innovator whose continual life education is the main task of his profession, but we are of the opinion that CNES should contain concrete suggestions for developmental possibilities in the expert and social competence of the teacher.

¹ The new Teaching Plan and Programme for Elementary Schools has been accepted for the school year 2006/2007, while the implementation of CNES was preceded by the performance of an experimental teaching Plan and programme from first to eighth grade during the school year 2005/2006 in 49 elementary schools in the Republic of Croatia.

The expression „children with special needs“ should also be explained at the very beginning. Namely, this expression covers talented children, but the specific quality of work with talented children is not the theme of our work. Only children with specific difficulties will be mentioned, and the expression special needs will be used.²

The Croatian National Education Standard (CNES)

In the aim of developing a "school to the pupils' standards", a Croatian educational standard has been created as basis for changes in elementary school working programs and methods. CNES introduces relief by removing superfluous educational contents. The contemporary manner of teaching is based on research teaching, independent and group work and applicable knowledge and skills. It foresees, among other things, the strengthening of the school's educational role; and acquisition of social and moral habits and capacities. Classes are to a lesser degree frontal: various types and methods of teaching, teaching outside class and outdoors – the use of the real world as a source of knowledge, research lessons, stimulating work in pairs, group and team work.

The realization of aims and tasks foreseen by the CNES requires the teacher's competence, expert as well as social. They are not clearly defined, but guidelines of effective performance are given. It must be said that during their studies, teachers acquire only elementary competence and their use of traditional teaching methods is not rare. They are burdened by daily routine, the study of isolated skills and success of the program realization. Daily educational practice is the key element of a teacher's professional development, but the continuity of the development requires the development and care of social competence, firstly due to a series of changes in contemporary schools. The introductory part indicates as a particular field work working with children with special needs in complete or partial integration. But, besides recommending the expert upgrading of teachers and expert associates, and their cooperation, no methodical instructions of content implementation are given which would help the teacher in working with children with special needs. CNES demands regular and permanent cooperation with other teachers such as discussions on the connection and persistence of the educational contents with other educational fields, exchange of opinion on the quality of methods and means of research, organization possibilities and other, and the stimulation of professional enthusiasm. The aspects of cooperation are not defined, which makes communication in school more difficult.

² The expression children with special educational needs is used in CNES instead of the expression children with development difficulties or children with disabilities because the first is a wider and less stigmatizing expression, more appropriate in the field of education and upbringing.

Music Culture Teaching Singularities – Implementation According to CNES

Unlike the Teaching Plan and Programme from 1999, CNES deals, at a much larger scale, with the basic assumptions of music culture and its singularities, and the conclusion is that it abandons the model of the past simple and non-effective *solfeggio*, putting the main emphasis on the cultural aspect of music. Teaching fields are set up relatively openly so that the number of songs sung, and compositions listened to are of methodical recommendation than an obligation – the choice of teaching themes and units is left to the teacher. Teaching music culture in the first three grades is an excellent field for stimulating positive emotions, and the teaching fields are, therefore, reduced to four: singing, playing an instrument, listening and elements of music creativity. It is recommended to burden pupils as least as possible with text books, workbooks, and all the teaching material can be left at school, not having children carry it home.

Several facts influence the creation and appearance of the teaching programme and the music teaching itself. The first is the specific phenomenon of music as art that exists in a determined period of time (and space), and therefore teaching music differs from teaching other subjects since it has to be experienced and learned on-the-spot through the activity of the pupil – playing, singing, listening and musical creativity.

The surroundings and the culture of the society of the teacher and pupils are also an important factor in creating the teaching programme. The stratified appearance of folk music considering its expressive aspect: singing, playing (along with) dancing, is, in the communicational sense, a real model of the educational process. The cultural and civilisation interests and obligation of society are to promote the wealth of heritage, (Sam – Palmić, 2002), particularly if we have in mind that ,besides the educational aim, music has many other aims and effects such as cultural and political that refer to preserving the musical expression of a certain region. The upbringing of children means the upbringing of a society and people by preserving one's identity and thus getting to know the cultural, artistic and common people's wealth. The teaching programme, as the creator of teaching and therefore the entire educational system – fruit of tradition, the present day and discovery of a better and more quality future – and as such must not neglect human values and man's greater need for culture. Musical education must not be subject to profit and the technological progress of man. The value of music is in the emotional and intellectual sphere of a man's life.

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that music classes in a general-education school cannot be the same as classes in a music school. There are particular conditions in a music school, and such a school is for those pupils with particular capacities or talents. The newest music culture teaching plan and programme in the Republic of Croatia (CNES) accepts the difference between music schools and general-education schools in establishing the very tasks and aims of music culture

teaching. Therefore, music culture lessons in a general-education school cannot be performed from logical profession but from logical aims (CNES, 2005). Music culture as such takes rise from the nature of its activity, but it is essential to establish a concept and methodology of the music education teaching programme in general-education schools.

Oblak (1995) states another art education singularity, which can be stated as specific analysis conclusion on the singularity of music culture teaching in general-education schools as a philosophy of the subject and source for drawing up a teaching plan and programme: “the meaning of every art education is that it is a result of the nature of its specific activity, contents and the expansion of the art framework. In this respect the methodology of the teaching programme for music education ensues from the specific music culture quality determined by the factors of music production, reproduction and reception. They are connected by creativity as a basic activity in art” (Oblak, 1995, 17, 18). He furthermore states that one of the basic human characteristics is thus created, and it is searching for something new and discovering the unknown.

Unlike the old Programme, CNES leads with the logics of having an aim, and the aim is conveyed as “introducing the pupil to music culture, getting acquainted with the basic elements of the music language, developing musical creativity, establishing and adopting measures of value for the (critical and esthetical) evaluation of music.” (CNES, 2006, p. 66.)

Besides bringing the main aim (or aims) of music culture teaching, CNES establishes also the tasks of music teaching and thus states how the pupil should:

- get to know (methodically lead listening) with various music compositions,
- getting to know the basic elements of the music language,
- encourage independent musical activity (singing, playing).
 - The task of singing songs is, first of all, singing as such, and not (only) learning songs.
 - The task of playing and instrument is playing as such, and not (only) learning a specific piece.
 - The task of listening is the development of musical taste, but also getting to know specific musical works and pieces.
 - The task of musical literacy is acquiring only basic information on notes.
 - The task of interpreting a musical work and form is, first of all, active music listening. The forms and types are in second plan and verbal knowledge on these does not, in principle, go further than what through a musical ear can be discovered in a musical example.

In practice, much more can be said on CNES realisation but the question arises on how much used is made of the fact that teaching themes and units are placed openly and relatively at free choice for every teacher, and how much many in practice really go by the textbook. It is my opinion that one does not need to particularly emphasize

the possibility of correlation, particularly in lower elementary teaching, where, in the light of a modern approach to education as a whole, subjects such as art, physical education, science, Croatian language and literature, religion, etc., should be more connected to music – music is not and should not be just a “decoration” in the teaching process! The importance of out-of-school activities linked with music must be emphasized just as much as correlation, and it seems that they have not been given a greater significance, but, regardless of this, the influence of choirs and school orchestras are irreplaceable in the educational process and the realization of music culture teaching aims. The participation of pupils in such activities is the best preparation for their being future quality music culture consumers in the cultural life of their ambience, and for continuing to educate and improve throughout their entire life. It must be, therefore, pointed out that children with special needs are just as well consumers as others and that this should be made possible for them. The teacher is given the possibility to use all his potentials, as well as the possibilities of various creations for the lesson hour so as to adapt it continually to the pupil, and to start from the pupil’s needs. The pupil is the centre of work and teaching, and therefore the participant, and not the passive education process observer. The question is asked: Does every teacher have the adequate competence? And is it always possible to implement music teaching contents to children with special needs? To neglect them and not include them in all teaching activities could have a negative impact on them and disrupt their social and emotional development.

The Specific Work Quality of Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Music Culture Teaching

CNES contains elements of differentiation and it is necessary to note competence from on various required levels, below and above the normal standard so as to enable every pupil to be able to express himself entirely, and expand competence. The CNES introduction particularly elaborates the approach of work with pupils with difficulties, newly categorized by terminology into pupils with special needs. Their integration in the regular education system implies the practice of special contents, manners and methods of work, and evaluating the accomplished. The singularities in the work with these pupils refer to recommendations on communication, didactical and methodical processes (enable studying with the help of another pupil, stimulate pupils into a positive interaction by performing mutual activities, and make other pupils aware of their needs, help and cooperation).

It is necessary to shape such conditions of the educational process that enable taking into consideration the individual needs of all children. This demands flexibility and adjustability to differences, education according to a curriculum founded on flexibility. The developed capacity of a pupil in appreciating differences is obvious through the support and help given to pupils with special needs, and the teacher holds

the most important role in the stimulation itself. It is necessary to take into consideration the special educational needs of all children. Carter (1996) points out that good studying practice of pupils with special educational needs depends on the following factors: good relationships between teachers and expert associates, good communication with personnel, pupils and parents, differentiation of demands, variety of studying models, teacher's treatment of every child as an individual, quality of assistance in studying, and involvement of coordinators for children with special educational needs.

In the introductory part of the CNES, methodological instructions are given in working with pupils with special needs, but it must be said that the instructions are conceived in so as they already assume a competent teacher, and some particularities are only listed. Namely, work with pupils with special needs is a complex and extremely responsible work where the teacher, through his activity, prevents the continuation of numerous other difficulties and failures in the emotional and social field, which can be experienced by children if they are not involved in lessons as other pupils are. The contents of the programmes stated with single themes represent the minimum needed to be adopted by a pupil, but they do not limit the expansion of the content offer. The list of songs in the teaching field of singing should be taken as a recommendation. The teacher has a free choice in selecting them from the presented list and/or outside the list, and his obligation is only for the indicated quantity of songs. He has a free choice of the specific examples for a certain teaching unit and a free choice of the fields, units and themes where the teaching work is based on listening to music, and these are *folklore music, musical instruments, choirs, shaping of a musical composition, types of music and music style periods*.

Singularities are stated, possibilities for adaptation, directions are given, but all this is only a part of what a teacher needs in order to realize the educational teaching tasks, particularly through music teaching, which is a specific field for pupils. CNES states singularities in the work with pupils with **motor disorders and chronic diseases**, and singularities in work with pupils with **lower intellectual capacity**. We are of the opinion that these differences are not important for experiencing music, and we will not elaborate them particularly. It is only necessary to point out that the teacher always has to praise the pupil for every least improvement, which influences positively his relationship with his peers. Children with **specific learning difficulties** have not until recently been able to participate in any type of music activity, except for listening to it. Technology has changed even this. It is now possible for children to create their own music using "musical simulation" (sound beam). A child can, at his own choice, dive into sound or silence. Children can research, discover and shape sounds. In general, when we are dealing with describing the characteristics of a pupil with specific studying difficulties, Armstrong (2001) points out an oversized direction towards the imperfections and weak knowledge of talent, as, for example, for music.

It must be likewise said for pupils with **vocal language speaking difficulties**, where these cannot be used as an obstacle in experiencing music, listening or playing, nor can **disorders in attention/hyperactivity and behavioural disorders**. They can be used as stimulation, and researches show that music has a positive and relaxing influence on pupils with the mentioned difficulties. Thus, by developing rhythm we, at the same time, influence the acquisition of self-control and the suppression of motor, and this possibility of self-control is important because it functions spontaneously (Šmit, 2001). The possibilities of applying the singing voice in the rehabilitation of children with speech or behavioural disorders are inexhaustible. It is to be assumed that even autistic children experience music in a particular way. They can sometimes develop particular capacities in some fields (music, painting, sculpture, mathematics,...) for which examples are given in literature: a six-months-old baby that could by humming reproduce arias that it had heard only once; a blind child with mental disorders that could remember long compositions after hearing only once (Nikolić, 2000). It is difficult to speak of this theme without additional researches, and also due to the fact that autistic children are partly integrated in the educational system. One of the greatest problems with **autistic children** is communication. Study results show that improvising music therapy can lead to a great improvement in their communication. Music stimulates sociability and self-expression studying words with music can be effective. Children with special needs demanding a particular approach and orientation from the teacher towards their needs through music teaching are certainly children with hearing impairment and particularly visual impairment, and we will mention some singularities in working with such children..

Singularities in working with children with hearing impairment

The aim of educating children with hearing impairment is the approach to the complete educational programmes adequate to their chronological age. This assumes that deaf and partly deaf pupils without further developmental difficulties or disorders can have various types of support considering their individual needs, counsellor's recommendations and parents' choice. Pupils have difficulties in adopting melodies, differentiating the tonality and identifying music compositions, but they can adopt rhymes and songs of a more simple melody, rhythm and articulation structure. It is therefore very important for the teacher to continually involve them in all the class activities. Music can improve the quality of life in children with hearing disorders, and therefore difficulties in studying. Šmit (2001) states that when working with children with hearing impairment, it is possible to try processes founded on the following perceptions:

- The speaking device in children with hearing impairment is ready to function rhythmically
- The syllable rhythm and intonation are transmitted through low frequencies to which the child with hearing impairment is most sensitive
- The rhythmical appearances are easily perceived and memorized

It is important to say that the CNES recommendations can only partly help the teacher in his work with children with hearing impairment for the “teaching creations” must simply be created by the teacher himself, on the spot, as demanded by the atmosphere in class at that moment. In such situations his social competence is most important. During music lessons, it should be made possible for a child to feel as part of the class community, not to feel neglected or disregarded. Besides recommending various teaching fields and teaching contents in class, suggestions are also given on work with pupils with special needs, and it must be said that these are not clear enough. For example, they state that children in the 2nd grade «can participate, and their success will depend on the degree of their hearing perception development» (CNES, 2005, p. 16). We are of the opinion that children must and have to participate. Music in lower elementary school grades is an ideal field for stimulating strong emotions, feelings of belonging, fellowship and tolerance. It can contribute powerfully to the increasing need of stimulating and creating a culture of non-violence among school children. Children sing, listen to chosen music and play during classes (giving rhythm to imitating their teacher, dancing, moving with the music, improvising, playing and similar). Music teaching must be performed in a pleasant atmosphere, deprived of all tension. If it is in any way possible, the usual sitting pattern in double rows must be changed in order to have the pupils experience the classroom as a free space where pupils can not only sit but walk and move in a more or less stylized manner (dance, march). The development of new technologies has enabled children with hearing impairment to approach music. Today technology that offers children with greater hearing impairment the possibility of playing electronic keyboard is easily accessible, and an entire series of multimedia technology has been developed where colour and vibrations are used in helping to enjoy music. Choirs also exist where songs are played and words are expressed with symbols for the deaf. Singing has been developed where hands show the music notes sung.

Singularities in working with children with visual impairment

The Croatian National Education Standard gives recommendations for working with pupils with visual impairment and blind pupils. It thus states that integrated pupils with visual impairment and blind pupils fall behind the intellectual development of their peers who are able to see and master the regular teaching plan

and programme foreseen for particular grades. They get to know the world, communicate and study using the remaining senses. For the blind the tactile perception, hearing and speech are most important. If there is some eyesight left it is certainly used. If the blind child has positive social experiences in the company of his peers, he will not react with negative emotions on his blindness, nor will he retreat from company and develop a negative feeling of difference, especially if the teacher notices and praises some of the activities in which the child stands out. Even though the concept according to which the blind have a talent for music has nowadays been abandoned, educators and teachers use it often in their work, primarily to make blind children equally participate in all school activities. It is well known that music is an art particularly close to the blind and the partially sighted because it is conceived through hearing, the primary sense of the blind, and, therefore, particular attention must be given to their music upbringing and education. Such children can actively participate in the implementation of all teaching plans and programmes. It is not necessary to particularly emphasize that **singing** will not pose a problem. At the interpretation of new songs, the teacher must adapt his methods to the child with visual impairment, and he will use methods of speech, singing and hearing analysis. If there are applications connected to the interpretation of new songs, they must be adapted. For example, in the interpretation of the song 'Spring at Heart' (according to CNES foreseen for the 3rd grade) we will show activities in which blind and partially sighted children can equally participate in class.

The teacher will use tone pictures during the motivating part of the lesson, i.e. music onomatopoeia, and methodically lead the class which will evoke the sounds of a green meadows in blooming in spring. It will inspire the imagination of the pupils who will well know all the sounds possible to be heard in such a situation (bird singing, bee, bumble-bee and bugs buzzing, the breeze, rustling of the leaves, falling of the rain ...) The teacher should then show his competence of leadership that will help children to figure out onomatopoeia for every particular sound after having distributed the roles for the dramatization of a situation where the sounds of nature appear, more precisely colourful spring meadows and numerous different sounds. During the lesson every child in the class becomes part of a big orchestra of the awakening of nature in spring. The interpretation of the song then starts according to hearing, and the use of one of the chosen methods. In this teaching unit, besides material aims (learned new song, development of the skill of precise and expressive singing, development of hearing concentration and music memory ...), educational aims are also realized, and they are the development of interest in getting to know new musical contents, and the stimulation and development of the musical taste. (Stanišić, Jandrašek, 2007).

Playing as a particular teaching unit is stimulating the blind and partially sighted children for the reason that in using the sense of touch and hearing, they can play music just as well as, and maybe even better than, other children. *Orff instruments*, self-made instruments (drums, rattles, flutes...) various percussions,

string instruments, and even instruments with keys, and *body percussion* are adequate for use in class, and the blind child will accept them gladly. Atanasov – Piljek (2008), in their music culture textbook for third grade elementary school, recommend the use of adequate children's instruments for the interpretation of most new songs. The interpretation "Song in Wheel Dancing", for example, includes playing the drum, sticks, triangle and rattles in a way as to have a song that is usually in 2/4 measure be played as follows: instruments are distributed in four groups in class, each group plays its own instrument, the drum plays the first beat, the sticks the second beat, the triangle all the beats, and the rattle the rhythm. The most important thing is to prepare the children for playing, explain how an instrument is to be played. Children will thus feel the rhythm of the song and play in rhythm of the beat, without being burdened to adopt the concepts themselves and the unnecessary verbalism. In this case a child with partial vision will master the given material only through the sense of touch (for playing an instrument) and hearing, and thus through the development of a musical ear, he stimulates the development of his motor capacities.

Listening to music has a powerful influence on the development of musical sensitiveness which superiorly influences man's entire emotional and spiritual life, and it follows the development of a child from the prenatal period to the end of his schooling and further on in life. (Sam, 1998). During elementary school education examples from music literature, songs and tunes appropriate for children's age can be heard, as well as class performances by the pupils themselves. Methodical preparation before starting to listen to the work is needed in listening to examples of music and songs, and the listening must always be with the task of determining the speed of the composition, the vigour of the performance, identification of the performance group, musical form of the composition ... Along with listening, elements of musical creativity can be connected, as, for example, moving with the music according to the following rules: the teacher releases the appropriate musical composition on a CD – player, and the pupils move with the sounds of music. Pupils should be led by methodical instructions: the movements do not have to be great in size, one can remain in place (moving among other pupils could be a problem for a blind child), try to follow the composition features through movement – quick movements of the arms if the tempo is quick large and big movements for loud dynamics, the opposite for a quiet one, trying to follow the melody through moving hands and arms, etc. When the music stops all must freeze in the position they are. The music should become lower and lower so that the pupils can pay attention to when it stops. This game develops creativity, strengthens the hearing perception and establishes a correlation with physical education, and the dancing movements develop the motor capacity in children.

Connecting **musical creativity** with the mentioned teaching fields, we acquire endless working possibilities with blind and partially sighted children. Let us take the example of the music game '*We Watch with Ears*' (Juričić, 2005) where we will realize that it is appropriate for the participation of a blind child. The rules of the

game are that one child wears a blindfold across his eyes (this role can be given to a blind child), and the other leads him to follow his voice through a curved way from one part of the room to the other, and at the same time keep an eye on the space so it adapts to the blind child, and prevent having obstacles that could lead to problems in movement. Besides his own voice, a child could be lead by ringing, rattling or creating another sound. The game becomes more difficult when the child following the given sound is obstructed by other children in the class producing different sounds. This game develops the perception of hearing, the child must follow a determined sound in the abundance of other sounds.

The musical capacities of blind and partially sighted children have to be discovered and developed because active engagement in music makes possible a life of greater quality and a more fulfilled social integration which starts already at kindergarten and school age.

Conclusion

Analyzing the possibility of music teaching contents implementation foreseen by CNES we cannot but notice how these are only at the level of instructions or suggestions. Even though it was not our intention to relate critically and negatively to the CNES instructions, the fact remains that it does not elaborate useful methods that facilitate teachers' work with children with special needs. If the recommendation states that children *can* participate in most games, or that they *can* feel something resounding, we have already made them different. Pupils with special needs need to participate equally, for we are all different in our experiences of teaching as well as music. It is likewise obvious how the same suggestions are made for pupils with special needs, which is not possible to notice in practice. We have already said that some difficulties have no influence on the music experience, which means that in such cases suggestions and remarks cannot be used. Children can do much more than we ask of them. We restrain their creative possibilities with our exaggerated worry. The role of the teacher as competent expert is therefore of crucial importance. CNES contains elements of differentiation, opens possibilities, but without continual and systematically conceived teachers' expert upbringing there is no possibility of quality implementation of teaching contents.

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