PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES BY PRIMARY TEACHERS AT BASIC LEVEL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This small scale ethnographic study is carried out in a public school of Kaski district in order to explore pedagogical practices from the perspectives of primary teachers as a course requirement of M Phil in Education Studies from Graduate School of Education, Tribhuvan University. Interview with three primary teachers was taken along with classroom observation. Data are analyzed qualitatively based on interview transcription, classroom observation record and researcher's field note. The study explored pedagogical practices in two broad global themes (1) shifting from traditional to constructivist teaching, (2) multiple school transition and curriculum. This article argue that primary teachers are in self-transition from traditional teaching to constructivist approach which is remarkable paradigm shifting on primary teachers' understanding of pedagogical practices. Similarly, multiple school transition and hangover of English as Medium of Instruction are major policy related challenges in order to renovate the existing teaching practices at primary level.

KEYWORDS: Ethnography, pedagogy, primary teacher, constructivism, school transition, policy

INTRODUCTION

Students' leaning is mostly influenced from the Pedagogical practices adopted by primary teachers. Since, teacher is the one of the key facilitator to enhance the better student learning. Siraj and Taggart (2014) argue that "pedagogy is the instructional techniques and strategies which enable learning to take place. It refers to the interaction process between teacher practitioner and learner, and it is also applied to include the provision of some aspects of the learning environment" (p. 5). Varieties of teaching strategies needs for a teacher in order to facilitate effectively during the teaching learning process (Dunlosky, Rawson, Marsh, Nathn & Willingham, 2018). From such strategies, teacher can help students to achieve the desired outcomes of curriculum or particular program. Similarly, feedback mechanism plays an important role in motivating students and strengthening their learning.

I had an experience of being primary school teacher in my early career. Looking back to my teaching behavior, I found myself as a traditional teacher instead of being constructivist teacher. In that time, I used to think that I am only the person to help students in their learning. But, nowadays, I realized that was not right concept in relation to learner centered pedagogy. Similar to my experience, a study from Dundar, Beteille, Ribound & Deolalikar (2014) found that there is lacking or less existent student focused learning in South Asia including Nepal.

An improvement in classroom teaching learning at primary level (CERID, 2006) is one of the serious issue of public debate. More importantly, such a situation occurred when a teacher lacks "organizational skills; positive classroom climate; personalized highly interactive approaches to teaching and learning, and more efficient use of the plenary" (Siraj & Taggart, 2014, p.35).

In order to enhance the quality and overall improvement of primary education, Nepal has experienced the implementation of various plans and programs. Basic and Primary Education Project [BPEP] (1997- 2002) is one of the foreign aided major intervention. Improvement in teaching learning is one of the key component of this project (BPEP, 1997-2002). Similarly, another policy document National Curriculum Framework [NCF] (2007) states that "the teaching method should be practical and effective in order to transform learning achievement" (p.21). However, in spite of the implementation of the different programs/projects the condition of teaching learning is remained the same. It is claimed that the primary schools have poor quality in teaching learning and low achievement especially in public schools (Mathema, 2007). Also, pedagogy is one of the key components in learning and 'transforming" (Ballantine &Spade, p.117). Likewise, Roshenshine (2012) argues that " the most successful teachers spent more time in guided practice, more time asking questions, more time correcting errors" (p.17).

Therefore, it is imperative to study deeply the pedagogical practices of primary teachers at basic level in order to explore its existing phenomenon. I believe that such a phenomenon of existing situation of teaching and learning practices at basic level can only be studied through qualitative study. More specifically, I am interested to adopt ethnographic approach in this study. Various scholars have claimed the usefulness of ethnography to study the process of classroom teaching learning (Yanik, 2017; Lyer, 2013; Miles & Morton, 2013; Hamilton, 1999).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study I aims to explore multiple realities from the 'ethnographic' perspectives in pedagogical practices of primary teachers' [Public School] at basic level. I employed the popular emerging trend of ethnographic research in educational setting as Mills & Morton (2013) argues that "teaching and ethnographic research share in common. Teaching, like fieldwork, is a form of engagement with difference, a means of learning and sharing through experience. Both professions cultivate the skills of observation and reflection" (p.162). I was also a primary school teacher in public school some 20 years earlier. Therefore, I have experienced the complexities and tensions existed between the policy intentions its execution in pedagogical practices at primary level. In order to understand this type of tensions, I employed 'symbolic interactionism' (Elliot, 2007; Ritzer, 2011) and 'anthropology of policy' (Shore & Wright, 2005) as theoretical lenses for this study. Because theoretical framework is essential to understand the complexity of the phenomenon (Given, 2008; Grant & Osanloo, 2014) of pedagogical practices at basic level.

In ethnographic study, I conceived that the classroom interaction is one of the important aspect of successful and productive teaching learning practices in classroom pedagogy. Ritzer (2011) argues that "in social interaction people learn the meaning and symbols that allow them to exercise differently human capacity for thought" (p.370). Similarly "human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpreting, or asserting the meaning of one another's action" (Elliot, 2007, p.34). This notion of

interaction is evident in classroom teaching at basic level of public schools of Nepal. In order to encourage basic level students to think independently teaching learning condition within the school plays an important role. Moreover, Ritzer (2011) argues that "the capacity of thought is shaped by social interaction" (p.370). Therefore, the lenses of symbolic interaction is helpful me to understand and explore the realities of classroom interaction on the role of the teacher and students.

Likewise the symbolic interaction, I have been engaged in anthropology of policy as additional theoretical lenses for this study. Pedagogical practices are highly influences by the overall educational policy of country and its execution within the educational system. Policy study is serious task because it does not only focus on the written document but it paid more attention to the unwritten practices in the name of implementing policies. Regarding the study of policy "the key question is not what is written in policy texts, but rather, what do people do in the name of policy?" (Khanal, 2012). So, it is not adequate the studying the functioning of government policy, but rather, it is equally important to study the practices in executing policy. Policy and 'Power' are interrelated and comes together in such policy execution. As Shore & Wright (2005) states that "who has the 'power to define' the policies" (p.26). In the process of teaching learning teacher holds the power mostly in the form of language than the policy language. Therefore, policy itself is a form and source of policy as power. Lyer (2013) argues that "in classroom situations, it is likely that the teacher is more powerful than the students, and among the students, power may be unequal and may be continually contested" (p.165). Nevertheless, Weden, Shore, Feldman & Lathrop (2005) argue that "policy must also be understand as a type of power as well as the embodiment of certain kind of instrumental reason" (p.37). Therefore, policy as a power for teacher to handling classroom in relation to implementing curriculum in the form of "polishing" (Wedel et al., 2005, p.35).

Improving students' learning and their outcomes depends on how the school to be a learning organization. This requires "both students and teachers are engaged in learning" (Lingard, Hayes & Mills, 2003, p. 399). In addition, it is equally important for any teachers to know and understand their children' background. Mills & Morton (2013) argue that "by acknowledging and making an effort to understand students' social backgrounds and prior experiences, teachers can strengthen these relationships and help students actively engage in their own learning" (p.165). Nonetheless, unequal power relations as well as power sharing between teachers and students cannot be supportive to gain the anticipated changes through engaged classroom. Consequently, "teachers' pedagogical practices, to be a central focus of educational policies" (Lingard et al., 2003, p.399).

Symbolic interactionism relates in my study. Firstly, my study is largely related with pedagogic practices in basic level by primary school teacher. Symbolic interactionism focuses on the interaction of individuals and on how they interpret their interaction (Bulmer, 1969). During the process of teaching learning both the students and teachers engage in the interaction. Also students interact with their colleagues and teachers outside the classroom. In this process words and gestures are being used which have great meaning in pedagogical practices. Secondly, anthropology of policy is related in my study since the educational or social policy influences the pedagogic practices. Only the written text or the government document is not the policy, rather than this activities in the name of policy execution (Khanal, 2012) are also a part of policy. In my study, I want to see the people perspective such as students, teacher etc. in relation to teaching learning activities in school.

METHODOLOGY

My Self Discloser as a Researcher

In this ethnographic study, as a researcher I myself was the chief instrument of inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, I have some "assumptions, experiences, and biases as a researcher" (Schulz & Rubel, 2011, p.288) such as, teachers either positive or negative towards their current pedagogical practices; the attitude of teacher influences pedagogical practices; and they understand modern or contemporary pedagogical practices and applying such practices into their classroom teaching. It is an ethnographic study of pedagogical practices of primary teachers in basic level of community school which as similar to my previous study. I was also a former primary school teacher in a community school similar to the participants of this study. I have an extensive teaching experiences of teaching in primary level (now it is named as Basic Level). I have familiar to the cultural context similar to this school. In addition I have experience of the complexities and dilemma existed in teaching basic level children. So, I have good understanding of my field in general and fieldwork in particular. As Fatterman (2010) explains "the most important element of fieldwork is being there to observe, to ask seemingly stupid but insightful questions, and to write down what is seen and heard" (p.9).

Participants

I have selected three primary school teachers of school 'A' of Pokhara Metropolitan city of Kaski district. Among the three teachers, one was female and the remaining two were male. Their name was replaced by pseudonym due to ethical consideration and to maintain confidentially in order to save them from possible harm from this study. Laxmi a female teacher has bachelor degree and having almost 20 years of teaching experiences but she still is temporary teacher by education regulation. Likewise, Ram and Kishor the remaining two teachers were male and both were permanent. Among them Ram, a SLC graduate has 30 years of teaching experiences and he is retiring next year. Similarly, Kishor, an I Ed graduate has almost 28 years of teaching experiences and he will be retiring after next two years. I have selected these three participants purposively because they are being information reach participant as ethnography demands (Fatterman, 2010; Creswell, 20070) and suits for my study.

I went to the school and talked to head teacher by explaining about my study. After explaining in detailed, I requested him to suggest such participants for interview and classroom observation. I further clarified that I am seeking those primary teachers who have extensive teaching experiences both of traditional as well as recent teaching methods; having training, and currently teaching both in Nepali and English medium of the school.

The Field

The field for the study was a fully governmental funded community school located at the center of earlier Pokhara metropolitan city (earlier Lekhanath Municipality). The school was established in BS 2017 and currently runs both the Nepali and English medium separate programmers in the same school compound. English medium classes were started two years back and now it runs from nursery to grade eight. Similarly, Nepali medium classes are running from grade one to twelve. Moreover, this is the unique school in this area where there are the children from internally migrated people and squatters'

people from the different parts of the country. So, there can be found students from diversified multicultural setting such as having different caste, ethnicity, demographic and socioeconomic status. Moreover, my house is nearer to the school and I am very much familiar to the social and cultural setting in the outside of the school.

The study was conducted during the six months of field study from March to August 2018 as a research study for the course requirement in M Phil in education studies from Graduate School of Education, Tribhuvan University.

Procedure

I have taken open ended interview with three participant teacher many times within the school, especially in their leisure time. Some questions I preplanned seemed irrelevant so, during the interview, I asked several probing questions with them. More importantly, I offered them a cup of tea few times and did informal conversation in order to capture their "perceptions, feelings, awareness" (Schulz & Rubel, 2011, p.288) and their understandings towards the pedagogical practices. For the interview, questions were designed to elicit description of their pedagogical experience rather than the simple collection of events and facts (Schulz & Rubel, 2005; Kavle, 1996). In addition to the interview, I have observed one classroom teaching of Laxmi where she was teaching in grade five. Bedsides the interview and classroom observation, I prepared field note by reflecting my observation what I saw in the school during the time I went there for the data collection. Interview data were recorded in audio devise. Then I transcribed the interview data. I have taken the interview in Nepali then translated it into English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Pedagogical practices at basic level from ethnographic perspective is related to shifting process of the traditional pedagogy into blending the constructivist approach. Similarly, among the various concerns, educational policy (Halpin & Troyana, 2005) is one of the influencing factor for pedagogical transformation in schools. Ethnographic studies concerns on the execution of national policies into practice instead of shaping them. In relation to the policy impact of ethnographic study, Hammersley (2005) argues that "ethnography has mainly been address to those on the ground: to teachers, local authorities, governors etc." (p.145). regarding the symbolic interactionism and the anthropology of policy. The following sections illustrate the shifting of pedagogical practices and influence of multiple school transitions of students and execution of national curriculum at basic level.

Shifting from Traditional to Constructivist Teaching

Traditional teaching emphasizes one way lecture from the teacher where students becomes "Docile and Obedient Bodies" (Lyer, 2013, p.171) and just remains inactive listener in teaching learning activities. In this type of approach pedagogy, influence of teachers' become high and centers on lesson delivery rather than focusing on students' learning. Regarding the teachers' influence Santoro (2011) argues that "doubtless individual teachers and the qualities they bring to their classrooms affect their teaching and their students' profoundly" (P.6). Also, I found this type of feeling with my research participants. Ram stated during interview,

> Earlier in my teaching career, I used to think that me as a teacher is the authority to teach and students should follow me and my activities during class. But

> nowadays I think, students should provide learning environment rather than forcing or imposing them to do something. [Interview April 17, 2018].

The above notion of Ram shows that attitudinal or perceptual changes occurred within him. It denotes constructivist approach (Given, 2008) in which "change has to be processed by the learner and not by the teacher only; the learner is the main actor in the process, since it is his or her own structuring which is at stake" (Larochelle, Bednarz & Garrison, 1998, p. 214). This approach is underpinned by symbolic interactionism. Since the theory of symbolic interactionism believes on the symbols and their interpersonal communications in transmitting the meaning of symbols. (Blumer, 1969; Given, 2008). During the process of teaching learning students see use and conceptualize symbols and constructs meaning themselves. Similarly, Aydodgu & Selanik-Ay (2016) draw conclusion that teacher characteristics support constructivist learning environment. They further argued that "less experienced primary school teachers were more willing to use constructivist principles in their primary school" (p.293).

I had observed classroom teaching of Laxmi at grade five there in order to whether the data in interview match with their real classroom teaching.

> She was teaching the lesson "Live and Let Live from Bad Habit" of social studies by using flash cards and pictures. Firstly, she demonstrated the pictures then assigned group work to draw the meaning of pictures followed by presentation. It was interesting that students had differently interpreted the symbols of bad habit. [Classroom Observation, May 24, 2018]

Alike Ram another participant Kishor stated as,

> I have experienced remarkable changes in my teaching career .Earlier I used to teach mathematics with oral explanations followed by solving all the problems of exercise then students used to do practice many times the same problems. By reflecting myself, that was not right way to teach. So, nowadays, I use to speak less and only provide clue to students so that I always encourage them to solve problems themselves. They try to find meaning and solving problem themselves. [Interview, May 24, 2018]

I observed and took note the students' activities inside and outside the classroom as well as school culture of both Nepali and English medium class without disturbing from my presence there. Even though, of compulsory dress code along with tie, Nepali medium students were enjoying freedom and less caring with them comparing to English medium students. Similarly, I observed the students' entry at the beginning in the morning and outing after the school hours. Nobody were caring Nepali medium students in the same school premises but sports teacher [who was responsible to maintain discipline in school] as well as other class teachers were watching strictly to all the activities of English medium students. Such as they were checking the dress, tie, neatness of cloth, putting students in queue/line while entering and outing from the school compound. In the same time a sports teacher shouted to the English medium students,

> You know you are English medium students of this school, so you must wear neat cloth, tie and you should be disciplined. You can't obey the rules of school. Your walking inside the school area should be in queue. [Field note, April 17, 2018]

The above illustration of sports teacher was striking for me and having so many meaningful symbols and their interaction there (Given, 2008; Taber, 2006; Redmond, 2015). It shows how the school is treating differently to their students in the same school premises. Similarly, it shows the motivation towards the English as Medium of

Instruction (EMI) whatever the achievement of students would be. It shows English medium students are special and they are expected to do better performance not only in exam but in the whole school activities. In addition it clearly indicates the symbolic meaning of school priority. This is the turn from traditionalism to neoliberalism (Bishop, 2018).

Above illustrations form participates clearly indicates their turn from the traditionalism to constructivists approach. However, there is paradox as well as misconception of EMI existed in the school does not support pedagogical transformation towards the constructivist way of teaching. It is noteworthy that all of the three participants, Laxmi, Ram and Kishor experienced the need pedagogical transformation within themselves. Furthermore, they felt the need to be adopt innovative teaching by integrating technology such as using mobile phone, TV, and internet into their classroom teaching for more meaningful learning where students are facilitated to learn instead of imposing contents with them. It's the sing of eagerness to adopt blended learning and it indicates towards the way to self-knowledge construction by students themselves (Lingard, Hays & Mills, 2003). Therefore, participants in this study perceives the students 'uniqueness in order to empowering students that "every student in class will bring unique conceptual and cognitive resources to bear on lesson" (Taber, 2011, p.53).

My research participants are more conscious towards the need of renovating the existing pedagogical practices by practicing blended learning. Simply, it can be started from the use of mobile phone, which they are practicing as well into their classroom instruction. Currently, the governmental bodies are banning the use of cell phone inside the school area. So, it is paradoxical and crus of the matter that even the primary teachers are challenging the existing educational policy as notion of "what teachers know and need to know" (Koppich & Callahan, 2009).

Multiple School Transition and Curriculum

Participants in this study argued that one of the major pedagogical problem they fare facing is multiple school transition of their students. But in contrary to their colleagues' views, Laxmi claimed that there are some positive consequences of such multiple school transition. She further shared that she found clever new comer students from school transfer as well. Ram and Kishor further clarified the causes of such school transfer that sometimes their students take transfer to another school and likewise they are welcoming new students from another school even in the mid of the academic session. This is due to the internal migration and seeking new job from their parents since most of the parents of their students are low skilled labor and squatter. There are various causes of such kinds of school transfer such as academic failure, new jobs of parent in new place. Sometimes it happens due to culturally unresponsive pedagogy (Khanal, 2017, p.463). This matched with the study of Schulz and Rubel (2011) in America.

Highlighting the situation of school transfer, Kishor draw his conclusion as follows,

> In the primary level of this school, there are the children of low skilled labor and squatter people. Such kinds of peoples do not have any stability of staying long time on one place. Specially, they used to move from one place to another in order to seeking new job/work. As a consequence, students are compelled to transfer into new school along with their parents moving. This creates so many problems both in learning of students and teaching to teacher. Major problem of such transition is difference between courses, pedagogy, peers adjustment, a new school

environment, which ultimately affect the students' learning. [Interview, May 24, 2018]

The above notion of Kishor helps to understand the multiple reality and complexities existed in the pedagogical practices of basic level in relation to multiple school transfer of students. Such school transfer creates insecurity to the concerned students. Similarly, other factors like different teaching styles, new friends to be adjust, gap between the courses taught are affecting the students' learning during school transferring. Furthermore, students' school transferring is related to the unemployment and poverty of their parents which is the policy issue.

Regarding the implementation of policy, it is highly important that the activities of people or authority are important than the written policy texts (Halpin & Troyna, 1994; Shore & Wright, 2005). During my field visit, I saw that there were separate canteen and toilet for English and Nepali medium students. For English medium students, there was newly constructed toilet with running water, drinking water in jar, separate library, and sports materials. But for the Nepali medium students there were dirty old toilet without tap water. Similarly, Nepali medium students have to go to tap for drinking water, no separate library and sports materials as well. In addition, I saw teachers were more caring and paying more attention towards the English medium students. I was curious about such discrimination and informally talked to the head teacher. He claimed that English medium students are being highly charged and these minimum facility in order to compete with the boarding schools. Such an intentional discrimination could create "low self-esteem" (Bauersfeld, 1998, p.214) and humiliation among the Nepali medium students and symbolic violence as well as Brodieu argued.

As discussed earlier, participants perceived parental care to their children is one of the key factor for the successful learning. But they felt that there is lacking thee provision of parental education to parents for effective guidance to their children. As Laxmi argue parental care along with school transition also affecting student learning and influencing pedagogical practices. As she experienced those students are performing better whose parents are more caring about their children. Currently, there is rare practice of involving parents in school related activities with references to community school even though policy has addressed this issue. For example there is a provision of directly providing students' progress report to the concerned parents is rarely being practiced.

Besides the parental care perception and attitude of teachers towards disciplinary practice affects student's learning in primary level (Lyer, 2013). Similarly, management of emotion (Given, 2008) during classroom instruction is highly important as Laxmi stated. She further added that students cannot learn well in the fearful environment. This notion of laxmi matches with the findings of Flynn and Colby (2017) that "we often underestimate the capacity of student to be self-sufficient. In a self-disciplined classroom, students possess the ability to document their own tasks and goals" (p.12). Regarding the disciplinary practices Ram seemed paradoxical himself comparing to his earlier claim. Earlier he shared that learner focused teaching learning with full autonomy is required to students for self-learning from their own efforts. But later on Ram amazingly stated,

> There should be silence in the classroom during instruction. Nobody should speak and to listen carefully what the teacher saying. If students do not pay attention there needs to be taken disciplinary actions. [Interview, April 17, 2018]

This view of Ram do not match with the argument of educationists argue that "interaction should be encouraged and utilized for learning" (Lyer, 2013, p.184). So, still

Ram believes learning is silent activity which ultimately kills the creativity of students. In this type of learning "teacher always hold power" (Lyer, 2013, p.185) as Foucault claimed.

Likewise the various factors, curriculum is one of the most influencing factor for pedagogical effectiveness of the teacher since curriculum is one of the main policy document. Currently, same curriculum, prepared centrally is being implemented all over the country in Nepal. This type of curriculum is not equally useful to all geographical as well as demographical diversity of the country. Regarding the development and implementation of the curriculum, Ram raised two burning issues he stated as,

> Firstly, I think current primary education curriculum is not relevant to local context even though it was prepared by experts. Secondly, monolingual school practice is serious problem to those students who have mother tongue other than Nepali language. [Interview, April 17, 2018]

Currently, there is global trend of School Based Curriculum Development instead of centrally made curriculum practice in the globe. In this type of curriculum practice, teachers have full autonomy to design curriculum themselves. This is not materialized in Nepalese context even though the non-functioning provision of Local Curriculum. Similarly, EMI as Medium of Instruction (MI) is another popular trend throughout the country. Regarding this issue, Kishor stated as,

> Neither EMI nor the monolingual practice of Nepali as MI is the solution to effective learning. In my opinion, students could have to provide the opportunity to learn through their mother tongue. [Interview, May 24, 2018]

Alike the Kishor, stated multilingual practice as MI in classroom teaching is currently a popular global trend.

CONCLUSION

This ethnographic study focused to explore the pedagogical practices by primary teachers in basic level from their perceptions and practices. I used symbolic interaction and anthropology of policy as theoretical lenses in this study. More importantly, I have more focused on constructivist approach since it is underpinned by the theory of symbolic interactionism. I have concluded this study broadly in two global themes i.e., shifting from traditional to constructivist teaching and multiple school transition and curriculum. In this study, I explored that primary school teachers, from their self-experience and their own learning are in transition from one way classroom delivery to adopting constructivist learning. This approach conceived that the center of learning are the students so the teachers only facilitates during the learning process. In addition, primary teachers now perceives that learners needs to be encouraged themselves supporting by teachers instead of forceful spoon feeding. However, participants in this study are experienced teachers, this finding is contradictory to the study of Aydodgu & Selanik-AY (2016) that less experienced primary teachers are more willing to use constructivist principles in teaching. I concluded this as great pedagogical departure and paradigm shift from traditionalism to constructivist approach of teaching. I found the participants have eagerness within themselves to renovate their teaching more conducive and student focused.

Another important phenomenon I explored is multiple school transition and curriculum and in relation to pedagogical practice at basic level this is also related to policy issue of school education within the country. From the experiences of participants, school transition is mostly related to employment and poverty of the parents of students'

besides some minor reason of student's academic failure. It is mostly happening to the children of squatter and low skilled labor who moves to seek work from one place to another as internal migrants. So, it is crucial to address by policy in order to ensure their children education. On of the main reason of students' low performance is school transfer especially during the session is running. Such school transfer is creating various problems within the students that are psychological and emotional problems related to adjustment in the new environment and peers, covering the courses and maintain balance between the differences in pedagogical practices with earlier school.

In addition to school transfer, another policy level debate on teaching is EMI as a medium of instruction under the curriculum component of school education which needs to be addressed by formulating clear cut policy. Participants in this study perceived that instead of blindly following the EMI and monolingual teaching practices of Nepali as a medium of instruction, multilingual teaching practice needs to be adopted in primary level in order to address multicultural diversity of the students. I saw from my observation that there was symbolic violence among the Nepali medium students of the school by adopting the EMI policy in the name of quality education.

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