

# ACER Newsletter

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### Contents

- Educational Research Information . . .
- Public Policy and Catholic Schools
- Where Junior Secondary Schools are Heading
- Review and Progress Tests in Mathematics
- New ACER Publications

### Educational Research Information — Its Dissemination and Use

**John Owen, Kevin Hall and Cliff Malcolm**  
(Tertiary Education Research Unit,  
Melbourne State College)

For some time educational researchers and administrators have been concerned about the impact on schools of new educational information, particularly that based on research. We possess little information about whether or not the large amount of time and effort spent on research has affected school practices. A study in progress is attempting to find answers to questions such as how research findings are best disseminated, the most appropriate forms of presenting the findings, and the best within-school arrangements for discussing important information about schooling.

The first phase of this ERDC-funded study focused upon the ACER/NZCER publication *SET: Research Information for Teachers* as a new form of knowledge-dissemination strategy. The adoption, dissemination, and use of *SET* was investigated in 1980 through analysis of national patterns of usage, case studies in 13 educational institutions, and structured responses from 122 teachers.

The second phase, in 1981, addressed a wider view of dissemination and use of new educational knowledge, with 400 teachers and 90 Principals and schools as the sample.

The next phase, underway at present, seeks to further analyse the information obtained so far and to probe more deeply into particular issues.

Although parts of this study are based only on evidence from schools and other educational institutions in Victoria, there is some evidence from studies in Queensland and Western Australia to suggest that the situations discussed in this report are not unique to Victoria.

### *SET* adoption, dissemination, and use

Analysis of adoption of *SET* was undertaken as an indication of its potential influence. In July 1980, there were 3406 subscriptions to *SET* from 2950 adopters. For Australia as a whole, 866 secondary schools and 1326 primary schools received the materials. Of the total number of adopters, 29 per cent were secondary schools and 45 per cent were primary schools. The remaining adopting groups were: individuals, 16 per cent of the total; tertiary institutions, two per cent of the total; and system level groups, seven per cent of the total.

Patterns of adoption were similar in most states. The most significant departure was in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) where there were comparatively few 'private' subscriptions and an above average proportion of system-level adopters. At the national level, about 18 per cent of all primary schools and about 39 per cent of all secondary schools adopted *SET*, equivalent to 23 per cent of all Australian schools. While there are no known data available about the adoption of comparable packages, the absolute value seems to be high for a centrally produced and disseminated innovation which is not free of charge.

The proportion of subscribing primary schools varied from 35.3 per cent in the ACT to 11.9 per cent in Queensland, the value for the country being 18.2 per cent. In secondary schools the adoption level varied from 56.0 per cent in Victoria to 27.9 per cent in Queensland, the value for the nation being 38.7 per cent. Taking all schools together the adoption level varied from 40.0 per cent in the ACT to 15.2 per cent in Queensland. For all states, a greater proportion of secondary than primary schools adopted the package.

Work is continuing on analysing the patterns of projected use which teachers have for the research information reported in *SET*.

### The Wider Context of Dissemination

The second phase of the study is a wider investigation of dissemination and use of new educational knowledge, but incorporating *SET* as an element of this. A detailed questionnaire was completed by a sample of up to five teachers in each of 90 Victorian schools. Also, the Principal of each school completed a similar questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire investigated awareness, use, and source of several widely-available publications. It was found that national publications (such as *The Australian Journal of Education*, *Education News* and *SET*) were less likely to have been read than state publications (such as *Curriculum and Research Bulletin* and *The Educational Magazine*). Subject association journals and *The Age Education Page* had the most impact on teachers, and these were also the two publications to which a high proportion of teachers subscribed personally rather than through their school. Few teachers saw any of the publications as having 'considerable impact' on their work.

Despite efforts by ACER to promote *SET*, 81 per cent of the respondents were either not aware of it or had not read it. This was despite the fact that one-half of the sample of schools were chosen for this second phase of the study because the school had subscribed to *SET* in 1981.

It is apparent that written materials are not viewed by teachers as an important source of new educational knowledge and it is clear that there is a need for senior administrators to develop strategies for making research information more accessible to teachers.

Reports available to date are:

*The Impact of SET: Research Information for Teachers* by John Owen and Kevin Hall, and *How Do Teachers Gather New Educational Knowledge? An Interim Report* by John Owen, Kevin Hall and Cliff Malcolm. Contact: Tertiary Education Research Unit, Melbourne State College.



## PUBLIC POLICY AND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



HELEN PRAETZ

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION REVIEW No. 17

### Public Policy and Catholic Schools

Helen Praetz

*Australian Education Review No. 17* examines and analyses broad developments within the Catholic school sector throughout Australia during this turbulent period. Clearly, many of these changes, and especially the creation of state-wide school systems, can be traced to the impact of government funding on Catholic schools. From cautious and limited initiatives in the early 1960s, state and federal governments' subsidies for non-government schools rapidly escalated in size and scope. With the victory of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1972, subsidies were restructured, resulting in increased resources for Catholic schools until, by 1981, almost all of their running costs were underwritten by governments.

The introduction of government support for non-government schools represents one of the most radical changes in educational policy in the post-war period. For Catholic schools, this policy shift was of crucial significance, changing both the context in which the schools operated and the problems which they faced. The welfare of Catholic education is now inextricably linked to government policies, which in turn reflect changed social conditions and political priorities.

This book describes and analyses major changes within Catholic education using a developmental framework. First, the post-war crises faced by Catholic schools and the attempts by governments and Catholic education authorities to cope with them are outlined. In 1963, Prime Minister, The Hon. Robert Menzies offered capital grants for science facilities to both government and non-government schools. The political wisdom of this action doubtless influenced the decision to approve library grants to these schools in 1968.

Political opposition to state aid to non-government schools had crumbled after the ALP in 1966 purged itself of its anti-state aid policies. When per capita payments to non-government schools

were included in its election promises later in the same year, the foundations were laid for funding policies based on the needs of schools.

Under a coalition government, federal funding of non-government schools continued to rise. On 9 December 1971 the Prime Minister, The Hon. William McMahon, announced increased per capita grants, and new proposals to take effect from July, 1973 were announced in May, 1972. Non-government schools would receive per capita grants equal to 40 per cent of the recurrent costs of government schools and capital grants for both government and non-government schools would be allocated on a needs basis.

In contrast, the ALP sought to take government funding out of politics by setting up a Schools Commission to examine and determine the needs of all schools and to recommend federal grants to bring all schools to an acceptable standard. The ALP promised to boost federal spending on education so that children attending both government or non-government schools could benefit.

Education emerged as a major issue in the federal elections of December, 1972. The Catholic bishops in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania openly supported the coalition's funding policies, but the bishops' official spokesman on education, Archbishop James Carroll of Sydney, adopted an even-handed approach. Within ten days of his victory, the new Labor Prime Minister, The Hon. Gough Whitlam, announced the appointment of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission, to be chaired by Professor Peter Karmel. Their report was to revolutionise the funding and politics of all the non-government schools.

Non-government schools were measured against the average recurrent resource use of the government schools, which was expressed as a quantum index of 100. The Committee recommended that the federal supplement the continuing funding effort made by the States and the non-government schools so that resource levels would be raised by 40 per cent in all primary schools and 35 per cent in secondary schools by 1979. In 1972 the average recurrent resource usage of government schools in each State fell within 3 points of the national average for primary schools, and within 9 points for secondary schools. In contrast, the quantum index figure of non-government schools ranged from 39 per cent below the average State schools' figure to 170 per cent above the standard. Clearly, differential support according to the resource levels of schools and systems would be needed to bring all schools to target standards by 1979.

Yet by 1979 all government schools systems exceeded the resource target standard proposed by the Karmel Committee. In contrast, Catholic schools were operating on average with 68 per cent of these resources and some 16 per cent of primary and 20 per cent of secondary Catholic schools were operating at 60 per cent or less of government school

resource levels. Although cash inputs into Catholic schools had risen faster than average weekly earnings over the same period, the resources gap continued to widen, as the number of teaching religions declined and lay teachers' salaries moved towards parity with teachers in government schools.

While conditions had undoubtedly improved for pupils in Catholic schools, parity of resources with other schools could only be achieved at the price of increased government subvention. Yet Catholic schools remain largely immune from government regulation. Schools are not required to explain or justify staff hiring and firing practices, pupil enrolment and expulsion procedures or curriculum policies.

Various legal, organizational and political strategies were used to repulse challenges to the autonomy of Catholic schools. Of critical importance was the outcome of the DOGS challenge to the legality of government subsidies to church schools. The Catholic Education Office of Victoria and the National Council for Independent Schools obtained leave to intervene in the case and paradoxically sought to establish that Catholic schools were much the same as other schools. The High Court's decision, handed down in February 1981, that the payment of grants did not contravene Section 116, removed the most threatening obstacle to the future prosperity of Catholic schools and rendered further legal challenges improbable.

The rapid transformation of Catholic schools into articulated, state-wide school systems also served to protect their autonomy. Block funding provided the resources to employ ever greater numbers of professional administrators attached to the Catholic Education Offices in the capital cities. Within a brief span the administration of Catholic schools bore some resemblance to that of state education departments. Among other tasks, these officers assessed the needs of schools, assisted them with submissions to the Schools Commission, received and accounted for public money, disbursed grants to schools according to agreed criteria and planned the overall rationalization and expansion of the system.

Although some attempts were made to involve parents and others in decision-making, the overall planning and maintenance of the system rapidly and inevitably relied solely on the expertise of the professional administrators.

The flow of funds to the Catholic schools in 1974 which averted their collapse also muted the questioning within the Catholic community of the role of the schools. However, as the disbursement of funds reduced the discrepancies between the staffing, curriculum, organization and administration of Catholic and other schools, the problem of the unique purpose and nature of Catholic schools assumed overwhelming importance.

Continued page 6



## WHERE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS ARE HEADING



C.W. COLLINS P. W. HUGHES

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION REVIEW No. 16

### Where Junior Secondary Schools are Heading

#### Schooling for 15- and 16-Year-Olds

In its report, *Schooling for 15 and 16 Year Olds*, the Schools Commission (1980) advocates a radical change of direction for the junior secondary school. While it ranges over a number of related matters, the central message of the report is that secondary schools are failing to meet the needs of many of their students, and that this failure has much to do with the continuing concentration of secondary education upon the study of academic subjects, in packages and by methods which have traditionally been aimed at university entrance.

The Commission recommends that the compulsory years of secondary schooling should be looked at afresh by all schools and systems and that the central purpose of those years should be seen as 'preparation for adult life' for all students, not as the first years of academic preparation in an effort to attain a place in a tertiary institution.

Considerable difficulties impede the implementation of the Commission's recommendations. Some of these difficulties flow from a very proper caution among educators about making major changes to a system which they see both as focusing on valuable disciplines and as an instrument of justice, providing access to elite knowledge for all. Other difficulties are the consequence of facing the public political process required to bring about genuine substantive improvements in education.

However, many problems in the way of constructive changes in secondary schools are not the results of struggling with educational and political issues. They are the consequences of a structural pattern in schools which makes it much more comfortable to maintain things the way they are. School systems have been built around a central pillar of academic study to an extent which makes change difficult and uncomfortable. The very basis for the selection of students for secondary

teacher education is in terms of competence in academic disciplines. Following training which emphasizes the curriculum of one or two particular academic subjects, teachers move into secondary schools usually organized around academic subject departments and participate in a system of promotion based largely on this departmental organization.

Many schools in the past decade or so have acknowledged some of the matters which the Commission raises and have tried to cope with a range of community pressures either by giving a few periods a week to a new subject (e.g. drug education) or by hiving off a small group of students into a different course, away from the mainstream (e.g. transition education). Meanwhile the central structures and values of the school have remained the same. It is precisely this which the Commission's report is questioning and declaring inadequate. A wholesale reappraisal of the junior secondary school is said to be required.

#### The Purposes of this Review are Threefold

First, we feel it important to redirect attention to the central and major issues of secondary education which the report of the Schools Commission raises. The current priorities set for education by the Commonwealth Government in our view avoid these issues by an overconcentration on one aspect only, transition education.

Second, we wish to challenge those involved in secondary schooling as well as those in government who believe that the easiest course of action will be to ignore the Schools Commission's report and to continue running junior secondary schools as before. We have been responsible, over the past four years, for two studies of community opinion of secondary schooling, one for the Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training (the Williams Committee) and one as a background to the Schools Commission's 15- and 16-year-old study. These have shown widespread community pressure for changes in the kinds of directions advocated by the Schools Commission. The next two sections of this paper set out the results of these studies. They are followed by a section giving further data from other studies. Such evidence should help to prevent the pretence that the report and the issues it raises will just go away eventually and can be safely ignored.

Third, while supporting firmly the Schools Commission's general perception of the situation and, to a large extent, its view of the direction in which junior secondary schools must change, we would like to open discussion on some major difficulties which we think the report inadvertently raises. The final section of this paper is thus a discussion which draws out the implications of what we know about public opinion, and points to problems which we think are likely to be created by the Schools Commission's new policies in the wake of solving the more immediate crises.

#### Urgent Changes Needed

It is clear that changes in junior secondary schooling are urgent. There is curriculum failure on a grand scale: the goals which those who know secondary schools best regard as most important are, by and large, not met. There is organizational failure: the basic developmental needs of youth growing towards adulthood cannot be catered for in the present system. *Schooling for 15 and 16 Year Olds* is an important and generally successful attempt to give guidelines for change. While it does not openly acknowledge some of the shoals, it steers fairly wisely between them, at least in terms of the junior secondary years. This review has attempted to show some of the reasons for its importance as a basis for discussion and vitally necessary action, to expose some of the shoals, and to make further suggestions.

The key to the possibility of such important and drastic changes in the secondary school is in the hands of teachers. They are being asked to undertake a task in which no country has yet succeeded. If they are to succeed, they must be given a quality of support from the whole society that has so far been absent. What has already been done in some schools is an index that there is some hope of success. Moreover, in all schools, some students have found satisfying and developmentally relevant education. It is on the basis of such real achievements, in the face of major difficulties, that a more caring and more meaningful secondary education could take shape.

The problems that surface in secondary schools are problems not of schools alone, but of society. They relate to the vastly increased demands that are made on the schools by society: demands for vocational relevance, demands for social responsibility, demands for personal development. If society looks, as it does, to teachers to help in finding answers, it must realize, too, that the answers lie in partnership — a partnership between school and home, school and community. There are sufficient examples of the potential of such partnerships to give some hope of more valid general solutions.

Copies of Australian Education Review No. 16 are available for \$6.00. See advertisement in this issue.

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#### WHAT IS THE ACER?

The ACER is an independent body concerned with research and development and service in education, with interests which are as wide as the definition of education, not limited geographically to what goes on in Australia, but principally concerned with matters of importance to Australian educators. It has its own governing body, a Council at present consisting of 21 members eight of whom represent the State Institutes of Educational Research.



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### AER No. 16 WHERE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS ARE HEADING: RESEARCH & REFLECTIONS

C. W. Collins and P. W. Hughes

Secondary schools are currently unfashionable. After a period in which it was popular to suggest that all our social problems might be solved by appropriate action in the schools, it is now most common to suggest that they actually help to cause those problems. This book seeks to penetrate beneath the surface of media claims, to determine the views and assessments of those most involved in the schools, students, parents, teachers, employers and others in the community.

Price: \$6.00

### AER No. 17 PUBLIC POLICY AND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Helen Praetz

Catholic schools have experienced dramatic and far-reaching changes during the past decade. This review examines and analyses broad developments within the Catholic school sector throughout Australia during this turbulent period.

Contents:

- 1 Catholic Schools 1945-69
- 2 Rescue and Rejuvenation 1970-75
- 3 Autonomy and Vigilance 1976-81
- 4 Identity and Catholic Schools
- 5 The Future

Price: \$8.00



# Understanding Classroom Behaviour

MAURICE BALSON (ACER)

Discipline is the major problem confronting teachers today. Faced with a growing uncertainty as traditional approaches to discipline become ineffective, teachers are searching for ways of relating to students which are more productive. The purpose of this book is to outline a framework for understanding the behaviour of students and to discuss methods of relating them in ways which are appropriate to a democratic society. Topics which are included deal with motivation, life style, purposes of misbehaviour, encouragement, discipline and behavioural consequences, inferiority feeling, classroom atmosphere, sociology and group discussion. The role of the teacher as a group leader whose task it is to integrate the class for common purposes is emphasized.

# Becoming Better Parents

MAURICE BALSON (ACER)

Child raising has always been based on tradition. Each generation passing on to the next those parenting techniques that time has proven to be effective, parents bringing up their children in much the same way as they were brought up themselves. The past two decades have seen much change however, and techniques which originated in an autocratic and authoritarian society are rendered ineffective by vast social upheavals. With the collapse of the autocratic social system, and the acceptance of a democratic approach to human relationships, parents face the dilemma of not knowing what to do with their children, and of having little help available to them which is attuned to the new democratic society in which we live. The book is written primarily with the intention of providing parents with a better understanding of children's behaviour and with techniques of parenting which are appropriate to today's society.

# Systematic Training for Effective Teaching

DON DINKMEYER et al. (AGS)

Two of the major challenges of education are discipline and motivation. *STET* offers teachers useful alternatives in meeting these challenges directly and systematically. *STET* is an inservice (or pre-service) program for teachers who want practical ways of dealing with motivation, encouragement, communication, discipline, group leadership, students with special needs, and parental involvement. *STET* is conducted in groups so teachers become resources for each other as they practice working and learning together. Teachers meet regularly to discuss issues of motivation and discipline, aided by printed materials, cassette-recorded examples, and a discussion leader. Between sessions, participants apply in **their own classrooms** the ideas and techniques they've learned.

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# Systematic Training for Effective Parenting

DON DINKMEYER et al. (AGS)

*STEP* is a nine-session parent study group program, encouraging the development of parenting skills which foster mutual respect, co-operation, responsibility, and self-reliance. By working together in a small group of six to twelve members, *STEP* participants become actively involved in • recognizing that their problems are not unique • sharing experiences of common concern • identifying both effective and ineffective ways they and their children have been responding to each other • learning alternative approaches that can lead to more satisfying relationships for both children and parents • providing encouragement for each other as they practice specific parenting skills with their own families.

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Many of the pressing tasks which faced Catholic schools at the beginning of the 1970s had been largely solved as the decade drew to a close. Catholic schools had been reorganized into school systems administered by professional officers and the financial management of schools was vastly improved. The downward trend in the proportion of Catholics attending Catholic schools had been arrested and a new prosperity prevailed within the schools. Class sizes dropped rapidly, curriculum offerings broadened as facilities improved, and teachers were more numerous and better qualified than before. Although some intransigent critics remained, government support for non-government schools was constitutionally permissible and widely accepted.

The continued buoyancy of the non-government school sector depends on the maintenance of the current thrust of government policy which has resulted in the incremental growth of subsidies to non-government schools. However, other factors may result in the formulation of policies less favourable to the non-government schools. The contraction of the government school sector and the expansion of the non-government schools, the increasing financial subvention to the non-government and especially the Catholic schools from the public purse, the relative immunity of non-government schools from government regulation and public surveillance, and the transfer of federal funds from the government to the non-government school sector have led to growing tension between non-government and government school supporters.

The tenuous coalition of interests established by the Schools Commission appears to face imminent breakdown.

Catholic schools must now respond to both external and internal pressures for changes in the decade ahead. Alternative administrative arrangements could be considered so that, in the Schools Commission's words, the 'advancement of one sector should not and need not be at the price of damage to the other'.

Copies of Australian Education Review No. 17 are available for \$8.00. See advertisement in this issue.

## STOP PRESS!

Available from 4 August 1982

**The Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria 1908-80  
Lyndsay Gardiner (ACER) 1982**

This book is a history of the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria which initiated the idea of free education for pre-school children in Victoria.

The association of the FKU with the Education and Health Departments, its troubles during two world wars and the depression, and its continuing battle to uphold standards in the face of ignorance, indifference or poverty are here recorded against the backdrop of changing Melbourne society in this century. Casebound ..... \$20.00

## Review and Progress Tests in Mathematics

John Izard

Teachers use test questions for a number of purposes. Sometimes we need to summarize past achievement before deciding on our next teaching plan. Where learning follows a developmental sequence we need to know whether particular learning objectives early in the sequence have been met so that our teaching is built on a sound basis. We may test a simple objective to identify any misunderstanding and then provide assistance before teaching new or more complex material. On other occasions we may gather information about a set of related objectives to decide appropriate starting points for further learning activities. We may arrange instructional groups according to this information.

Many tests cover content or objectives that a teacher does not wish to test at that particular time; the separate teaching objectives assessed by the questions are difficult to identify and there may be too small a number of questions on the objectives of interest to a particular teacher. One solution to this problem is to provide a number of short tests each on a separate single objective. The teacher decides which objectives are to be tested and chooses the test appropriate to each objective. If a small number of aspects are being tested there may be a short test provided which covers these aspects.

A number of ACER staff have been working on a new set of computational skill tests where each test is referenced to a particular objective in either addition, subtraction, multiplication or division. This type of test has been called a Progress Test. A progress test may have six questions all relating to the one objective. If all, or nearly all of these questions are answered correctly, we can conclude that the objective has been mastered by that student. A substantial number of errors indicate that the student will need further assistance. Another type of test, called a Review Test is referenced to a limited number of objectives rather than a single objective. The easier questions come first and the difficulty or complexity increases as the student works through the test of ten questions.

The Review and Progress Tests (RAPT) in Addition will have eight separate Progress Tests ranging from Addition of three 1-digit addends, with a total of 14 or less (easiest) to Addition of four 1-, 2-, 3-, or 4-digit addends with regrouping where necessary (hardest). One Review Test will have 10 questions covering the first five addition objectives while the other Review Test will have 10 questions covering the five most difficult addition objectives. (Note that the questions on the middle level objectives are the hardest on the easy Review Test, and the easiest on the more difficult Review Test.)

Two parallel versions of each Addition Progress Test and Addition Review Test

will be provided so that different tests can be administered to children sitting together in a double desk. The Teachers Handbook will include score keys arranged so that the clerical task of marking the tests is reduced to a minimum and unusual patterns in the answers are readily identified.

The RAPT in Subtraction also will have eight separate Progress Tests and two Review Tests, while the RAPT in Multiplication will have 12 separate Progress Tests and three Review Tests. The RAPT in Division will be arranged in two sets — one covering 'short' division and the other 'long' division. Both sets will have seven Progress Tests and two Review Tests.

Because each question has been scaled for difficulty on the basis of trials in many classrooms each student's results on a particular test can be charted on a graph if the teacher wishes to keep records in this way. The Teachers Handbook will also provide procedures for constructing Review Tests from a selection of Progress Tests and Review Tests. Provided that each part of such a Review Test is completed at the same time the results of each student can be interpreted on the same difficulty scale.

By making the RAPT materials available the ACER will make it easier for teachers to assemble computation tests for each operation to suit the syllabus in a particular classroom. It is hoped that the research effort which is leading to publication of these materials can be extended into other areas.

### New from ACER

#### Books

- Understanding Classroom Behaviour* by Maurice Balson ..... \$6.50  
*From School to Tertiary Study: Transition to College and University in Victoria* by Gerald Elsworth, Neil Day, Rosalind Hurworth and Jana Andrews (ACER Research Monograph No. 14) ..... \$10.00  
*Public Policy and Catholic Schools* by Helen Praetz (Australian Education Review No. 17) ..... \$8.00

#### Bibliography

- Multiple-choice Testing: A Select and Annotated Bibliography of Research in the 1970s* by Richard Bell and Graeme Withers (Available only in microfiche) ..... \$6.00

#### Bulletin

- ACER Bulletin for Psychologists* No. 31, April 1982 edited by Meredith Shears

#### Tests

- Australian Chemistry Test Item Bank Years 11 & 12* Volumes 1 and 2 edited by C. Commons and P. Martin  
 Individual volumes ..... \$21.00 each  
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