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Non-verbal Communication in Music Lessons

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Abstract

In our study, which we carried out with a group of primary-school children aged between six and nine, we were interested in how musical language is shaped through group improvisations. Narrative dimensions of improvisation were studied through activities of *Orff-Schulwerk*, the specific music-movement education approach which, apart from music activities, puts great emphasis on development of social competences. The research was designed as a phenomenological case study. The findings show that, contrary to *Orff-Schulwerk* premises, children had yet to learn musical language and how to use it. It also turned out that teacher's expectations regarding the use of non-verbal communication are inversely proportional to the successful use of musical language. In line with *Orff-Schulwerk's* principles, rhythm proved to be the primary musical language parameter, as it was through rhythm that children first reached the sensations of others and reflectively depicted events from everyday life.

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1. Introduction

Non-verbal communication represents a considerable part of the everyday interpersonal communication. We discover non-verbal communication and train how to express meaning with mimicking and body language (also) by developing communication skills in artistic areas, such as drama, dance and music. In music, we work with and communicate in musical language with specificities of musical performance, listening and creation. By its nature, this is a language establishing towards the other communicating partner a relationship which is not about conveying information but (also) about cultivating the proper sensitivity towards his/her personality (Tarr, 2000).

This premise is pursued by the Slovene curriculum for music education in primary school (*Učni načrt za*

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glasbeno vzgojo v osnovni šoli, 2011) which defines music as a cultural phenomenon and as “an individual’s need of an organised acoustic environment, sound-based communication and creativity.” (ib., p. 39). As such musical language can be most closely linked with non-verbal communication as used in the *Orff-Schulwerk* music-movement education (Zalar, 2012). As it is evident from bibliography, theoreticians as well as practitioners (Blažeková, 2011; Goodkin, 2002, 2010; Hartmann, 2010; Haselbach, 2010; Jungmair, 2003; Lopez – Ibor, 2005; Piazza, 1995; Sangiorgio, 2010; Sangiorgio & Hennessy, 2013; Steen, 1992) present musical language particularly as a form of communication in group improvisations. This is based on elementary music the expressive and creative potential of which is deeply linked to folk tradition and children singing tradition (Sangiorgio, 2010) and connects movement – dance, speech – singing and playing musical instruments. In their design of transmission of *Orff-Schulwerk*, its authors, Orff and Keetman, put great emphasis on the importance of developing social competences – including in relation of other artistic areas. They designated rhythm as the starting point of all musical activities, since, as Orff says: “Rhythm is a life of its own. Rhythm can only be born with you, you cannot learn it.” (in Jungmair, 2003, p. 139). Orff (2002c, p. 187) also claims that children spontaneously express their musical sensations with the so called “primeval music” which represents “expressing from yourself” (ib., p. 184). In addition, we presume that with non-verbal communication musical language leans towards the abilities of a personal, yet convincing representation of experiencing life stories and moves away from the characteristics of spoken language, such as discussion, argumentation and persuasion. Outside musical language, this transition represents a shift from rational to narrative communication paradigm which emphasises the necessary trust between the members of the group to transmit or receive stories (Fisher, 1987).

The studies looking into musical language within “*Orff-Schulwerk*” (Boras, 1988; Chandler Trotman Womack, 2008; Johnson, 2006; Siemens, 1969; Umemoto, 1997; Wang & Sogin, 2004; Wolf, 1984) do not indicate clearly what, apart from influencing individual aspects of musical development, are the contributions of its narrative dimension to the musical progress of an individual or a group. Therefore, bearing in mind that no two interactions between people are the same, and so the narrativity of the language between persons communicating is formed anew every time, we researched the dimensions of musical language, reaching beyond visual and acoustic activities, touching upon the experiencing of individuals while embodied in group performance.

2. Method

The objective of the research was to learn how non-verbal communication is formed in musical language between children and to study its narrative dimensions. In particular, we looked into how individuals are included in the *Orff-Schulwerk* music-movement education and into the functioning of the group as a whole. We presupposed that the group functions as a non-trivial system, “unrepeatable and unpredictable in its nature” (Kordeš, 2004, p. 55), which only preserves its characteristics as a whole (of participants) (ib.) and also as a system where the teacher is part of the group and well involved in the pedagogical process.

Based on the two research goals, we defined the following research questions: how do children as individuals and as a group shape musical language as a form of non-verbal communication and what are the narrative dimensions of the musical language used by children.

The research was designed as a phenomenological case study. This research method enabled direct observation of the participants' experiencing while shaping and communicating in musical language in interaction among them. It was also possible to monitor how the participating children behaved towards each other, their reactions to musical and other artistic stimulations, interactions between children and the teacher and also the entire context in which musical language was formed.

The study took place in the framework of a primary school interest activity “Orff instruments workshop”. In nine months 44 lessons were carried out. The group was composed of 10 boys and 8 girls, aged between 6 and 9. Their age, in terms of grades, is shown by Table 1 below:

Table 1: Age structure of the group in terms of grades and according to gender

	Girls	Boys	Together
1st grade	6	5	11
2nd grade	3	3	6
3rd grade	1	-	1
Together	10	8	18

We decided to include younger children in the study, as we presumed that, due to their young age, they would have internalised less influences from the acoustic environment and would be more susceptible to elementary musical stimuli which are part of the *Orff-Schulwerk* and which also represent the basis of primary school music education in Slovenia (Zalar, 2012). Thus we wanted to obtain the best possible internal validity of the study as regards the issue of originality of musical language use, since we presumed, in line with the research objective, that younger children with less previous musical experience would communicate in musical language in a more primal manner.

We collected data during lessons in the reflective protocol where the teacher recorded his first-person experience, in the descriptive protocol with the data of participant observation, and by videorecording the lessons.

Records on first-personal experience made immediately after each lesson represent source of data on the experience of the teacher as researcher and at the same time as participant in the *Orff-Schulwerk* pedagogic process. They are gathered in the Reflective Protocol (RP) where in the course of the study, the teacher continuously made notes on his live involvement with the group of children, while trying to avoid the influence of his previous practical experience and describing his expectations about the lessons, by writing down in detail his experience and trying to understand how this affects children and vice versa. The awareness of this mutual interconnection called for epistemological approach which he tried to acquire as deeply as possible in terms of participatory position. This position did not only represent the theoretical basis for working with musical language, but was fulfilled particularly in the “internal apprehension” (Kordeš, 2004, p. 76) of his own experiencing.

With participant observation we wanted to reach the children’s experience field when they produce musical language and identify its elements of the narrative paradigm. This method was chosen as the most suitable on the basis of the presumption that it enables the teacher to get a direct, “in vivo” experience of the research process. The acquired data were collected in the Descriptive Protocol which represents the happening description (HD) for each lesson from the point of view of each individual child as well as that of the group as a whole. It was produced in the following way: immediately after each lesson, the teacher wrote down everything he could remember about what had happened during the lesson. Since he could not rely entirely on his memory and his own objective reporting, we supplemented his notes with transcriptions of videorecording (V). This way it was possible to describe in detail even the events that were impossible to perceive during the lesson and were concealed to the teacher due to his own experiencing. While they were communicating in musical language during the improvisation, it was sometimes impossible to know which direction the participants would be taken to by their creative zeal. So, without seeing the videorecording, we could miss the contribution of those children who, at a certain point were not engaged in a musical dialogue with the teacher. Another element from the transcriptions that was included in the descriptive protocol was the teacher’s speech (V-TS) and the speech of the children (V-CS), which enabled parallels of verbal reporting in the phenomenological discussions among all participants.

We watched the videos immediately after each lesson was concluded, and then again after two or three months. Since the teacher noticed differences in how he saw his involvement in the learning process the second time he watched the videos, we decided to include in the protocol also the data on first-person experiencing in time distance (V-TD-T) as well as teacher’s experience of the happening in children (V-TD-C).

2.1. Definition of Categories

We represented the data from the Reflective and Descriptive Protocols with respective timeline. We processed the material gathered with qualitative data analysis which, in defining the categories, included open coding and axial coding. We derived 18 categories, four of which, with three subcategories, proved relevant for the formation of musical language and describing its narrative dimensions.

Based on the data from the Reflective Protocol, and the parts of the Descriptive Protocol relating exclusively to the teacher, we defined two categories.

2.2 *Gap in the Attitude towards the Course of Lessons*

The category “*Gap in the Attitude towards the Course of Lessons*“ includes descriptions of the lessons, written down by the teacher immediately after the lessons, transcriptions of his speech during the lessons, and the descriptions resulting from transcriptions of videos in time distance.

It can be seen that in the initial lessons, the teacher was so strongly under the impression of the requirements of the phenomenological study regarding (honest) recording of reflective impressions, as if they were “inserted” from behind his teacher’s attitude, that at certain points they even overcame the perception of the participating children: “*I wished to..., however...*” (RP). In the course of the research he gradually changed the (prevailing) attitude towards the phenomenological study and realised that “*(positive) changes are reflected also in (his) face mimicking*” (V-TD-T) and that regardless of his status as researcher, he became more and more involved in the work with children: “*Children’s laughter was very contagious.*” (RP)

2.3 Previous Expectations

The category “*Previous Expectations*” brings descriptions of the teacher's expectations regarding the group of children which he gradually discovered in the framework of the phenomenological study. At first, he did not even call them expectations, as they were eluding his apprehension. From time to time he experienced them as failures in his teaching: “*I am unhappy, because the lesson did not develop as I had planned. I thought we would reach common terms in musical creation.*” (RP)

Materials gathered in this category contain only data with negative connotation, meaning that the detected previous expectations connect only to the part of the Reflective Protocol in which the teacher describes his difficulties in accustoming himself to phenomenological research. His internalised way of functioning in a group, based on non-verbal communication as specificity of *Orff-Schulwerk*, manifested itself strongly. Consequently, at the beginning of the research he often reported: “*In order to carry out the lesson I ‘resign’ from my way of teaching.*” (RP) or: “*I have the impression that I speak a lot, telling how to go about something..., giving instructions /.../ - from my own teaching practice, I am used to simply show... I feel lost in speech... and I do not feel connected with children.*” (RP)

Based on the data from the Descriptive Protocol, we defined one category relevant for the area researched.

2.4 Cooperation in the Group

The category “*Cooperation in the Group*” describes in what ways the participating children were connected within musical language. The descriptions include a variety of forms, from the participation of an individual in the group, connections into dyads, and integration of members of the group as a whole.

The data (HD, V-TD-C) show how children gradually got used to paying attention when listening to others performing and how they developed musical sensitivity as they were joining a group improvisation or getting out of it. A participating boy reported: “*You know, we agreed that I would play when they ran out of music, so I stepped in!*” (V-CS)

“*Making up*” language games with their rhythmic structures and with the addition of body movement, proved to be the first possibility for common music-making and also a source of spontaneous knowledge development. For example, in a game which involved balloons some children talked about the characteristics of the sound: “*Oh, look, my balloon is shaking!*” (V-CS) and connected them with their own perception of the sound in the personification of the balloon: “*I heard how the balloon felt, so that it shook a little bit.*” (V-CS) Later on, children on their own developed this sentence they had made up into a perfect rhythmical-movement rondo in triple meter.” (HD)

During the creative process in the group, children's personal characteristics emerged and they had to deal with them, or face them in the first place. In the data, it is possible to identify individualism, e.g.: “*I would have had a very good performance...//, but if it was as I wish.*” (V-CS) as well as accordance of feelings in musical language when using simple improvised musical instruments: “*Yeah, well, whatever he said into the kazoo, I then told with the stones.*” (V-CS)

In the category “*Musical Language*”, with three subcategories, we included data from both protocols, Reflective and Descriptive.

2.5 Musical Language

In the category “*Musical Language*” the descriptions refer to the effects of musical language, musical syntax and musical semantics. Since this is a vast area, we introduced three subcategories.

2.6 The Effects of Musical Language

The data in the Reflective Protocol show that the use of musical language caused the teacher to mentally disconnect from his worries regarding the analysis of the videos, thus enabling him to be relaxed in the group.

The data in the Descriptive Protocol show how performers are affected by their own anticipations regarding music or its parameters, e.g.: “*I played, but I was embarrassed a little bit!*” (V-CS), and how other participants as a group were affected as well (HD). At some points they felt threatened: “*I thought he came to disturb me, so I wanted to chase him off. I waved with my hand, like this: get lost!*” (V-CS). Intense involvement in the use of musical language reflects in the inner acoustic image of music (HD) and particularly in the way how children were introduced into musical language: “*It took me quite a while (to understand what he wanted from me). Yes, it always takes me a while.*” (VT-CS)

In the course of the study, difficulties in “translating” musical language into verbal language reoccurred several times. At first, children described musical parameters mostly with objects or states of the external world, and (only) through these descriptions they gradually identified their own sensations and expressed them with musical language (V-TD-C).

2.7 Musical Syntax

The subcategory “*Musical Syntax*” describes the comprehension and use of musical parameters. As regards pitch, the participating children were not convinced in determining the relation higher-lower (HD, V-CS). However, they responded adequately and gladly with movement (HD, V-CS). Even though they know well a great number of children’s songs mainly in major, they spontaneously invented melodies outside the major scale (a girl once sang a made-up melody in Dorian mode). They also created various rhythmical motives and combined them in the context of contents from their everyday lives (HD, V-CS).

2.8 Musical Semantics

The subcategory “*Musical Semantics*” includes reports on how the participants expressed what they experienced during the use of musical language, what meanings they attributed to it and how they communicated those meanings to others.

When they were first introduced to musical language, they often had fun without actually describing anything (HD, V-CS). As it turned out, they expressed their experience more individually with movement than verbally (HD, V-CS). It is clearly evident, that there was a development in the way they sensed musical language (HD, V-TD-C), with their verbal descriptions undoubtedly lagging behind their musical performance: “*I don't know what to say... Well, I just played, that's it.*” (V-CS)

3. Grounded Theory

In selective coding of the material gathered on non-verbal communication in music lessons we identified paradigmatic model of relationships between categories. We distinguished between codes and categories of key relevance and codes and categories of secondary relevance, the latter contributing to the understanding of the researched area indirectly (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). This procedure led to creation of a grounded theory in larger conceptual sets, operating as “external descriptors” of the formation of musical language in children and of its narrative dimensions. They exist as cumulative whole of the findings of previous open and axial coding.

The finding of selective coding is that the sets of categories which are the research area's key explainers are not in causative relations, i.e. they do not result from each other. Right the opposite. They are circularly connected in the way that they pass among each other through certain codes. They are realised in a recurrent process. In musical

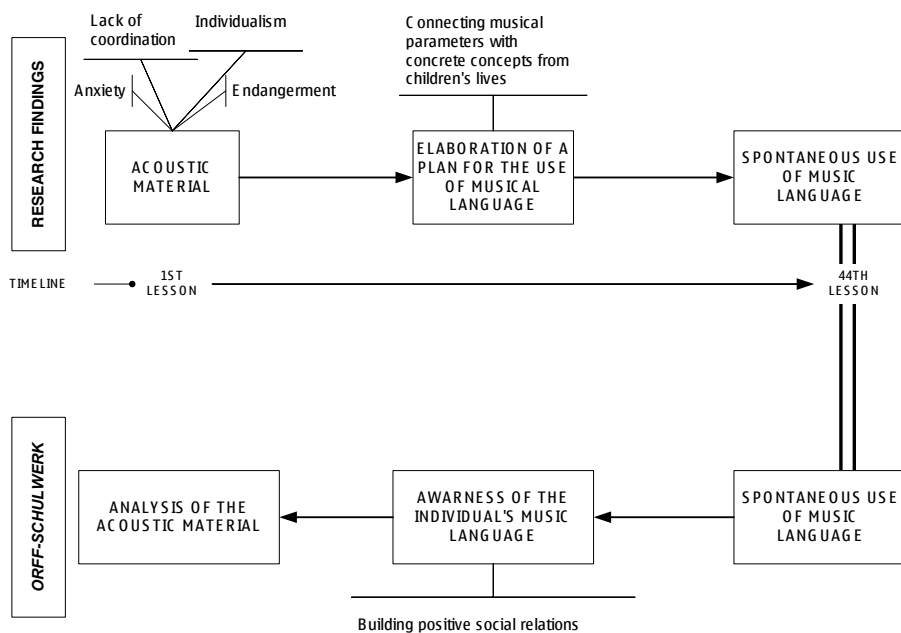
language, they do not act as part of individual process, but rather as components of an undividable whole of non-verbal communication.

3.1. Reacquisition of Primeval Music

We found out that children included in the study could not express their musical sensations the way described by Orff as “primeval music” (Orff, 2002c, p. 185). According to Orff, primeval music is in the “natural children’s music” and represents spontaneous expressing in the play. Children had yet to learn the play which developed into communication in musical language and further into common creating. Characteristic of *Orff-Schulwerk*, such play represented a form of social reality as part of the cognitive system and experiencing which evolved in musical interactions between all participants.

The table below shows comparison of findings of the study on the use of non-verbal communication and *Orff-Schulwerk*:

Figure1: Comparison of findings of the study on the use of non-verbal communication and *Orff-Schulwerk*



As it is evident from the table, the result of group work according to the *Orff-Schulwerk* method is spontaneous use of musical language in the course of the study, while according to the *Orff-Schulwerk*, such use is – right the opposite – the starting point (Orff, 2002c). Data (HD, V-CS) show, that at the point when they were faced with the challenge of translating the acoustic material into meaningful non-verbal communication in musical language, children expressed a considerable amount of anxiety, lack of coordination among them, individualism and feeling of endangerment. After having gradually acquired some experience, working in the group, they managed to plan the use of musical language in connection with concrete events and concepts from their lives. This fact is supported by many notes in the materials (V-CS, V-TD-C) describing their attempts to create their own music, taking into account external stimulations and the momentary atmosphere surrounding them, as well as individuals’ abilities to associate with other participant’s sensations. Thus, based on a previously agreed plan for the use of musical parameters in combination with other artistic activities (in line with *Orff-Schulwerk*), forms of cooperative learning were developed which enabled all the participants to take part in the music-creating process simultaneously, develop their

skills and knowledge as well as independence and responsibility for common musical products, created in improvisation, while at the same time respecting their individuality. The influence of the group showed in intervening with differences among the participants, not only differences in their musical abilities, but especially in adjusting to new social relations; as the strength or weakness of relationships in a group shows when its members overcome their personal inclinations and affinities and become “we” (Bahovec, 2005, p. 94) according to the “community principle.” (ib.)

Engagement in non-verbal communication conveyed as a form of reality which children came into with previously acquired social patterns (V-TD-C). They included those patterns in the group play, expressed them with musical language and in return, influenced their social realities with newly acquired experience in artistic expression and participation in the group. An important element in this process were the interactions among coevals which, according to *Orff-Schulwerk* principles, are the kind of child play which enables spontaneous actuation of musical creation. Already Vallejo (2010) underlined the importance of imitation as autodidactic component of *Orff-Schulwerk*, and our survey once again confirmed the importance of open learning situations in establishing situational factors that create conditions for participants’ development in the zone of proximal development (Vigotsky, 2010). The children in the group did not teach each other. However, by improvising together, everybody, including children who were less successful in creative areas, contributed to the creation of music of their own, showed good knowledge of musical parameters and were able to use them successfully. In the conversations following the activities (V-CS, V-TD-C) children expressed satisfaction with group work, reported on their own contributions to the final product and evaluated the contributions of others. The informative aspect of musical language proved to be the key element of cooperation in learning situations. Therefore, we attributed it a distinctive narrative character. In the details it corresponds with the Fisher’s claim (1987) that people are basically storytellers (so we are not rational) and we act according to the so called good reasons. This fact is the basis for the paradigmatic shift from rational understanding to narrative understanding (of musical language) in which one does not have to consider only accomplished facts and strict rules, but also “meanings and senses, inspiration and imagination.” (Ule, 2005, p. 111). We start from “concern and sensitivity” (ib.) as important musical language characteristics, also outlined by C. Orff (2002a) in his description of group music-making.

As regards the presenting of one's personal, intuitive experience in musical language to other participants, the question arose as to the extent to which others can grasp this experience in its original form. Based on her pedagogic practice, Jungmair (2003) claims that this process is much easier, if there is identification with the musical instrument, and with expression through movement. Our findings based on the data about the use of musical syntax (HD, V-CS) confirm that. The above activities take place when participants attract each other in such way that the experiencing of one becomes internal property of others as well. This process was also established by Gardner (2008) who, besides the three minds for the future (disciplinary, synthesizing and creative), also indicates the rise of the respectful mind and ethical mind, which are deemed particularly important "for the development of responsible behaviour." (Kroflič, 2007, p. 105)

In the course of the study, the element of silence proved to be an important link of musical language and a distinctive factor of the *Orff-Schulwerk*. There are no many references to it in the data (HD, VT-TD-C, VT-CS), however, whenever it is described, it has a deeper importance. It is a result of the introduction into group improvisation, with individuals paying attention to how they join musical performance and get out of it. In this, silence represented the time each individual had spent in order to reach internal readiness, which is how children harmonised their experience in simultaneous performance of various musical parameters as musicians – singers and instrumentalists, dancers, conductors, narrators and fictional characters. With this experience they recognised to each other the existence of co-experiencing, even though it was impossible to plan it in advance, either by them or the teacher. So the meanings attributed to musical language by children in their mutual interactions were the fruit of common sensation in musical improvisations and, in most cases, the concrete nature. The expression of musical language, i.e. the relationship between the musical parameters heard and their impact on the listener in the sense of musical syntax, gets its meaning in the enhancement of emotional reactions as described by the narrative paradigm.

3.2. The Influence of Teacher's Expectations

One of the key results of the study is the finding on the influence teacher's expectations have on the students. As it results from the analysis of the Reflective Protocol (RP, V-TD-T), the change in the importance of constructive

cooperation in the group using musical language (musical syntax and semantics) in the sense of primeval music occurs is inversely proportional to the teacher's expectations. The more the teacher restrains his expectations regarding the lessons, especially as regards non-verbal communication, the stronger children's musical language becomes in the sense of primeval music.

When the teacher, based on the findings, generated in the course of the research, gradually abandoned his expectations regarding musical achievements of each lesson and when he tried to establish among the children *Orff-Schulwerk* as the kind of musical expression in which mistakes are not possible, we noticed a more relaxed children's attitude and consequently, more communication in musical language. These findings show *Orff-Schulwerk* as a method of teaching and learning music which guarantees successful cooperation between children in circumstances where children feel no pressure of teacher's expectations regarding musical achievements. This way, children acquire personal experience in group creation regarding musical work as success of the entire group and therefore, evaluating it as such. This finding in music education supports the *Orff-Schulwerk's* guidelines (Orff, 2002a) according to which the teacher's role is (only) that of facilitator of musical activities, letting the children to experience musical language holistically by active participation.

3.3. Rhythmical Contents as the Starting Point for Group Musical Creation

As it results from the analysis of the materials, rhythmical contents are a typical element of musical syntax in the starting point of group creation. Among them, according to Orff (2002b), meter is the organising factor of group improvisations. Nevertheless, it turned out that, at least in the initial lessons, those children who did not introduce a constant meter as the linking element in their improvisations experienced musical communication deeper than children who did respect an even course of music. The former showed more original use of musical material, they were able to represent their experiencing with a different artistic language, during the study they learned to report about their sensations during the performance with more wit. Within the group, these children were seen as more roguish or less "diligent" as other children often described them. We can presume, that they were less worried about or not interested in the information on certain processes and theoretical rules in music. In this case, *Orff-Schulwerk* proved to be a form of reality which children entered with their previously acquired social patterns. They included those patterns in the group play, expressed them with musical language and in return, influenced their social realities with newly acquired experience in artistic expression and participation in the group.

In the course of lessons, rhythmical materials proved to be the most important "building block" (Jungmair, 2003) which all further musical activities stem from. Even though accustoming to performance with constant meter went on gradually, slowly and in a most playful way, it was always based on musical-motor improvisations, with movement having the leading, totally creative and formative role. This confirms the basic Orff's (2002c) idea about rhythm as the primary beginning and starting point for elementary music in improvisation, as the power of productive fantasy in every person.

4. Conclusion

The study emphasises the participant qualitative research which enables a deep insight into the pedagogical process. It proves that the course of scientific research is influenced by the fact that the relation between the teacher and children in music education, as well as in other school-related situations, is reestablished anew every time and so each situation in the learning process is unrepeatable. The research findings also underline the importance of the group which enables formation of musical language and its active use in the learning process only when all the participants in communication have the feeling of safety.

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