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for Knowledge and Impact

Edited by
Paul Webb, Mathabo Khau and
Proscovia Namubiru Ssentamu



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4 Eccleston Place, Somerset West, 7130, Cape Town, South Africa
info@africanminds.org.za | www.africanminds.org.za

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CHAPTER 10

Using participatory visual methods to teach character education in early childhood, Kenya

Evans Mos Olao, Bernard Misigo, Karsten Speck

Introduction

Among the ideals of character education is the inculcation of basic positive values such as respect, honesty, responsibility and fairness among learners (Osabwa, 2016). These ideals partly guide the education system of a country by being reflected in the aims, goals, content, instructional methods and policies of such a system. Battistich (2005) noted that teachers, as responsible adults, should use all the aspects of school life to foster optimal character development in learners. However, Osabwa (2016) argued that the objectives of character education in Kenya remain elusive as attempts to use the current teaching approaches appear less effective. He points out that:

After independence the main approach to character formation was instruction. This was administered through formal schooling, with moral values being taught through disciplines such as Religious Education, Social Ethics Education, Life Skills Education, and also through guidance and counselling, infusion and integration. There was little in terms of practical experiences [...] the said teachers mainly focused on attaining high grades in examinations as opposed to formation of good character among pupils. In the end, the objective of forming character remained elusive. (Osabwa, 2016, p. 79)

Various alternative solutions to this issue have been proposed by previous studies. These include the need to teach character education in early childhood using the best teaching approaches and use of real life experiences (Battistich, 2005; Lee, 2013). Further, Akanga (2014) advocated for the use of child-centred methods in teaching character education, while Andiemba (2016) suggests that participatory visual methods are effective when used with young children.

Based on these studies, the current study envisioned participatory visual methods (PVM) as innovative ways of teaching character education which might make a difference. The use of PVM in subjects like science, HIV/AIDS and sexuality education with older children in elementary and high schools has been documented sufficiently in the literature (e.g. De Lange & Stuart, 2008; Yego, 2017). However, there is limited empirical information on studies done on the use of participatory visual methods in teaching character education in Kenya. This lack of information formed the *raison d'être* to explore teachers' experiences and views of using PVM to facilitate the teaching and learning of character education.

The concept of character education

According to Edgington (2002), character education (CE) is subjective and as such, it has not been able to acquire an all-encompassing definition. Berkowitz (2011) has described CE as an attempt within schools to craft pedagogical and supportive structures to foster the development of positive, ethical, pro-social inclinations and competencies in learners. The teaching of values has been a critical part of the Kenyan school curricula since pre-independence (Wamahiu, 2015). It was introduced in Kenya by missionaries linked to the Catholic and Anglican churches. These churches established schools with an aim of evangelizing and teaching of character that would enhance the religious beliefs of learners.

After independence the Kenyan government, through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), developed reform documents that dealt with the institutionalization of character education in schools. This introduced the teaching of character education in formal schooling. Later it was recommended that character education be taught to students at all levels of education (Kamunge, 1988). However, the continued deviant behaviour that was observed among schoolgoing children led Akanga (2014) and other character education scholars to recommend the use of appropriate methods of teaching character education. The assertion by Muthamba (2017) that religious education lacked practicality, implied that character education required a more hands-on approach of teaching.

Teaching approaches in character education

Most of the traditional approaches to character education emphasised the role of modelling, instruction, imitation, rewards and punishment, and authority in the formation of character (Nucci et al., 2008). In contrast, heuristic educators present the benefits of utilizing child-centred approaches to foster character development (e.g. Dewey, 1952; Freire, 2017; Lanham, 2004). In Kenya, most teachers today apply learner-centred approaches of teaching so as to promote learners' interest, critical thinking and enjoyment during learning inside and outside of the classroom (Hesson & Shad, 2007). With particular regard to early childhood education, Andiema (2016) advocated for participatory teaching and learning methods that make children enjoy learning and apply what is learned to everyday life. De Lange and Stuart (2008) posited that, at the time, most practising teachers were not exposed to participatory strategies hence, they tended to teach the way they themselves were taught using didactic approaches.

Participatory visual methods

Participatory visual methods (PVM) are innovative teaching approaches that have been used successfully in addressing issues like HIV and AIDS, gender-based

violence and sexuality education (Mitchell, 2008). They have also been widely used as research methodologies to enable participants to reflect on their knowledge of life and their daily experiences with the issue under investigation (De Lange et al., 2014). However, previous research has not mentioned the applicability of such methods in the teaching of moral values.

Participatory visual products can be handmade, digital media or performance-based in their design. The handmade products include drawings, story-boarding, collage, beading, quilting, memory boxes, body mapping, murals, installations and graffiti. The digital products are photovoice, digital story-telling, participatory videos, digital archiving, blogging and social media. The performance-based processes are dance, theatre-in-education, forum and image theatre, and role-plays. It must be noted at this point that these visual products can be used as teaching methods in the teaching-learning environment. Interestingly, they are being given more attention in Kenya which is experiencing curriculum reforms by way of adopting a Competency Based Curriculum (CBC). With the inception of CBC, it has become clear that children enjoy teaching approaches that are more practical and more visual such as in the use of photographs and videos (Griessel-Roux et al., 2005). Furthermore, visual material in teaching encourages maximum participation by learners and also provides avenues for free expression of understanding and experiences with little dependence on verbal communication (Van der Riet et al., 2005; Holderness, 2012; Wood & Wilmot, 2012).

Bearing the benefits of participatory visual methods in mind, it should be clear that most teachers are not really exposed to these methods. The teachers in Kenya are not an exception on this issue. Yego (2017) posits that participatory visual methods are effective for use by teachers and learners in the classroom to navigate issues around sexuality and HIV/AIDS education in Kenya. In her study, Yego summarized the pedagogical qualities of participatory visual methods as (1) being child-centred, (2) freeing learners to engage in learning, (3) simplifying teacher's role in the classroom, and (4) providing a free space for the teacher to deliver effectively.

Khau et al. (2013) concluded that participatory visual methods can transform classrooms into enabling and democratic spaces which are conducive for teaching and learning for all. Hence, it is imperative that teachers in all levels of education get exposed to the implementation of such methods in class. Berkowitz (2011) strongly advocated for the teaching of character education in early childhood, while Andiema (2016) recommended the use of participatory methods to teach in early childhood. Given these postulations, this study explored the use of participatory visual methods in the teaching of character education in early childhood, specifically focused on teacher experiences of using participatory visual methods upon implementation in class. An initial establishment of the methods used by teachers to teach CE in early childhood was also done.

Methodology

This study was located in the interpretivist paradigm that allowed for reliance on participants' views of their experiences using PVM. A qualitative approach was employed and a multiple-case study design utilized to enable the analysis of data within and across cases. This was helpful in establishing the value and reliability of findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Sample and setting

A non-probability sampling technique was employed to obtain a purposive sample of eight Grade 3 teachers from 4 public primary schools that had two streams per level in Eldoret East Sub-County. The teachers selected were those that had been teaching the same set of learners from Grade 1 to Grade 3. It was presumed that this set of teachers had used a number of approaches to teach character education beforehand and would, therefore, be in a better position to report on the effectiveness of implementing participatory visual methods in class. All the learners from these teachers' classes were also chosen to take part in the study considering the reporting would be based on how the teacher participants worked with them specifically.

Data generation

Prior to the research, a three-day preparatory workshop was organized for the eight Grade 3 teacher participants. The main purpose of the workshop was to offer preliminary education on the use of participatory visual methods. The training practically covered the use of drawings and photovoice. Furthermore, the workshop aimed at making the teachers feel prepared and supported. They had a chance to meet and familiarize themselves with each other, and were also given the opportunity to talk about their expectations regarding the implementation of the participatory visual teaching methods. The sessions were conducted mainly in the English language, though occasionally participants would use Kiswahili. The discussions were recorded and later transcribed.

Data were generated through drawings, reflective journaling and face-to-face interviews that were conducted separately with each teacher participant. They were guided to make drawings about their experiences of implementing participatory visual methods in class, and provide captions describing their stories. They were also provided with writing pads which they used as reflective journals. In these journals, the teachers were expected to make notes representing their reflections of implementing participatory visual methods over a period of time. The teachers took part in face-to-face interviews that were semi-structured in design. They were interviewed to provide first-hand information on main issues around character education and its teaching. Notably, the PVM tools that were used included drawings and photovoice. The sampled teachers would prompt the learners on various

character traits and allow them to engage in making drawings or taking photos which they would later describe. All the drawings and photovoice products would be displayed in the classroom for reference. To this end, it can be seen that drawings were used in two ways: as a data generation method, and as an approach to facilitate learning of character values.

Data analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to make meaning of the qualitative data generated. This was done in three stages: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding. Initially, we began by listening to the audio transcripts obtained from the interviews and oral presentations of the drawings. This was followed by reading through the interview transcripts and the reflective journals. The data were then subjected to verbatim transcriptions that allowed me to read and re-read. In the open stage, data from the reflective journals, audio-recorded interviews and oral presentation of drawings was transcribed manually through typing. Spaces were then left to the right side of the transcript page margins for creation of memos. This enabled sorting of data for each school, and this was based on the uniqueness of the information.

During axial coding, I (first author) read through the memos while examining the commonalities between the data. A Microsoft Word programme called 'DocTools' was used to generate tables containing the data in text with their respective codes. This enabled me to see closely linked information and formed the basis of creating themes. After establishing the relationship between categories, the codes with the same labels were put together into one group. In the last stage, selective coding, I crosschecked for any missing information. At this point, the codes were also keenly reviewed and those that were overlapping and redundant were reduced.

Ethical considerations

Prior to data collection, the schools in the study area were visited to discuss the purpose of the study with the headteachers. After the initial permission was granted, I discussed the same with the teachers who later gave consent to participate in the study. The teachers volunteered to take part in the study and were assured that their responses would only be used for the purposes of the research. All the teachers who participated in semi-structured interviews signed written consent forms, as did the parents of the Grade 3 learners from the four schools. The participants' anonymity was maintained throughout the study through assigned pseudonyms. Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Education at Moi University, the Office of the County Commissioner and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

Results and discussion

The qualitative data generated in this study were discussed in line with the literature and the constructivism learning theory. I worked closely with the Grade 3 teachers in the incorporation of participatory visual methods in class. They particularly used drawings and photovoice to teach character education. However, there was the constraint of time considering the fact that character education was not indicated in the class timetable as a standalone subject. Hence, the teacher participants made time during Christian religious education and life skills lessons. They would teach the character values as indicated in the objectives of the individual lessons using drawings and photovoice.

Each teacher would create time to ensure that the drawings and photovoice were used as much as possible and at the end of the lesson, they were expected to reflect on their experiences as much as possible. Based on their reflections, the teacher participants were of the view that participatory visual methods were learner-centred and enhanced collaborative learning. These views formed the basis for creating the themes that were used to present the findings of this study as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Findings

Research Question	Themes	Categories (Sub-themes)
What views do teachers hold about using PVM to teach character education?	Learner-centred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active learning • Learning atmosphere • Excitement and motivation • Memory boost • Practical approach • Language barrier
	Collaborative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group work

Learner-centred learning

As explained by Gravoso et al. (2008), learner-centred learning involves putting the pupil at the centre of the learning process. Participants in this study argued that the use of drawings and photovoice carried many features of child-centred learning approaches.

“Use of drawings and photovoice is child-centred. It is more on the child. I didn’t do the drawings. They drew themselves and it worked.” (Oakley)

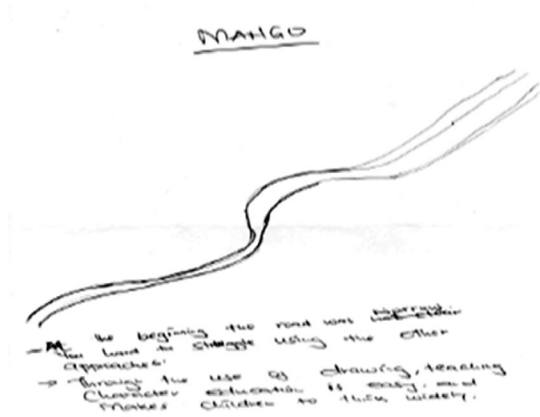
“Before attending the training on participatory visual methods of teaching, I used lecture method lessons which were teacher-centred.” (Pina)

The teachers argued that through these methods, the learners were actively involved in class activities and that their degree of participation subsequently increased. Through their active participation in class, the children’s thinking about character concepts widened. Teachers said that the children could be seen becoming critical

by asking each other questions and thinking deeply about how to present their work. This corroborates the constructivism learning theory which supports own creation of knowledge through critically asking questions and exploring existing knowledge.

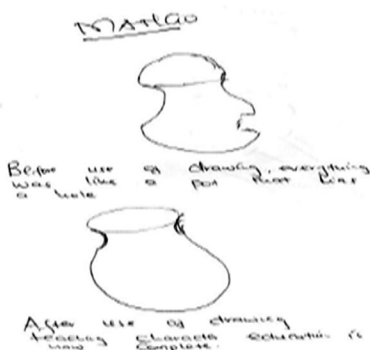
“Something like drawing, they are participating themselves, like the one we did, the photovoice, they are participating themselves. So that by the time you tell them we are going to something like respect, they come with different ideas themselves and not you giving them the ideas.” (Becky)

This following drawing was made by Melissa. She indicated that with the use of drawings, the road ahead widens. This is because the children can now think broadly. Melissa noted that before the use of drawings, the learners could not think or do so normally, but now their thinking had widened. This observation is consistent with Mpho (2018) and Weimer (2013) who posit that active engagement in class activities by learners deepens learning and widens their thinking.

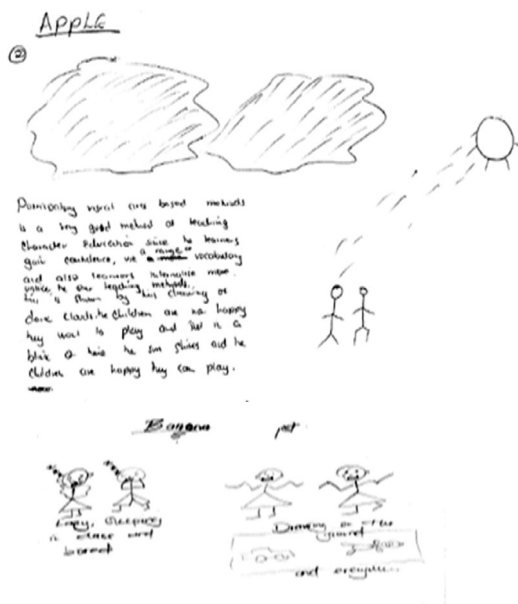


Knowledge retention also came up as an observed characteristic. It was found that active engagement and class participation enabled learners to exploit concepts first-hand hence leading to more knowledge retention. Karten (2015) posits that the use of child-centred teaching methods enables learners to accomplish tasks on their own with little guidance from the teacher. As a result, they are able to exploit their academic capabilities and increase the power of their knowledge retention.

“Before, knowledge was not retained. Very few children could retain knowledge. But now that we’ve taken photos, they are on the walls, we’ve displayed them, they cannot forget. So, it makes knowledge to be retained for a long time.” (Melissa)



The drawing above was done by Melissa who pointed out that before the use of drawings everything (knowledge) was like a pot with a hole at the bottom. She argued that, in this example, knowledge was leaking out. But after the use of drawings, knowledge about values in character education stopped leaking out. She asserted that her learners could now retain knowledge. She also pointed out that with the use of drawings, she felt that the teaching of character education was made complete. This observation is consistent with Baker and Wang (2006) who assert that the use of participatory visual methods in teaching leads to long-term retention of knowledge.



In the above drawings, the participants argued that the use of drawings and photovoice made learning more enjoyable. They indicated that the exciting nature of these methods made all learners want to participate, including the learners who were

initially known to be less enthused. In agreement with Andiemba (2016), this research found that the use of drawings and photovoice motivated learners to participate in the class learning activities. It was found that these methods were also exciting to the teachers. Back in the preparatory workshop, the teachers said that they had not been exposed to participatory visual methods initially. Because this came as a 'new' method to them, they said that they were eagerly waiting to see how it would work with their learners.

"The two methods are quite motivating. They are motivating first to the teacher and then to the learners. They are very interesting." (Pauline)

"My learners were happy and not shy anymore. As a teacher, I also gained more out of their drawings. I put my thumbs up for drawing." (Becky)

These teacher reports suggest that in the learning process, excitement begets motivation which enhances participation in class activities. However, it was the position of this study that teachers needed to take care that overexcitement on the part of the learners did not override the lesson objectives.

As claimed by the participants, the use of drawings and photovoice enabled them to transcend the language barrier. This in turn enhanced classroom interaction between the teachers and their learners. This study found that through these methods, learners did not have to struggle with vocabulary or language of communication as the drawings spoke for themselves. Also, when working in groups, the learners were able to step in for each other, hence covering for those that seemingly had poor language mastery for communication.

"If I find is somebody is stranded to explain him/herself, I just take a pencil or a piece of chalk. Go and draw whatever you want to talk about. And it will work." (Becky)

"And it really helped my slower [learners] because even they never used to talk. They never used to smile, but when it came to drawings, it was like ... they were so excited." (Lucy)

"There is richness of content and you can see the mind of that particular pupil. It is a better way of allowing people to say what they have in thoughts without having to struggle with limited vocabulary. I will recommend these methods for the learners in the lower and mid classes because they have not yet acquired much vocabulary and this can limit them in the way they can write about a particular topic given to them." (Oakley)

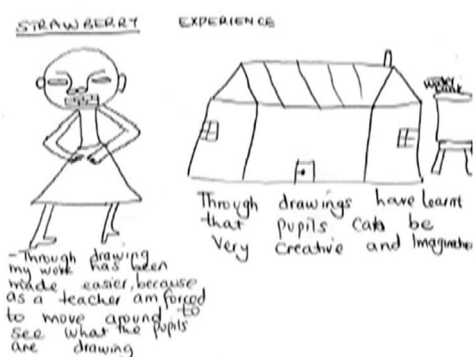
Closely linked to the issue of transcending barriers, the teachers felt that the use of participatory visual methods created a conducive learning environment where learners were free to express their thoughts and ideas with ease.

"You find that child who was not able to talk, was silent all the time now can talk, can even ask questions, is free to mingle with the rest." (Agnes)

"I also came to realize that pupils like to work in a free atmosphere where not much supervision is done." (Pauline)

In this case, the learners were able to interact freely with each other and with their teachers through the use of drawings and photovoice thus improving the student-teacher relationship. The teachers maintained that the use of participatory visual methods to teach character education was timely as it enabled them to realize that all learners are unique and need friendly learning environments to be able to work well and learn better as individuals and as members of a group.

From a constructivist learning perspective, teachers are encouraged to provide reflective activities that engage both the minds and hands of the learners (Dewey, 1929). These activities should as well provide something to think about and something to touch. It was revealed that through drawings and photovoice, learners got a practical experience of learning about character values within the process of character education.



The above was a drawing by Stacy where she pointed out that, through participatory visual methods, her work in class was made easier. She was left to move around the class and see how the pupils were immersed in the action of drawing. Stacy argued that the use of participatory visual methods is practical and not theoretical. The practical nature of using drawings and photovoice encouraged the learning of character values in a manner that was more concrete. This finding is consistent with Griessel-Roux et al. (2005), who posit that children desire teaching approaches to be more practical and visual to enhance learning processes.

Collaborative learning

The teachers felt that using drawings and photovoice in class helped the learners to work together hence learning from each other. It was clear in this research that all teachers and learners were new to the use of participatory visual methods in teaching and learning character education. For this reason, there was a need to work as a team for guidance and direction.

“The children were able to discuss and tell situations depicting hard work. Some went as far as telling their experiences of hard work in school and at home. The children grouped themselves and started taking photos depicting hard work.” (Agnes)

“After the lesson I came to realize that my learners have developed some values like sharing, love and others. They have developed in their language in that they can communicate and collaborate by sharing ideas, working together. I really was happy because each group had different ideas and the photos that came out and they also learnt from other.” (Pauline)

When learners engage in group learning, as seen in the highlighted responses, as a form of a participatory strategy, they are able to construct knowledge through reflection and dialogue. Through group work, the learners were able to engage in critical discussion of concepts and ideas pertaining to character values (Cherrington & Shuker, 2012).

Up to the completion of this research, it was found that teachers experienced some constraints that had the potential of impeding the implementation of participatory visual methods in class. Their main concerns were around their preparedness and competency in incorporating these methods in class. They also argued that these methods took more time in class during teaching and, therefore, were not suited to the strict class timetables that they had. They felt that if the challenges they faced were appropriately addressed, then these methods would be successful in the teaching of character education and other subjects.

Connecting to constructivism learning theory

Constructivism learning theory (CLT) foregrounds the learner as the centre of focus in all learning activities. It then follows that classrooms which subscribe to the principles of this theory set a constructivist learning environment (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). The findings of this study revealed that using participatory visual methods gave learners the opportunity to learn concepts on their own through self-discovery and reflection. Teachers also revealed that in their teaching using drawings and photovoice, everything was done by the learners and they only facilitated the process. This is supported by CLT which advocates the use of learner-centred approaches (Gravoso et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the teacher provides pupils with opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches in the skills they need to do so effectively (Collins & O’Brien, 2011). This was evident in the findings of this study as teachers reported that learners could be seen asking each other questions and seeking answers on their own. The teachers acknowledged that participatory visual methods enhanced peer teaching. Dewey (1929), in his contribution towards the constructivism learning theory, emphasised the need for practical, concrete, participatory and experiential learning. Similarly, this study revealed that the use of drawings and photovoice enabled children to share their experiences bearing different character values. They were also able to practically express the different character values in the drawings they made and the photos they took.

Discussion

The qualitative data analysis in this study illuminated the perspectives of Grade 3 teachers regarding the integration of participatory visual methods (PVM) in teaching character education. Grounded in constructivism learning theory, which emphasises learner-centred approaches, the findings underscored the efficacy of using drawings and photovoice to facilitate character education. Despite logistical challenges, such as time constraints within the curriculum, teachers creatively integrated PVM into Christian religious education and life skills lessons.

Learner-centred learning emerged as a prominent theme, aligning with scholarly literature and the pedagogical principles of child-centred approaches. Participants noted that PVM encouraged active engagement, expanded thinking about character concepts, and fostered collaborative learning environments. This resonates with constructivism theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through active participation and exploration. By allowing students to generate their own ideas and interpretations, PVM facilitated deeper understanding and memory retention of character values.

Moreover, PVM were found to enhance motivation and enjoyment in learning, both for students and teachers. The novelty and excitement of these methods motivated even previously disengaged learners, contributing to a more dynamic classroom atmosphere. However, it's essential for educators to ensure that excitement aligns with lesson objectives to maintain focus and effectiveness.

One notable advantage of PVM highlighted by participants was its ability to transcend language barriers, promoting inclusive classroom interactions. By allowing students to express themselves visually, regardless of language proficiency, PVM facilitated communication and participation among diverse learners. Additionally, PVM created a conducive learning environment where students felt empowered to express their thoughts and ideas freely, improving student-teacher relationships and promoting individualized learning experiences.

The practical nature of PVM was also emphasised, providing tangible experiences for students to explore character values first-hand. Through drawings and photovoice, students were able to actively participate in the learning process, leading to a more concrete understanding of abstract concepts. This aligns with constructivist principles advocating for experiential and hands-on learning opportunities.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that participatory visual methods in teaching character education within Grade 3 classrooms is effective. Grounded in constructivism learning theory, the integration of drawings and photovoice promoted learner-centred approaches, collaborative learning environments, and practical learning experiences. Despite challenges such as time constraints, teachers

creatively incorporated PVM into existing curriculum frameworks, enhancing student engagement, motivation, and understanding of character values.

Moving forward, addressing logistical challenges and enhancing teacher preparedness will be important for the successful implementation of PVM in classroom settings. By embracing participatory visual methods, educators can foster inclusive, dynamic, and experiential learning environments that empower students to construct their own knowledge and develop essential character values.

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