

Shallow Roots Require Constant Watering: The Challenge of Sustained Impact in Educational Programs

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Abstract

Socially-oriented educational programs often face societal barriers. Peace education in a region of prolonged conflict faces a negative socio-political environment that works against its effects. The media, leadership, educational system and other societal institutions continue to express a culture of conflict. Recent studies show that the effects of peace education programs are short-lived and methods to sustain the effects over time are needed. The present paper describes the societal-psychological climate of prolonged conflict, the goals of peace education in such regions, the challenges of achieving these goals, and possible ways to overcome these challenges. The main argument is that peace education programs should be designed to effectively manage the “reality dissonance” between the sought-for effects and socio-political environment. Mechanisms for sustaining educational change are described along with considerations for program design. Finally the paper offers several conclusions and directions for future research.

Keywords: Long-term effects, Sustained impact, Reality dissonance, Peace education

1. Introduction

Despite these difficult circumstances, initiatives in peace education have thrived in settings such as Israel, Northern Ireland, and the Balkans. Different kinds of initiatives include Pathways into Reconciliation (IPCRI, 2004), Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) (CCEA, 1997), and Education for Peace (EFP) (Danesh, & Clarke-Habibi, 2007). Although peace education initiatives in contexts of intractable conflict are commonplace, it is still important to ask whether they accomplish anything in such difficult circumstances. Careful research on peace education is limited, but by this point there is clear evidence of impact from some interventions. Several studies have documented positive impacts on perception of the other side, more positive emotions, willingness to have contact with the “others” and greater legitimization of “other’s” collective narratives (e.g., Kupermintz, & Salomon, 2005).

However, the news is not as heartening as it might seem at first. While most research has focused on immediate effects, a few longer-term studies suggest that the impact dwindles over time (Rosen, & Salomon, 2011). The present article focuses on this phenomenon: In contexts of intractable conflict, how can we understand the forces that erode the near-term effects of peace education? Our analysis offers a model of the forces at work summarized by the concept of “reality dissonance,” the dissonance between the ideal views and practices promoted by typical programs of peace education and the socio-political environment that surrounds participants.

While part of the problem lies with reality dissonance itself, another part lies with the design of typical peace education initiatives, which on the whole do not incorporate features to combat reality dissonance. However, there are real prospects for doing better. In the last part of the article, we identify a number of program components that seem likely to promote more sustainable change, based on research in diverse areas.

2. The Reality of Intractable Conflict

Attitudes in a setting of intractable conflict are far from homogeneous. Nonetheless, on the whole, members of such societies tend to be skeptical about peaceful resolutions. Both sides expect the conflict to continue and involve violent confrontations. Parties engaged in an intractable conflict make vast material (i.e., military, technological, and economic) and psychological investments in order to cope with the situation. Intractable conflicts are perceived as being about essential and basic needs and/or values that are regarded as indispensable for each side’s existence

and/or survival. The conflicts characteristically have a multifaceted nature, including matters of territory, self-determination, statehood, economy, religion, and/or culture. Each side focuses only on its own needs, considering any loss suffered by the other side as its own gain, any gains of the other side a loss.

Intractable conflicts occupy a central place in the lives of the individual members of such societies as well as the societies as a whole. Members are involved constantly and continuously with the conflict. Children and youth grow up in a pervasively belligerent climate that supports the prevailing culture of conflict, thus opposing the spirit of peace education (Bar-Tal, & Salomon, 2006; Bar-Tal, & Rosen, 2009). The younger generation experiences this culture through family, through the societal channels of communication, including the mass media, and through other cultural agencies and products.

The educational system serves as the major agent for socialization for conflict through school textbooks, instructional materials, teachers' instructions, and school ceremonies. Even so, peace education initiatives are a prominent and at least sometimes somewhat effective method for promoting a culture of peace (Aall, Helsing, & Tidwell, 2007; Abu-Nimer, 2004; Zartman, 2007).

3. Goals of Peace Education

In general, peace education aims to reconstruct students' worldview -- their values, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, motivations, skills and patterns of behavior -- in a way that facilitates conflict resolution and other peace processes and prepares the students to live in an era of peace and reconciliation (Abu-Nimer, 2004; Bar-Tal, & Rosen, 2009; Iram, 2006). The Peace Education Working Group at UNICEF defines peace education as:

The process of promoting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level. (Fountain, 1999, p. 1)

It is useful to conceptualize peace education initiatives as operating on three fronts: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (e.g., Bar-Tal, & Rosen, 2009; Iram, 2006; Salomon, 2004; Staub, 2002). Although these are not perfectly distinct, *the cognitive aspect* can be understood as encompassing knowledge, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, values, and evaluations regarding the other and one's own collective. This includes:

- Understanding the origins of violence between collectives and the need of reconciliation. Understanding the multi-dimensional characteristics of the conflict (cultural, religious, power, etc.), as well as the need of multi-faceted approaches to peace making. Legitimizing (without necessarily accepting) the other side's collective narrative of the conflict;
- Understanding of and concern for human rights (civil, political, social, economic, cultural, environmental and developmental rights);
- Reflective thinking: Critical examination of one's own side's contribution to the conflict. Assessing what one knows and what one needs to know about the interaction between both sides in the conflict;
- Balancing and personalizing the image of the 'other';
- Openness to alternative information and tolerance toward collectives with contradictory worldviews;

The *emotional aspect* consists of emotions and feelings toward the other and one's own collective. This includes:

- Decreasing feelings of fear, anger and hatred toward the other;
- Increasing hope, trust and mutual acceptance;
- Empathy: To feel the feelings of members from the other collective and to be able to empathize the suffering of the other collective;
- Recognizing the feelings and their roots on both sides, sharing them reflectively with one's own group and with members from the other group;

The *behavioral aspect* consists of overt behavior patterns regarding the other and one's own collective. This includes:

- Nonviolent dispositions;
- Proactive skilled efforts to avoid escalating conflict through deed or language and to seek peace;
- Caring for the other's collective welfare;

- Raising children to take action to prevent violence;
- Ready cooperation and patterns of friendly relationship with the other;
- Activism for peace through social movements and networks;

The cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects of peace education are not disconnected each from the other. Change in one of them can lead to a change in the others. Thus, changing the negative image of the other side (cognitive aspect) or reducing fear of members of the other collective (affective aspect) can influence openness to social contact with the other (behavioral aspect).

4. The Mixed Effectiveness of Peace Education

On the affirmative side, research on peace education in the context of the Israeli-Palestine conflict shows positive impacts of educational programs on youth. For example, Maoz (2000, 2004) found in her evaluative studies a positive attitudinal change among Jewish and Palestinian youth who participated in dialogue workshops. Biton and Salomon (2006) studied the extent to which participation in a school-based peace education program affected youth's perceptions of "peace". It was found that both Jewish Israeli and Palestinian participants came to stress more the positive aspects of peace (cooperation, harmony) as a result of the program. Also, this study found that the program served as a barrier against the deterioration of perceptions and feelings during the times of escalated mutual hostilities (e.g., Intifada). Lustig (2002) studied the effects of a peace education program based on studying a foreign and remote conflict. She showed that as a result of learning about a remote conflict the students have developed perspective-taking abilities regarding the home conflict. Rosen (2008) found positive impacts of peace education program signaled by greater acceptance of members of other collective, more positive emotions, less negative stereotypes, openness to contact with the 'others' and greater legitimization of the 'other's' collective narrative.

However, several findings indicate that the effects of peace education programs dissipate with time. For example, Bar and Bargal (1995) reported an extensive study of peace education dialogue encounters where most of the effects of peace education programs were lost within a few months. Participants relapsed there to previous negative or stereotypical attitudes and beliefs. Peace education as value-oriented education often faces societal barriers. Close analysis of peace education programs suggests that they face formidable barriers that would appear to prevent the attainment of their goals of mutual legitimization, changed attitudes and empathy.

A study by Bar-Natan, Rosen and Salomon (2008) revealed friendships with members from the other side created during the encounters, increased readiness for social contact, and greater perceived legitimacy of the collective narrative of the other. However, the study found that these effects were short-lived as well as highly correlated with the initial attitudes and beliefs of the youths involved.

Finally, Rosen and Salomon (2011) showed that peace education programs can effectively influence adolescents' more peripheral attitudes and beliefs, whereas the typical roadblocks facing peace education appear to pertain to the core beliefs of the groups' collective narratives. Core attitudes and beliefs are more extreme than less central ones, are more stable over time, are held with more confidence, are more strongly associated with behavior, are more likely to influence other attitudes and beliefs, and – most importantly - are more resistant to external interventions (Thomsen, Borgida, & Lavine, 1995). Thus, peripheral attitudes and beliefs that are more easily affected by a peace education program can as easily change back in an adverse social and political atmosphere.

5. Reality Dissonance

It is hardly surprising that impact would dwindle over time. Such phenomena are commonplace across many kinds of learning. That acknowledged, how can we best understand the erosive forces in the specific case of peace education in settings of intractable conflict? We argue that far more than simple forgetting is involved. The relapse reflects a pervasive and belligerent culture of war. The dissonance between more positive productive views and the socio-political reality wears away cognitive, emotional, and behavioral gains, particularly after participants have finished the intensive part of the program. For an overall term, we call this effect reality dissonance.

For example, Sommers (2004), noting the active resistance of parents and other members of the students' larger communities to changes within participating youth, argues that "peace education positions itself between schoolchildren and adults in the same community making it virtually impossible for education to inculcate peaceful values in children when adult role models are built on conflict. In fact, cultivating a disjunction between values promoted at home and in school may cause 'anxiety and distress in children' rather than optimism and peacebuilding. (p. 180)". Indeed, findings from empirical study indicated that parental attitudes toward bilingual and peace-promoting education at a school often affect negatively the behaviors and perceptions of their children

studying there (Yahya, Bekerman, Sagy, & Boag, 2012).

Outright confrontations aside, more subtle undermining of gains accrues from the constant signals of belligerence sent through everyday conversations, newspaper stories, television news, and political speeches. It's hard to swim in this sea without getting wet! The pervasive sociopolitical reality tends to wash away islands of progress.

However, reality dissonance itself is only part of the problem. It is also the case that peace education programs typically do little to prepare learners for reentering the socio-political context. The programmatic shortfalls can be organized by the same three dimensions that characterize the goals of peace education: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Peace education programs generally suffer from what might be called cognitive oversimplification, emotional oversimplification, and behavioral oversimplification. We address each of these in turn.

Cognitive oversimplification. Peace education programs tend to emphasize superficial cognitive learning, giving short shrift to the complex multi-dimensional reality of the conflict, peace efforts and reconciliation processes. The content of peace education often amounts to a form of indoctrination provided by the government or NGOs (see for example Northern Ireland case in Duffy, 2000). Terms such as "tolerance" might be interpreted by some as ignoring the atrocities of the 'other side' (Duffy, 2000).

To win learners away from an established culture of conflict, it is no doubt intuitively appealing to offer a strong simple counterview. However, we suggest that such a counterview, even if temporarily adopted in the context of an intensive peace education program, is not likely to prove robust as learners return to their normal life patterns. According to Bar-Tal (2007), information that is consistent with a deeply entrenched culture of conflict tends to be more attended and remembered, and inconsistent or confusing information reinterpreted to fit. Minimizing the multi-dimensional characteristics of the conflict in the name of peace can leave learners without ways of making sense of the complexity, and reality dissonance will most likely "reconvert" them to the culture of conflict.

Moreover, many programs focus on individual relationships, including relationships with members of the other group, but without deeply addressing or affecting perceptions of the other as a group. They also express an overly static view, incorporating little reflection about the future of the painful group relations (Atieh et al., 2005). When the participants try to understand fresh events that express the conflict, they tend not to transfer their knowledge to the new situations (Bar-Natan, Rosen, & Salomon, 2008). Connection to the person's reality as a point of departure for change is required in a process of change (Gardner, 2004).

Perkins (2008) has summarized the problem as "tribethink", the tendency to see the world in terms of the needs and aspirations of one's own tribe (group), and standing against the other competing tribes. The members of the tribe develop excessive cohesiveness, commitment, and compliance, sacrificing exploration of possibilities. The challenge of peace education is to overcome the limits of tribethink by dealing directly with the advantages of more open-minded views and mutual benefits of peace. In many cases, programs do not do enough to make an alternative vision cognitively clear, accessible, and compelling for youth. Moreover, in many cases the immediate environment of family and friends continues to represent the culture of the conflict and draw participants back into tribethink.

So what might be done? We will return to this in more detail later, but basically there is a need for more cognitively complex and fact-oriented education about peace (Rosandic, 2000). Peace education has to work harder to develop complexity of thinking about conflicts and possible ways for peace making and reconciliation.

Emotional oversimplification. A negative emotional orientation marks the societal-psychological infrastructure of intractable conflicts (see for summary, Bar-Tal, Halperin, & de Riviera, 2007). Despite this, most peace education programs do not refer directly to the affective aspects of the conflict and inter-group relations. For example, most of the programs do not deal with symbolic and realistic threat. Symbolic threat concerns perceived conflict between groups' values and goals; realistic threat involves perceived competition for limited resources, often framed in zero-sum nature (Stephan, & Stephan, 2000). According to Bar-Tal (2007), hatred, anger and fear are prominent in the psychological repertoire of societies involved in intractable conflict.

Moreover, peace education programs in regions of intractable conflict by definition are implemented amidst unstable and sometimes violent situations that generate frequent emotional stress. Under stressful conditions, educational effects achieved earlier tend to revert to old patterns (Biton, & Salomon, 2006; Bar-Natan, Rosen, & Salomon, 2008).

So what might be done? Blindness toward the suffering and the emotional lives and feelings of others can be reduced by developing empathy, awareness of others' feelings and perspectives, which can change the ethno-centric emotional view developed as a part of a culture of a conflict (e.g., Rosen, 2008). Also, peace education programs need to include learning of self-regulation emotional skills (e.g., Goldman, 1998; Gross, & Thompson, 2007).

Behavioral oversimplification. During and especially after a program, there is typically nothing much for participants to do with the newly learned attitudes and concepts. Participants have few ready-at-hand opportunities for political action, reflective expression, or contact with people from the other side. This near vacuum of significant actionability also applies to the educators involved, who see themselves as teachers and coaches, not as political or social leaders. New experiences, if occurred during the participation in peace education program, mostly reacted to initially familiar and reliable construction of reality (e.g., Rosen, & Salomon, 2011).

So what might be done? True change may require people finding dissatisfaction, inconsistency, or intolerability in the current situation (Fullan, 2007), leading on to some kind of productive action. What counts in the end is what people do. Peace education programs need to offer a kit of specific inter-group and intra-group activities that translate newly learned concepts and feelings into action on the ground, forming stable positive behavioral patterns over time (Perkins, 2008).

6. General Mechanisms for Sustaining Educational Change

As already noted, erosion of impact is not unique to the field of peace education. Similar setbacks, with both different and similar causes, have been noted in other fields as well. For instance, in science education learners often regress to previously held misconceptions (Chi, 2005); when teachers return to pre-training views of teaching (Strauss, & Shiloni, 1994); drug addicts return to their addictions (Dakof, et. al., 2003); and schools and other organizations return to previously practiced modes of operation (e.g., Argyris, & Schön, 1996).

Relapses in these and other fields such as social and organizational psychology have sometimes been successfully overcome or even prevented and changes have been sustained in the face of adverse forces. Fullan (1997, 2007) argues that change is a never-ending proposition under conditions of dynamic complexity; therefore connection with the wider environment is critical (Sarason, 1971). According to Sims and Sims (2004), long-term change in collectives involves the creation of key mechanisms, such as symbols, stories, language, ceremonies and statement of principles. These mechanisms enable transmitting and sustaining the newly developed culture. According to Senge et al. (1999), the challenges of sustaining transformation involve keeping the participants open-minded and managing fear and anxiety.

Huberman and Miles (1984) identify three main factors for continuation of change: (a) embed the change into the structure of the environment; (b) generate a critical mass of people committed to the change; and (c) create established procedures for continuing assistance, especially toward supporting new participants. To assure the sustainability of change, groups create member commitment, seeking to inculcate a sense of emotional identification with the practices and values (Kelman, 2005).

Sometimes a change process can find a self-sustaining path from the very beginning; an initiative can “feed on itself” through positive feedback which produces further change. Positive feedback mechanisms may be activated indirectly, by promoting successful experience, and directly by creating “as-time-goes-by” support (Kelman, 2005). An induced compliance technique involving dissonance arousal can serve as an “as-time-goes-by” mechanism (Festinger, 1957; Harmon-Jones, & Mills, 1999): the more a person tries the new learned behavior, the more he or she will like it, because the drive to reduce dissonance encourages people to change attitudes to make them more consonant with their behavior. Another “as-time-goes-by” mechanism is the “foot-in-the-door” effect - a willingness to engage in more significant behaviors after undertaking less dramatic ones (Freedman, & Fraser, 1966; Burger, 1999, Ross, & Nisbett, 1991). Here, when someone carries out a small request, this increases considerably the likelihood of agreeing to a similar (or in many cases even dissimilar) larger request made by the same person (or in many cases even by another person).

Another potential self-sustaining mechanism involves peer-teaching. One of the best ways to understand deeply new concepts is by teaching them. Peer-teaching involves responsibility for collection and organization of information, deep understanding and identification with the body of knowledge, reflective thinking and leadership skills (Myrick, 1993; Dueck, 1993; Whitman, 1988).

Political support may be needed to sustain a prolonged change. Various studies have found that real change requires a significant amount of support from political overseers and other key external stakeholders (Berry, & Berry, 1999; Chakerian, & Mavima, 2000; Mazmanian, & Sabatier, 1989; Thompson, & Fulla, 2001). Political overseers have the authority to pass legislation or put policies in place that mandate change, and they also control the flow of vital resources that are needed to sustain a transformation.

7. Designing for Sustained Impact in Peace Education

It has to be acknowledged that addressing some weaknesses of peace education programs requires a change in the whole political-societal environment. According to Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009) the following conditions are essential for implementing widely peace education in the context of intractable conflict: Progress toward peace, support for a peace process by major political parties and the civil society, ripeness for reconciliation, and governmental and political support for peace education. However, even under less supportive conditions there is a place for the development and implementation of peace education programs based on what we would like to term the “*sustaining components*”. Based on the analysis presented earlier, this approach suggests important elements and psychological-educational processes of peace education for sustained impact. According to this approach, *the challenge of sustainability must be addressed from the beginning and throughout*. As already argued, typical education for peace in settings of ongoing intractable conflict neglects the problem of reality dissonance. Without special preparation, participants encounter the gap between the new culture of peace promoted by the program and the pervasive reality of the conflict, which leads to losses of initial gains as participants readapt to the pressures around them. Although severe reality dissonance is by definition a reality in such settings, programs can include features designed to mitigate some of the effect -- features we call sustaining components -- both during the main part of the program and afterward as part of a follow-up process. These components can prepare the participants for real-life situations where reality dissonance is likely to come to the fore. Follow-up components can help to refresh and maintain changes after the more intensive experiences of the main part of the program. We discuss briefly several promising sustaining components.

Perspective-taking activities: Frequently putting oneself in the others' place and seeing the world through their eyes, feeling their emotions, and even role-playing as they would behave in a particular situation. The "others" include people on the opposite side of the conflict but also more militant members of one's own society. This is based on the empirically-proven method of induced compliance in the context of intractable conflict (Rosen, 2008). Habits of perspective taking should help to build and sustain empathy toward the needs, suffering and intentions of others involved.

Analyzing the recent events: Guided uni-national and bi-national meetings for mutually analyzing the recent events of the conflict. Such meetings can foster transfer of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns cultivated by the program.

Social networks: Encouragement and support for participant activity within social networks and peace movements. Under the stressful conditions of a prolonged intractable conflict, societies set rigid limits for social proximity and distance. Internet-based social networks can help peace education participants overcome constraints of time, physical distance, and social distance (Roth, 2004).

Mutual projects: Involvement in collaborative prolonged initiatives. Participants might engage in initiatives such as films, music, painting, theater, science, computer programming, literature, sports (e.g., Lynn-Duckworth, Allen, & Triguba-Williams, 2012; Zamir, 2012; Zoubi, 2007). Initial interest in the subject is essential for effective involvement.

“Foot-in-the-door” experiences: Less dramatic actions leading to more dramatic ones. The idea here is to create an initial platform leading toward greater commitment and participation. For example, this method could be used toward the end of a program by asking the participants to write small essays about their reflections on the program, sending them to other participants or educators. Most participants will then feel more obligated to the program and more likely to respond to invitations to volunteer for additional activities.

Involving family and community: Cognitive, emotional and behavioral efforts to cultivate change can be addressed not just in individual settings but with family and larger community. Youth are of course part of the community in which they live and are influenced by the views expressed in it. Therefore it is important to reach out and involve families and the community in programs of peace education, even when the population is not at all homogeneous in its commitment to peaceful solutions. This can be done both during and after the major part of the program.

Cross-age peer teaching: After participation in a peace education program, teaching younger children (Jayusi, 2011). Peer-teaching fosters deep understanding, reflective thinking and leadership skills.

Mutual ceremonies: Creation of mutual symbols, ceremonies and statements of principles. These mechanisms foster transmission and sustaining of the developing culture of peace.

Positive expectancy: Dealing explicitly with doubts and difficulties of conflict resolution and the reconciliation process. The participants have to expect challenges and setbacks, recognizing that they are part of the process and

that they can be overcome.

In summary, first, we do not see this list is complete; certainly other strategies could be added. Second, we view these components as complementary; they contribute in different ways and can be used in combination. An extended program could even use them all, although it is perhaps more plausible that different well-designed programs would use different combinations of convenience. Finally, it is especially important that a program include some of these as follow-up components, to help learners weave the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral gains tightly into their everyday lives. Perhaps after the main part of the program, participants might adopt any of several sustaining routes, involving combinations of two or more components. These routes could in principle continue indefinitely, generating a prolonged supportive environment.

8. Conclusions

Educating new generations about the importance of peace and ways toward achieving it is probably one of the most important challenges for human beings wherever they live. Peace education is a principal tool toward peace and reconciliation within societies involved in ongoing conflict. Peace education in contexts of intractable conflict refuses to accept the supposed intractability, aiming to reconstruct the worldview of the young generation toward facilitating conflict resolution and peace processes and preparing youth to live in an era of peace and reconciliation.

Research shows that peace education programs in the context of intractable conflict can have clear positive impact. However, research also suggests that the effects of peace education programs are temporary, with participants reverting to their original mindsets in the months after completion of a program. Losses with time after a period of education are a common phenomenon with several contributing factors (Rosen, & Salomon, 2011). Our analysis seeks to explain these losses in the case of peace education, at least in part, through the general idea of reality dissonance. After a program, learners reenter the pervasively belligerent climate of a culture of conflict, with friends, parents, local and national political figures, and media stories commonly expressing views sharply contrary to the goals of peace education. Learners typically encounter push back from such sources, few chances to act concretely on their new commitments, and few opportunities to maintain thoughtful and empathetic discourse around themes of peace.

Although reality dissonance is a formidable force, there may be more hope for peace education initiatives than seems apparent at first. The fact of the matter is that typical peace education initiatives in regions of intractable conflict do little to recognize or cope with reality dissonance. An interdisciplinary analysis of the theoretical and empirical literature on change and its sustainability suggests a better general model for effective peace education. Programs could include a number of “sustaining components” that specifically address the challenges of reality dissonance in different ways.

Looking beyond peace education, in general sustainability does not seem to get much attention from educational scholars and practitioners. Yet the problem is widespread. Moreover, reality dissonance plausibly figures in losses following other programs seeking cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes; for instance programs designed to ameliorate substance abuse or violent or criminal behaviors, when people exit into the same social and physical environments that maintained these patterns. Likewise, it is reasonable to suggest that strong versions of such programs would incorporate a number of sustaining components to combat reality dissonance. Such components are a clear presence in Alcoholics Anonymous for instance.

Turning again to the challenge of peace, some of the sustaining components mentioned are empirically proven in the context of peace education (e.g. perspective-taking, social networks). Empirical studies are needed to examine the effects of other methods and combinations proposed here. Results of these studies can improve our understanding of sustainable change toward peace in cultures of conflict.

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