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How Do Schools Become Effective and Inclusive?

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We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us; we already know more than we need to do that; and whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

R. Edmonds

Setting the Stage

Kenny was in a self-contained special education setting for students who had "challenging behavior." This classroom held 12 students with the label of emotional disturbance, one teacher, and three paraprofessionals. Students remained in this classroom year after year until middle school. Kenny, an African American boy, was educated in this self-contained room from kindergarten to third grade, when Kenny's school administrators and teachers decided to move toward a much more inclusive philosophy of schooling and an inclusive service delivery model. Because of this change, all of the students with disabilities became permanent members of general education classrooms. Therefore, when Kenny started fourth grade, he started the year in a general education fourth grade classroom alongside his same-age peers for the first time.

On the first day of school, when all of the students were lining up and packing up their backpacks to go home, Kenny remained at his desk. When his teacher approached him and asked him again to line up, he whispered to her, "Ummm . . . I think there has been a mistake. I have never been in a classroom like this . . . I am afraid if I go home, that I won't be able to come back here again." She smiled, and whispered back, "You are going to be in this classroom all year. We are excited to have you. We are going to learn together all year." Kenny hesitantly put on his backpack and went home.

Given the current push toward accountability and high achievement for all, the topic of creating and maintaining effective inclusive schools is at the forefront of the discussion on education. Never before have we had such a strong political push toward accountability for

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ALL students in the United States (even those students with significant disabilities who have traditionally been educated in segregated settings). That push, coupled with the legal mandates to include students with disabilities in general education and research demonstrating that access to the general education classroom leads to better academic and social outcomes for students, has led to a modern day inclusive education imperative for students like Kenny, and for schools and districts across the country.

Every school in the country is at a different place in terms of both effectiveness and inclusivity. Some have been "doing inclusion" for years, and need information about how to maintain and improve inclusive practices in this era of accountability. Others have segregated students (i.e., maintain separate programs for students with disabilities, or engage in pullout services) as a common practice and seek information about how inclusion can lead to much better outcomes for students with and without disabilities. Regardless of where each school falls along the effectiveness and inclusivity continuum, information about how to engage in inclusive school reform is often useful. The aim of this chapter is to help school leaders or practicing teachers to create more effective and inclusive schools and classrooms. Essentially, we will demonstrate how creating inclusive schools actually increases effectiveness.

In this chapter we will first provide a historical perspective on research and practice related to inclusion. We will situate inclusive practices into the current context of education. Then we will provide a suggested path for schools to take in order to become both more inclusive and more effective. We will provide information on the necessary leadership, philosophy, service delivery models, and classroom practices.

Historical Perspective on Research and Practice

For years, students with disabilities and their families have had to fight for the opportunity to learn in general education settings (Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007). Despite winning many battles for inclusive opportunities over the years (e.g. Daniel R. R. v. State Board of Education, 1989; P.J. et al. v. Connecticut State Board of Education, 1993), large numbers of students continue to learn in educational environments that are substantially separate from their peers without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). According to the Data Accountability Center (2008, 2011), about 40% of students with disabilities spend 20% or more of their day in an environment *outside* general education, with roughly 41% of students with emotional disturbance, like Kenny, spending over 60% of their day outside general education classrooms. These statistics are evidence of a history of special education practice which presumes that removal and remediation are the best ways to educate.

Scholars and practitioners have engaged in ideological debates over whether inclusion is the "right" way to educate students with disabilities since individuals began to entertain the idea of including students with disabilities in "typical" schools and classrooms (McLeskey, 2007). These ideological debates are clearly reflected in school practices, with some districts across the country continuing to segregate students with disabilities, while others include nearly all students regardless of the significance of disability or disability label.

Brantlinger (1997) identifies these opposing viewpoints on how and where to educate students with disabilities as being either "Inclusionist" or "Traditionalist". She describes Inclusionists as individuals who promote the inclusion of students in general education settings and promote the blending of special and general education, and Traditionalists as individuals who promote separate settings and separate systems of special and general education. Although these viewpoints exist along a continuum, they are useful in describing historical debates on inclusion and how they relate to current views in special education today.

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A significant body of research indicates that students with disabilities benefit academically and socially from inclusive education (Affleck, Madge, Adams, & Lowenbraun,1988; Daniel & King, 1997; Huber, Rosenfeld, & Fiorello, 2001; Hunt, Staub, Alwell, & Goetz, 1994; Mastropieri et al., 1998; McDonnell et al., 2003; Saint-Laurent et al., 1998; Shinn, Powell–Smith, Good, & Baker, 1997; Stevens & Slavin, 1995; Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Prior research suggests that students with disabilities who learn in general education settings score higher in reading and mathematics than student with disabilities who learn in self–contained settings (Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002). The results are similar for social and behavioral achievement (Agran et al., 2002; Fisher, Pumpian, & Sax, 1998).

Further, the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom strengthens the classroom as a whole. Research has shown that when students with disabilities are included, teachers work to create strength-based classrooms, increase student access to resources and technology, implement differentiation, and teach skills of collaboration and interdependence (Kasa–Hendrickson & Ashby, 2009). When students with disabilities are included, not only does the achievement rise, but learning opportunities are also strengthened for all (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Demph-Aldrich, 2011).

Unfortunately, despite evidence of positive outcomes for inclusive practices, many students continue to receive their special education services in segregated special education classrooms where there is little evidence of success (Ainscow, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002). Rather than focusing on the individual needs of the student and the family preference for placement, some schools and districts continue to follow an outdated model wherein disability labels, perceived intellectual levels, and physical needs drive educational placements.

What Does the Law Say About Inclusion?

Although the term inclusion is not in the law, inclusive practice comes from the federal law governing special education (IDEA, 2004). The provisions for inclusion are found under the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provision of this law. IDEA stipulates that all students with disabilities have the legal right to be placed in the LRE:

> LRE means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, school districts must educate students with disabilities in the regular classroom with appropriate aids and supports, referred to as "supplementary aids and services," along with their nondisabled peers in the school they would attend if not disabled.
>
> *(IDEA, 2004).*

Under LRE, the general education classroom is the first place to be considered for placing a student with a disability, before more restrictive options are considered. Furthermore, a child with a disability cannot be removed from a general education classroom merely to meet the needs of the school (IDEA, 2004), and must be provided supplementary aids and services to support placement in the general education classroom.

Supplementary aids and services that educators have successfully used to modify or adapt instruction in the general education classroom include modifications to the general education curriculum and other supports such as preferential seating, large print materials, peer tutors, graphic organizers, use of computers, taped lectures, reduced seat time, assistance of a teacher with special education training, training for the general education teacher, use of

computer-assisted devices, a note-taker, communication device, or changes to materials. By law, educators must utilize all of the possible supplementary aids and services before determining that a student needs to leave the general education classroom.

Setting the Course for Effective Inclusive Schools

Leadership for Inclusive Schooling

School leadership plays an essential role in establishing, improving, and maintaining high-quality education that serves all students well (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2009; Fullan, 2008; Theoharis, 2009). It is widely accepted that school leadership is vital to creating and maintaining equitable and excellent schools; this clearly extends to inclusive schools:

> Systemic change toward inclusive education requires *passionate visionary leaders* who are able to build consensus around the goal of providing quality education for all learners. . . [Study after study found] *administrative support and vision to be the most powerful predictor* of success of moving toward full inclusion.
>
> *(Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996, p. 44 [italics added])*

Villa et al. (1996) provide a resounding reminder that leadership is the driving and perhaps the most important factor in creating and maintaining inclusive schools. The leader's role requires a number of key components. In the following sections we position and describe this leadership in Kenny's inclusive school, which provided: a vision and reason to embrace inclusion, inclusive service delivery, and inclusion-oriented instructional leadership.

Vision and Reason for Inclusion

Leaders who are committed to inclusion recognize the systems of oppression that operate within schools (Boske, 2011). As Frattura and Capper (2007) argue, "Oppression in our society is perpetuated through our schools by the "slotting and blocking" of students with differing needs into self-contained programs and separate schools for their perceived own good" (p. xxvii). School change literature suggests that exemplary leadership is the crucial factor that contributes to systemic change (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). The leader's role is to identify school inequalities, develop school consciousness amongst faculty, and make a plan for change to happen. In the words of Fullan (2009), "Those engaged in educational reform are those engaged in societal development; those engaged in societal development are those engaged in the evolution of virtue" (p. 84).

Inclusive leaders act as transformative agents who critically analyze inequities for groups that have been historically marginalized and adjust the structures and practices within their buildings in efforts to change culture (Riehl, 2000). As Shields (2010) argues, "Transformative educational leadership begins by challenging inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice" (p. 564). Furthermore, the leader's role includes examining the structural aspects of the school and how students are provided services (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

It is necessary that leaders enact critical reflection and act from a socially transformative orientation that disrupts systems of hierarchy and oppression that serve to discriminate against

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students with disabilities (Riehl, 2000). Leaders have the role of dismissing possible strategies for academic failure that have been proven to be ineffective, including pullout remediation programs and grade retention (Shepard & Smith, 1990).

A key to inclusive schooling is that students with disabilities should receive special education services within the context of general education classrooms—that is, the context in which students learn is a fundamental concern of leadership for inclusive schooling. These principals wholeheartedly believe that all students learn best in heterogeneous settings and sustain efforts to tease out implementation intricacies (Frattura & Capper, 2007). In inclusive schooling, the principal leaves questions such as, "Where should this student be educated?" "Which program works?" and "Does this student belong here?" behind, and instead chooses to enact sustained social action by means of problem-solving implementation issues and restructuring service delivery to ensure that all students are educated within general education contexts.

In order for educational reform to have a lasting impact, constituencies both inside and outside of schools must develop capacity about and invest in the changes (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Effective leadership involves the principal becoming the co-creator of new understandings and values (Riehl, 2000; Parker & Day, 1997). Riehl (2000) argues, "Real organizational change occurs not simply when technical changes in structure and process are undertaken, but when persons inside and outside of the school construct new understandings about what the change means" (p. 60).

Enacting a vision of inclusive schools required building a common philosophy or inclusive culture across a school. At Kenny's school, along with many other schools that have undergone inclusive school reform across the United States, we have repeatedly witnessed that key aspects of that inclusive culture involve embracing:

- a common definition of inclusion,
- an authentic sense of belonging,
- a commitment that "all" means each and every student, and
- a presumption of competence for ALL students.

Given that many schools feel that they "already" do inclusion or "have done" inclusion, it is important for leaders to use, discuss, and ground this work in a shared definition of inclusion. Many school administrators, including those at Kenny's school, adopt a commonly used definition of inclusion by Norman Kunc (1992):

> *In Principle, inclusive education means:*
> . . . the valuing of diversity within the human community. When inclusive education is fully embraced, we abandon the idea that children have to become "normal" in order to contribute to the world . . . We begin to look beyond typical ways of becoming valued members of the community, and in doing so, begin to realize the achievable goal of providing all children with an authentic sense of belonging.
> *In Practice, inclusive education means:*
> A Classroom Model in which students with and without disabilities are based in a regular structure and benefit from the shared ownership of general and special educators.
> A Student-centered Approach Beginning with Profiles that help educators appreciate the strengths and challenges of learners with and without disabilities and the individualized accomplishments that can be attained.

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A Schedule that accounts for the full range of needs in the class—where no student engages in "pull out" or alternative activities to the extent that disruptions in the daily schedule and in peer relationships do not occur.

A Curriculum that is rich and accommodating for all students—and when further individualized to meet the needs of a particular learner.

A Teaming Process in which support staff work in flexible, coordinated ways to strengthen the collaborative relationships among special and regular educators, parents and educators, and educators and the community.

A Classroom Climate that embraces diversity, fosters a sense of social responsibility, and supports positive peer relationships.

(pp. 38–39).

This definition provides both philosophical as well as practical guidance. In addition, the "in principle" section centers inclusive schools within the idea of belonging. We see that moving from effectively including one student or creating one effective inclusive classroom team requires purposeful attention to building and maintaining a sense of belonging for students with and without disabilities, as well as for teachers and staff (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier & Dempf-Aldrich, 2011).

Moving beyond inclusion for some children in some classrooms and toward creating entire inclusive schools necessitates that leaders extend the common definition of inclusion centered on belonging for each and every child, regardless of need or ability. At Kenny's school this means students with mild disabilities, students with moderate disabilities, students with significant disabilities, students with autism, students with significant behavioral challenges—each and every child is a permanent and valued part of the general education classroom. This required the leaders and their staff to see all students as essential members of the school community, which leads to collaborative work to meet their educational needs within the context of general education (Theoharis & Capri, 2011). Without the belief and commitment that each and every student is a full member of the general education community, schools struggle to move beyond pockets of partial inclusion.

The final aspect of the shared vision is the idea of presumption of competence. This involves looking for and believing in intelligence in all students, and in particular in students with significant needs. It involves reframing discussions to address the question "How can this child be successful?" (Kasa-Hendrickson & Buswell, 2011, p.1), instead of asking "Can this child be successful?" or approaching students with significant needs from the position of "This child cannot do this" (Kasa-Hendrickson & Buswell, 2011). A presumption of competence requires educators to honor that students with disabilities have feelings and a say about their lives. This necessitates engaging students respectfully and using age-appropriate communication, including them in conversations, not speaking for them, and assuming that all students will benefit from an age-appropriate curriculum (Kasa-Hendrickson & Buswell, 2007).

It is clear that leaders need to provide a vision of inclusive schooling. We have witnessed that effective and inclusive schools create and hold a vision that includes a common definition of inclusion, an authentic sense of belonging, a commitment that "all" means each and every, and a presumption of competence for all students.

Inclusive Service Delivery

This second aspect of the leader's role in inclusive school requires creating and maintaining inclusive service delivery. This involves a multi-step process involving multiple stakeholders.[1]

The educators at Kenny's school participated in examining their existing human resources and service delivery model, and created a new model by re-deploying special education teachers and paraprofessionals to create teams of general educators and special educators who co-plan and co-deliver instruction in general education classrooms. This involved moving away from categorical special education services, where particular teachers work only with students with certain disabilities. It involved moving away from pullout services and self-contained special education settings, and making all students full members of general education classrooms. Re-deploying staff to create inclusive services necessitated building teams of general and special educators who work together to meet the needs of all students (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier & Dempf-Aldrich, 2011; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2010.)

Inclusive service delivery relies on using existing human resources more effectively. Too often special education teachers are either working with students with disabilities in separate and segregated settings, or have a fragmented schedule as they pull students from different classes, then push-in to other classes, and run separate groups or classes for particular students. Furthermore, when special education teachers push-in to general education classrooms, they are all too often relegated to the same tasks as a teaching assistant.

At Kenny's school, inclusive service delivery relied on instructional teams that serve students in general education settings. This meant school leaders facilitated the creation of heterogeneous classes honoring the natural proportions of students with disabilities at the school. This moved away from overloaded classrooms with disproportionate numbers of students with special needs. Using the natural proportions of students with disabilities in the school is a key aspect of student placement in inclusive service delivery. The leader's role was to facilitate an inclusive service delivery plan, create instructional teams, and set parameters for class placement (Theoharis, 2009). This service delivery process became part of the routine of each year to plan for the following school year and adjust the service delivery/instructional teams based on the needs of the students (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

Another key aspect of planning was to maintain a reasonable number of different general education teachers with whom special education teachers co-plan and co-deliver instruction. We recommend no more than three—and preferably two—general education teachers for each special educator (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, in press). This provides a more manageable schedule for the special education teacher and avoids logistical issues (e.g., common time for co-planning) as the leader supports instructional teams by providing common planning time and other supports.

The final role of leaders supporting inclusive delivery is to provide other kinds of support to the instructional teams (Capper, Frattura & Keyes, 2000). This includes time for planning, but also time for new team development, professional development, and collaboration. Leadership support takes both symbolic and material forms as well. The symbolic support takes the form of treating all teachers on instruction teams as equal and full members of the teams; for example, including both names on class lists, on classroom doors, on communication with families, and in other ways that send a symbolic message that this instructional team collaboratively serves this entire group of students. Material support takes the form of providing supplies and curriculum. This can mean allocating additional resources, as both the general education and special education teachers require teacher guides and necessary teaching supplies such as manipulatives for mathematics. At Kenny's school, every team received a modifications box. This box included many necessary items (i.e., highlighting tape, raised lined paper, word windows, fidgets, and correction tape). Material support also takes the

form of making sure that both teachers have similar space (e.g. a teacher's desk) to organize their work.

Inclusion-Oriented Instructional Leadership

School leadership that enhances knowledge about inclusive instructional practices, builds teacher capacity, and leads to curriculum development is a critical attribute of schools that effectively educate students with disabilities (DiPaola et al., 2004; Riehl, 2000; Parker & Day, 1997). The leader's role includes promoting inclusion through instructional leadership for all students (Boscardin, 2005; DiPaola et al., 2004; Coyne, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 2004). This leadership contributes to an increased capacity of curriculum, instruction, student progress, and climate (Parker & Day, 1997). Strategies to increase the capacity of faculty include supporting voluntary topical reading groups that situate schools as professional learning communities (DiPaola et al., 2004) or communities of inquiry (Carr, Fauske, & Rushton, 2007) and as spaces that generate knowledge to be implemented in classrooms. This instructional leadership provided by principals is linked to teachers' usage of research-based practices (DiPaola et al., 2004), a focus on increased academic outcomes for all students (Klingner et al., 2001), and knowledge about federal legislation (i.e., IDEA and NCLB) requirements (DiPaola et al., 2004). Problem-solving that translates into academic improvement (Boscardin, 2005) and collaboratively engages the school community (DiPaola et al., 2004) is also a central part of the principal's leadership.

An essential part of the school leader's role at Kenny's school was this inclusion-oriented instructional leadership. As a leader implements inclusive service delivery and develops learning communities or communities of inquiry, there are a number of additional roles she/ he plays. The leader sets and supervises the application of inclusive instructional expectations. First, this means explaining the expectations for teams in terms of co-planning and co-delivery of instruction. This means that during walk-throughs and observations the leader is looking for instructional teams to co-deliver instruction to heterogeneous groups of students. The leader needs to confront situations if the team is taking only students with disabilities and instructing them at a separate table in the back of the classroom.

The leader's role is to set a strong, shared, inclusive vision, create and update inclusive service delivery, and act as an inclusion-oriented instructional leader. These are no small tasks, but when brought together, as was the case at Kenny's school, this results in authentic inclusive schools and classrooms.

What Does an Inclusive Classroom Look Like?

The best way to fully understand what an inclusive classroom looks like is to directly experience such a setting. In an effort to create that experience, we will take you through a segment of time after lunch in Kenny's fourth grade inclusive classroom, and then point out the essential elements of the inclusive learning experience.

In this classroom, during a morning reading block, they were doing a read-aloud of *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Before the reading began, the paraprofessional introduced the read-aloud by letting the entire class know that during the reading they had three choices: they could remain at their desks to listen to the story; they could grab a clip-board and sit on the rug or on the bean bags; or they could stand and work graffiti-style (meaning working on large chart paper that was taped to the wall). No matter where they were working, the assignment was to write or draw the big ideas they heard in the book. Students were given 30 seconds to make their choice.

The general education teacher and special education teacher then took turns reading the text. The adult who was not reading supported students around the classroom (i.e., getting markers for a student, closing the door, turning on the lamp in the back of the room, checking in with a student that looked sad). The words from the book were projected on a smart board in the front of the room, and many students alternated between following along with the text on the smart board and writing or drawing. Seven students (including Kenny) were standing and writing or drawing graffiti-style. The paraprofessional was at the back table preparing images for a science experiment the following day. The special educator stopped at the end of the chapter and asked all students to turn to a neighbor and share any of the big ideas they had written or drawn. The students engaged in conversation, and returned to their reading journals. Students then selected from three writing prompts and began writing.

Collaboration

Prior to the lesson, the team met to plan this read-aloud. The team consists of the general education teacher, the special education teacher, the paraprofessional, and sometimes the vision therapist and speech and language therapist. Three students in this classroom have identified disabilities and receive services inclusively. The first concern was Kenny, who needs to move when he learns, which is why the graffiti paper and the bean bags were options (although several other students found these options helpful as well). He is also a reluctant writer, so having the choice to draw or write is sometimes helpful for Kenny and for others. Notice, these were not options only for Kenny, but options for all.

Another consideration in this meeting was Josephine, who receives speech and language services and is working on effective turn-taking and sharing in small group settings. Therefore, the turn and talk was planned with Josephine in mind, but was certainly effective for all. Finally, they considered Sam, who has a visual impairment. His reading journal is electronic, so he uses his laptop. Also, at his desk he has a Magnabrite (a dome-shaped magnifier) and he uses 20/20 pens that provide clean dark lines that are easy to read.

Effective Support

One of the most common, yet ineffective ways to support students in inclusive classrooms is to sit next to them and provide reminders or prompts to stay on task, and to provide academic support in a side-by-side fashion. This has been shown to be stigmatizing to students, and it interferes with their opportunities for natural social interaction (Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006). In Kenny's classroom all three adults were engaged in support, all three adults rotated between leading the class and providing support, and all students received support as needed (not only the students with special education labels). One of the adults (the paraprofessional) was not needed for support after she gave directions, and therefore she was gathering visual images that would be used to make modifications for an upcoming lesson.

Differentiation

Choice was naturally built into class activities in an effort to differentiate for students' strengths and preferences. The students in this classroom had a choice of where to sit, to sit or stand, to draw or write, which materials they used (i.e, clip-boards, pens, pencils, or markers), size of paper, and peers to work next to. They also had a choice of writing prompts. The prompts varied in difficulty, and one student with a visual impairment had an electronic

reading journal so the font size and letter background and color were most visible. All of these instructional choices were made during a collaborative planning meeting. Each of these decisions made by the team resulted in an improved learning experience for everyone, including Kenny.

Conclusion: So, What Happened to Kenny?

Kenny remained in the general education classroom for his entire fourth grade year. His grades improved, his teachers reported that his motivation had increased, his attendance improved, and during his fourth grade year his IEP team determined that he was no longer eligible for special education, and so he was exited from special education. The team deemed him to be a general education student. Was he cured of his disability? Or was the segregated environment he had been in for the past four years disabling?

"Ummm . . . I think there has been a mistake. I have never been in a classroom like this . . . I am afraid if I go home, that I won't be able to come back here again." We think there has been a mistake too. Not a mistake to include Kenny—the mistake was in excluding him from the general education environment for the first four years of his educational life. We have made a colossal mistake in education. The mistake is in thinking that some students are optional. The mistake is in thinking that removing students based upon their deficits does not have a detrimental effect on hearts and minds. The mistake is in thinking that we are not teaching children to exclude by race, by disability through our example. The mistake is in thinking that removal from the general educational environment somehow provides more access to general educational content. The mistake is in thinking that normalcy is real and desirable.

These mistakes are huge. However, we think these mistakes can be remedied. We think that there are a great many students like Kenny who can take full advantage of an effective and inclusive educational opportunity. We think that the only way to make schools more effective is to make them more inclusive. The question is will we make that choice?

Note

1   For detailed information on the process see Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis (in press).

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