

# DIDACTICS: A PEDAGOGICAL EXPLICATION\*

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## A. WHAT IS DIDACTIC PEDAGOGICS?

To be a person means to bring up (educate) and to commit one's self to being brought up (educated). No one is born educated; each of us undergoes this far-reaching intervention by others (adults) in his own life and eventually becomes an educator himself when, as a grown up, he establishes his own family. The fact that persons are educated and usually also become educators themselves is a primary or basic given in terms of which being a person can be described. As an event or activity among and between persons, it cannot be reduced to or traced back to a previous or another situation. Educating is given with being a person. It occurs when there is an educative situation between an adult, as a person with authority, and a child, as one accepting authority. The aim that the educator tries to attain in an educative situation is to help the child become an adult himself. Now, when an adult stands back and thinks about his educative aims, means, authority and responsibilities, he does what a pedagogue does who practices pedagogics, the science of the phenomenon of educating. All thinking about the event that we know as "educating" is pedagogical thinking; it takes the educative situation as its point of departure and attempts to answer the question, "How is it that educating is possible and meaningful in the course of a person's life, in particular a child's life?"

When adults think about the educative event as such, two aspects receive attention, namely:

(a) the adult continually influences a child's **emotional life** by trying to establish positive dispositions, relationships and appreciations. This influence touches a child's entire life of striving, i.e., his emotional, willing and evaluating life and more;

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(b) by intervening in his emotional life, the adult also continually directs himself to a child's **knowing life** by presenting him with particular contents of a religious, moral, social, esthetic, etc. nature and by expecting that he will acquire and appropriate them for himself. It is important to indicate that the adult should never isolate these two aspects in his educative activities. He should never attribute a separate identity to the emotions or the intellect. As far as these two facets are concerned, his influence is "simultaneous" and he continually touches the intellect through a child's emotional life and the reverse. In this way, educating strives for a harmony in a child as a total person--and should one of the two facets be neglected, the other becomes equally impoverished and attenuated. Thus, educating is a unitary event directed to a child as a total person.

As we know, a child's natural educators are his parents and the natural place or terrain for educating is their home. The entirety of educative activity--emotional as well as intellectual influencing--occurs in the home. It is there that a child learns to know his immediate surroundings, that he is protected and pampered, that he encounters other members of the household, family and neighborhood--and that he also learns about his places there and how to assume them.

The educative activity and milieu, therefore, also are matters of "learning": learning to know, to value (appreciate), to talk, to keep quiet, to walk and, on a more formal level, to learn to play. When a child engages in these learning activities, the adult's (parent's) educative activities are set into motion as are the possibilities for extending them. Thus, educating also implies an adult offering help to a child regarding his learning activities. Certainly, demonstrating and imitating are the most important bases for this--but the influence exercised on a child by these is far-reaching and encompassing. As a person, a child never again learns as much in a comparable amount of time as he learns at home during the first six years of life. Without the help (admonitions, encouragement) of his parents he indeed will learn--but without knowing whether what he learns is good or bad, right or wrong, valuable or harmful, etc. Although not in a formal or systematic way, the parents "teach" their children as an integral part of their educative intervention within the framework of the pedagogic situation. In Old Greek we come across the concept "to teach" as "didaskhein": "Didaskhein" means to teach in order to make something clear. From this root

word also comes the Latin "didactica", as does modern "didactics", which really is an overarching concept that embraces all aspects of what today is known as "teaching". Therefore, it is important to understand that the science which today is known as "didactics" has developed from the study of both theoretical and practical analyses of the activities that embrace all aspects of teaching. A situation in which a person, in particular a child, finds himself and where help in the form of "making something clear" is required by the demands of that situation is known as a "didactic" situation. As a science, didactics addresses both the theory and practice of teaching and, therefore, it deals with and indicates the principles according to which teaching should occur.

The question that arises now is whether the concept "didactic" should not rather be substituted by "methodology" because the latter means "way" (Greek *methodos*) and therefore points to the way someone should teach. From the above, it is clear that primary (home) educating is a matter of "giving instruction" and that didactic characteristics are undeniably present in an educative situation. Educating shows itself as teaching and vice versa--without inquiring about a particular way or "methodos". The aim sought also is not that of teaching in the narrow sense of the word but of educating. Also, reflection in this respect is not a purely didactic matter but it also is a pedagogical one. Thus, there is a relatively clear indication of a "didactic pedagogics" that seeks the origin of an adult's teaching intervention with a child, that reflects on the sense and meaning of that intervention, that tries to determine what contents are or ought to be implicated in it, that considers who is interested in this activity, that investigates what the circumstances are that create a favorable climate for it, that looks into what means promote the favorable progress of the intervention, that determines what categories are peculiar to the event itself and to what extent they are a matter of the pedagogical--all of this before the question about methods for promoting this event is raised. When a didactic structure is built up, the topic of methodology certainly arises--but it does not embrace the entire field covered by didactics. "Methodology" is a much narrower concept than "didactics" and as will be shown, it is embedded within the didactic.

The point of departure for didactics, in its pedagogic connection, is in the first, primary intervention of a parent with his child in an educative situation. This teaching aspect understandably is extended to other adults when a child becomes older and discovers

a world outside of the family household, and when this world is so comprehensive and vast that the parent no longer is able to manage teaching it alone. Then, during a particular time of day, these other adults (teachers) teach particulars about this world. In this way, teachers enter a child's life and the child finds himself in school for part of the day. (Greek *schole*; Latin *schola*: a place for practicing free teaching activities; a place where teaching youth has to be amplified). Understandably, the aims the school strives for are coupled with the child's spontaneous learning activities that become goal-directed such that his becoming adult can flourish. In view of the instructional flavor of the school situation, it is called a teaching or didactic situation. However, a pedagogical view of this event clearly shows that the school situation essentially is a reconstitution or re-establishment of the home situation; primary educating by teaching is actualized anew in the school although more formally, systematically and purposefully than earlier in the family. The school-didactic situation, thus, is a secondary situation by which an adult **continues** previous educative work in systematic ways until a child no longer is a child and takes responsibility for continued forming from free choices in an institution of higher education (and/or in life).

Perhaps the didactic-pedagogic relationship between home and school intervention will be clearer if we focus on four important pedagogical categories (from many others) and describe and evaluate the school's intervention in relation to them. The point of this is to seek out the pedagogical aspects of the didactic (school) situation by which it also ought to become clear that from this angle, "methodology" cannot be a substitute concept for "didactics":

### 1. The aim of educating

In broadest strokes, educating aims at the eventual adulthood of a child. But above it was shown that educating without teaching in one or another form is not possible. In a Christian family educating continually revolves around the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) and Christ's compilation of them (Matthew 22). The parents exert themselves to awaken their child's disposition toward these norms because a life of thankfulness is manifested in obeying them. But to meet their demands, the child has to learn **to know** these contents. Knowledge of the contents is a precondition for obeying them. On the other hand, a child's dispositions are a significant factor in learning them. Obviously, the question here is not of the end

justifying the means. There is a clearly perceptible **unity** in the aim of the learning activity and the aim of forming a child's dispositions. Later the parents are compelled to turn to other adults (catechists, teachers) in order that each commandment can be interpreted for the child to the fullest extent. Teaching in the home now proceeds to a form (variation) of school teaching. However, this teaching does not merely involve knowing but also a knowing **attitude** (disposition). Clearly, there is a unity of aims in both aspects of the intervention noticeable even though it extends over many years and different adults are involved in it.

## **2. Authority in educating**

As an event, educating is unthinkable, really not possible, without authority. The exercise of authority by an adult and its acceptance by a child are preconditions for educating. The adults who exercise authority do not have to be a child's parents: ministers, youth leaders and especially teachers exercise pedagogic authority. Where educative authority, as such, is mentioned, there are no multiple forms: it remains the authority that an adult exercises over a child. The preconditions and consequences continually are the same; in the situation a child has to become "different" (more adult). When a teacher exercises authority over him, this is not "another kind" of authority because the teacher above all is an adult: thus he is more than a "know-it-all". As an adult he is subject to the same demands in his exercise of authority as is the parent, and when he exercises it, he does so in place of the parent.

## **3. The child as person being educated**

A child is involved in the event of being educated as a total person. Thus, the educator should not try to divide him into separate psychic "functions", each of which then becomes a separate aim for educating and, thus, for teaching. Didactic pedagogics views a child as a total person in the classroom: when he learns he does so as a person, as a totality and not only is his intelligence involved but also is his will, affect and body in their mutual relationships; when he fails he does not experience this only as a matter of understanding but his entire being (a person) is involved in the experience; when he achieves, he does so as a person. Neither parent nor teacher recognizes any separation regarding the child's involvement in the educative event at home or at school. Their involvement with the child in both types of situation always is that

both be brought to completion. They intervene with the same child in situations that in principle are not different with respect to aims and actions.

#### 4. Values and norms in educating

Where there is educative effort to pass on morals, there are values and norms. The values and norms of the family home need to be evident in the school, otherwise the parents will not be able to tolerate the school. A different interpretation of values and norms by the teacher disrupts the initial educative work of the parents and gives rise to a dualism and contradictions in educating. Then helping the child takes on a negative and detrimental character. What is viewed as good, right, beautiful, etc. in the home has to be recognized as valid and valuable in the school. The didactic situation does not primarily have "individual" norms when a child is involved in it, and the demands a child has to meet basically are pedagogic ones. It is obvious that this aspect sometimes acquires an attenuated form at home and the school purposefully proceeds to fill the gaps so a child's future adulthood in a religious, moral, cultural, political, social and esthetic sense does not suffer.

In light of its pedagogical foundation, didactic pedagogues, in planning teaching situations, give a child help related to his struggle with the future. The central problem of didactic pedagogics, namely, the teaching event and everything connected with it in every respect is an integral part of a person's lifeworld. Thus, to be a person also means to receive instruction in one or another period and in one or another way and form. The phenomenon generally known as teaching is, through educating, given with being a person and does not arise because there are traditional institutions such as schools. The distinction between didactic pedagogics and methodology also has to be clarified: didactics addresses itself to "teaching" in its entirety; methodology provides guidelines regarding ways in which **particular** teaching aims for a particular subject in the practical classroom situation can be attained. Methodology sheds no light on the questions about "what" must be offered and "why".

Didactic pedagogics does not build its structure from a particular or composite view based on a psychology of learning but also not without intensively investigating learning psychology and interpreting its results in a clearly didactical-pedagogical way.

Proceeding from the pedagogical situation, as fundamental situation, the didactic pedagogue not only penetratingly and critically investigates learning psychology but, where useful, other sciences in order to be able to offer good justification for the designs he makes to bring about didactic situations. At the same time, in this way the didactic pedagogue tries to avoid the trap of serving up his didactics as nothing more than an applied philosophy, psychology, sociology, physiology, history, etc.

## B. THE DIDACTICAL-PEDAGOGICAL STRUCTURE:

How can the didactical pedagogical become accountably structured within a pedagogical framework and with learning as the central task and what does this structure look like? It was indicated that the lifeworld of persons also is the foundation for teaching. On this basis the didactic pedagogue is of the opinion that a person's (a child's) learning activities are more than merely conscious processes. This opinion is supported by the simple observation that can be made in each learning situation: much more is involved in learning than distinct or isolated processes of "consciousness". Sometimes there is anxiety and tension because norms are always involved in the learning activity; there also is joy and happiness because learning achievements also are a matter of life achievements; there is a broadening of life perspectives and attitudes because learning contents indeed are life contents; there is an intensification of communication because the conversation with reality in its totality (with God, with fellow persons and with things) becomes deepened by learning. Essentially, learning cannot be a "process" because its effect on and influence of a person's form of living can be neither predicted nor explained. To be a person means **to have to learn**. Thus, it also is a way of living (way of being a person) and a life task. Much has been written about **how** a person learns. The didactic pedagogue is aware of this literature-- and knows well that the mysteriousness of life regarding learning is not clarified by it. Thus, he is confronted with the task of (a) designing a series of situations on the basis of his knowledge by which a child is helped to be able to carry out a richer, fuller, more responsible form of living, and (b) being able to justify the meaningfulness of his design: In school will the child arrive at a fuller self-actualization under the teacher's guidance? His striving to give form to this task is a result of a radical and systematic thinking through of the teaching event. Didactical pedagogical

thinking, then, especially ranges over the following areas. The brief, synoptic descriptions should not be interpreted simplistically.

## 1. General didactics

General didactic questions are concerned with the teaching event in general. These general matters are not only basic but even overarching because the **meaning** and **nature** of teaching have to be manifested in them. This includes each facet of teaching as it is recognized in the lifeworld. General didactics provides the first opportunity to become acquainted with didactics as a science. The range and terrain of this aspect of the science of didactics possibly can be best clarified by stating in the form of questions certain themes that arise here: How is school-didactics pedagogically anchored and how must it be pedagogically accountable; what is meant by the concept of school and how does it figure in a child's lifeworld; what roles do the adult and child assume in the course of schooling; how does the structure of a didactic situation appear there and what (pedagogical-didactical) categories crop up; what should be understood by "learning material"; in what ways and on the basis of what principles should it be selected; what is included in "learning" and how do the different opinions regarding it influence the design of a didactic situation; what principles are generally valid didactically and how can they be implemented (e.g., the principles of activity, visualizing, experiencing); what considerations hold in general for ordering the learning material? These are some questions of a general didactic nature that really are valid for **all** teaching situations in schools. The aim of answering these questions is to broadly orient the teacher regarding his task in general. The significance of this for his pedagogical insight hardly can be overestimated.

## 2. Specific (particular) didactics:

The area of study best described as "specific didactics" focuses itself on trying to answer particular didactic questions that flow from the above general considerations. Specific didactics searches for decisions about matters such as: What circumstances or climates are most favorable when a child is placed before the learning task; how can the learning situation be made meaningful for a child regarding particular aims and subject contents; what aids can be implemented to try to insure optimal learning and what is considered to fall under such aids; what physical circumstances will radically



influence learning and how can the teacher control them partly or entirely; what didactic ground forms can the teacher consider in order to find links with a child's forms of living; what general methodological pronouncements should be considered before designing different subject methods? The answers to such questions are of a specific rather than general nature--therefore, the name "specific didactics". From the above two facets, the teacher now can consider a presentation of a particular subject in a classroom knowing that in each case his actions will not harm the children before him.

### **3. Methodology or subject didactics:**

In his thinking about presenting different subjects within the framework of a teaching plan, the didactician has to decide about subject didactics or (teaching) methods. Here a clear distinction is made between general methods or methodology, as mentioned in specific didactics, and subject methods. A general methodological matter such as experimenting certainly will place at one's disposal general, over-arching facts for consideration in offering different subjects while these general principles will be used differently in teaching physics, art or geography. Subject methodology should be chosen. or if a general methodology crops up for presenting a particular subject, it has to be interpreted in terms of the nature of the learning material. Thus, a method, as such, is not merely directed to a particular subject but, conversely, it is strongly determined and delimited by the subject. As far as aims are concerned, subject didactics merely directs itself to the aims of the particular subject where matters such as the subject science method(s) and their possibilities of application are considered. Therefore, a method usually has a matter-of-fact, objective character for bringing the subject nearer to a child. The preconditions for presenting a particular subject are one of the most important themes of subject didactics. The method is intertwined on two sides with general and specific didactic statements, on the one side, and with the teaching activity itself, on the other. Thus, when method is reflected on, essentially this means anticipating the teaching activity that has to acquire form in the situation. In his pronouncements about method, the teacher, in a literal sense, clarifies how he is going to act in a particular situation. A variety of perils for teaching are concealed in these pronouncements. Too one-sided an emphasis on the subject can lead to its being presented in isolation by which the general didactical as well as the pedagogical aims disappear

from view. Often the consequence of this is a recipe-like, rigid and foreign to life presentation of which the children, in spite of merely being by-standers, are victims. Then the subject content loses its central place in a child's experiencing reality and his participation becomes a reproducing by rote. Thus, in considering method, the teacher has to be able to distinguish clearly between didactic and methodological principles. Didactic principles are rooted in the aim of helping a child become adult through teaching; methodological principles are rooted in the aim that he directly masters the learning contents of adulthood.

#### **4. Orthodidactics**

However well a teacher commands his didactics and however penetrating his insights into subject methodology might be, he knows he cannot guarantee a successful course of learning for each individual child. The factors that contribute directly or indirectly to unsatisfactory learning are not discussed here. That there are such factors is what constitutes the terrain or task of orthodidactics within a pedagogical framework. The teacher has to recognize that orthodidactics cannot be considered apart from the larger structure of orthopedagogics. And because the teacher in an orthodidactic situation is focused on supporting a restrained or retarded child in his intention to also become an adult himself, the concept orthodidactics embraces much more than remedial teaching. In this light, orthodidactics has a three-fold structure that flows logically from the orthodidactic situation. First, orthodidactics has to investigate and help clarify what the learning difficulties embrace in a broad sense. This research includes theoretical as well as practical aspects. After this, the second aspect follows necessarily, namely, that of orthodidactic diagnostics. Knowledge of a problem has to lead to its recognition. When the nature, extent and origins of a particular learning difficulty are determined, the orthodidactician confronts his third task, namely, to give help by which such a child can overcome his problem entirely or partly. With this he operates in conjunction with the broader terrain of orthopedagogics. Thus, he has to design ways of teaching and aids which can help a child, knowing well that his help will or can be of far-reaching significance for his form of living, life contents and lifestyle.

In this paper, an attempt has been made not only to explicate how the pedagogue views didactics but also to indicate its terrain with reference to certain traps and dangers. It clearly is a comprehensive

terrain that includes much more than methods and principles of teaching. It is pedagogics. The answer to the question of the importance of studying didactic pedagogics for prospective as well as credentialed teachers, perhaps, is the most fitting way to conclude this brief explication of didactic pedagogics. Hopefully, the answer now is close at hand: Without such a study, the teacher does not **know** where he is going to venture when he teaches. However good and trustworthy his intuitions might be, he should want always to become a better teacher on the basis of an enduring and accountable didactic orientation.

## 5. Summary\*

Contemporary thought on pedagogics encounters problems of teaching a child while educating him. Throughout history, no one has denied that when ideas about educating are put forth, ideas about teaching also have to be considered. Therefore, it is not surprising that modern didactic theory takes the pedagogic situation as its starting point in order to explicate its meaning within the larger frame of a theory of educating or pedagogics. This pedagogical situation arises when an adult and a child encounter each other in a way that irrevocably changes a child's existential mode of living and thus helps him become a responsible adult himself. In order to clarify the problems of teaching, one should first understand what the idea of the "pedagogical" implies and the ways it reveals itself in the pedagogical situation. In our case, the questions to answer are the following: Does an examination of the pedagogical situation reveal that some forms of the act of teaching help constitute this situation in the primary sphere of educating, i.e., in the home situation? If so, what categories and terms should be used to describe learning in this situation?

To answer these questions, the didactician has no other choice than to study the pedagogical situation to discover how it unfolds itself within human existence, and thus to tabulate the pedagogical categories that actually constitute this situation. Observing a parent and a child in the primary educative situation leads one to acknowledge that the adult, while educating a child, also teaches him specific contents which he deems necessary for his eventual

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\* The summary, which appeared in English in the original paper, is included here because the author makes a few points not made in the text of the paper itself. I have slightly edited parts of it—G.Y.

adulthood. Such an investigation also inevitably reveals that the child being educated or brought up learns a vast number of facts about human existence in general during the years he is entrusted to the care of an adult, especially his parents. These acts of learning are fundamental in shaping his own lifestyle and thus, in no uncertain way, influence his eventual way of being human. Growing up or being educated undeniably includes a duality of facts, namely:

(a) Forming or molding the inner self in order to bring about a harmonious and well-balanced **appreciation** of values, norms, authority and the cultural heritage, including a taste for personal propriety;

(b) Acquiring knowledge of values, norms, the cultural heritage, etc., and learning to implement these within the structure of one's own world, i.e., learning to actualize life's contents within one's own field of existence.

These acts of learning understandably cover the simplest and most direct fields of **knowledge** during the first years of life. One thinks of learning healthy habits, learning to eat properly and correctly, acquiring a language and its use in communicative situations, respect for age and property, learning to play according to the rules covering every social situation and learning about religious and ethical norms operating in the parents' lives. The act of learning fundamentally influences a child's way of being; in fact it is a way of becoming a responsible adult. As such, the ways a child learns forces the educating adult to promote these acts of learning in order to live up to the demands of his own responsibility to educate his child. He also evaluates a child's future in terms of his ways of learning, down to the most simple of these acts. In answer to the first question above, on the basis of these insights, the didactician has to acknowledge the intrinsic unity of educating and learning so that the act of teaching becomes of utmost importance within the greater pedagogical setup.

The second question requires the discovery and presentation of categories that are valid for both pedagogical and learning situations. These categories have to transcend the home sphere because later learning becomes the major aim of the school situation. Their explication thus has to prove that the home situation continues in the school, even though the school stresses different aspects. Matters mentioned in (a) probably constitute the

main function of the family whereas factors mentioned in (b) seem to constitute the greater part of the school's responsibility toward the child. Among the many categories that present themselves in analyzing the pedagogical situation, only four have been selected for discussion. Their selection reflects more their obviousness rather than their overbearing importance.

1. There is an obvious correlation between the **aims** of the pedagogue (educator) and the teacher. Both seek the moral independence of the child in religious, ethical, social, economic and other matters. The interaction between inner experience and acquiring knowledge is the mainstay of this category: both facets are directed by the adult from his own way of being and are aimed at completing the child's education as a totality.

2. Both parents and teachers take up their task of educating on the basis of an **authoritative disposition** that amounts to pedagogical authority in any situation they share with a child. Thus, authority directed at a child's independence includes that of the parent in a primary (i.e., home) pedagogic situation and that of a teacher in a secondary (i.e., school) pedagogic situation. In view of the educator's aims and authority, the school situation is a reconstitution of the original pedagogic situation within the family. The diversity of activity never leaves the field of the pedagogical idea, namely, the child's total independence (adulthood).

3. The anthropological perspective on a child's way of being can not differ in home and school educating without causing serious disruption and disharmony in the ways a child participates in the respective situations. Should this occur, one can be sure of educative conflicts between home and school and, understandably, this does not further the pedagogical aims.

4. The **unity in values and norms** for both home and school accounts for the security a child experiences in both types of situation. Should home and school vary in this respect, the child will be torn apart by the dualistic approach of his educators. The school, as an institution within society, has to obey and teach the values and norms accepted by society in general.

Taking the primary pedagogic situation as its point of departure, a pedagogical view of didactics thus can only start building a didactic structure that is in harmony with those categories revealed by a

thorough analysis of this primary situation (the home). Such a didactic structure understandably includes the following:

### **1. General Didactics:**

By "general didactics" is meant the study of didactical-pedagogical topics in order to discover their general value for the didactic-pedagogic situation that is constituted daily by the teacher. Such topics should include: the natural pedagogic unity of home and school; clear-cut decisions on what the institution called "school" should imply, including its didactic aims; clear insight into the question of learning materials and the principles for selecting them; intensive study of the act of learning or so-called "learning process"; a clear definition of the teacher's task in constituting the didactic situation in general, but especially of the principles on the basis of which it comes into being in the classroom, etc. General didactics, therefore, does not merely imply general methods and principles of teaching. It rather directs attention to problems of a general didactic nature.

### **2. Specific Didactics:**

Having decided on the general principles, a didactic theory can then proceed to descriptions and judgments of a more specific nature. These would include school organization and administration; classroom procedures; the use of teaching aids in general; the description of didactic ground forms (i.e., play, conversation, example and assignment) and their didactic possibilities; methodological study as a preparation for studying teaching methods in specific school subjects.

### **3. Methods and Principles for Teaching School Subjects:**

The various school subjects and different teaching techniques are the third aspect of didactics. Here the intention is not to supply an infallible recipe or bag of teaching tricks. The study of teaching methods for the different subjects should complete the totality of didactically sound presentations in a situation with a specific character that, in spite of having a bearing on a particular school subject, still remains essentially a didactical-pedagogical situation.

### **4. Orthodidactics:**

Should the learning for some reason not contribute to a child's eventual adulthood, and should normal teaching, as such, not succeed in aiding him toward this aim, the educator has a learning, a pedagogic problem on his hands. In order to remedy this, he has to take note of directed diagnostic research as well as special teaching methods and aids that might help him bring the child back to a normal level of learning.

Therefore, the study of didactics aims at orienting a teacher for a task of cardinal importance to the children entrusted to his care. He should **know** why he is teaching them, what to teach and how to go about it.

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