



Comparing School Climate Improvement with Other Prosocial Education Approaches: Similarities, Differences, and Trends

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I. Effective implementation: lessons learned from implementation science:

- ✓ Effective instruction X effective implementation X enabling contexts = educationally significant outcomes
- ✓ Understandings shape goals. Goals shape behavior. Goals suggest methods/pedagogies/interventions that are designed to actualize our goals. Finally, metrics support revised understanding/learning.

II. Prosocial educational improvement efforts: Similarities, Differences and Trends

What is prosocial education?

Prosocial education or what is sometimes referred to as “whole child” education refers to teaching and learning that promotes the skills, knowledge and dispositions that promote mature, productive and ethical citizens, who are also critical and knowledgeable.

Both prosocial education and “whole child” education are helpful umbrella terms that are increasingly used to recognize the range of overlapping “camps” focusing on social, emotional, civic and ethical, as well as intellectual, learning.

For more information: Brown, P., Corrigan, M.W., & Higgins-D’Alessandro, A. (2012). *Handbook of prosocial education*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Is there a set of essential goals that characterize all prosocial educational efforts?

Yes.

The National School Climate Council has recently outlined three sets of essential goal systemic, instructional and relational that are central to our work and should be present in all potentially successful prosocial educational efforts. We suggest that the following efforts are largely consistent with the overarching goals we have set for our own prosocial work:

- The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development’s (ASCD) *Whole Child Initiative*;



- Character Education Partnerships *11 Principles of Effective Character Education*;
- CASEL's theory of change;
- National School Climate Council's *National School Climate Standards*;
- Coalition for Community Schools *Models of Community Schools*;
- The Federally funded Center for Mental Health in Schools three-component policy framework, and
- The USDOE-funded Equity Assistance Center Network's *Six Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform*.

The following three sets of goals and the outlined processes support ALL students having equal opportunities to succeed at school and in life:

I. Systemic or school wide processes:

I-i: Educational Leadership

I-ii: Educational leaders need to strive to learn and lead in a *transparent, democratically informed manner*.

I-iii: Educational leaders need to engage and include the whole school community -- students, parents/guardians, community members, and all school personnel -- to become co-learners and co-leaders in improvement efforts

I-iv: *Indicators of success* must include both academic outcomes (e.g. academic grades; portfolios) as well as the social, emotional, and civic outcomes essential for school and life success (e.g. school climate findings; markers of engaged school community members; indicators of student personal and prosocial development).

I-v: *Improvement goals are tailored* to the unique and contextual needs of the students and the individual school community.

I-vi: *District level – and ideally State level – policies support the integration of prosocial and civic instructional efforts and a continuous process of school climate improvement, with full understanding of the dimensions of school climate.*

I-vii: *Adult learning* and professional learning communities are valued and supported in order to build capacity and sustain efforts through continuous improvement.



I-viii: *Professional codes of conduct/student rules/norms/codes of conduct*: Students and parents/guardians as well as faculty/staff have a real "voice" and contribute authentically to the development of codes of conduct governing them and school rules/norms/expectations for students, faculty/staff and parents/guardians.

I-ix: *Prosocial education* is an explicit and valued goal, holding equal value to academic goals, and an integral part of the educational process.

II. Pedagogy:

All educators should consider and focus on the following four ways that prosocial instructional efforts can be furthered:

II-i: Being a helpful "*living example*" (e.g., role models of social, emotional and civic learning and for a moral compass).

II-ii: *Managing classrooms* and offices in dignified and democratically informed ways that always focus on student engagement, co-leadership and restorative practices.

II-iii: Utilizing *pedagogies* that promote prosocial instruction and provide personally relevant learning experiences that have authentic opportunities to contribute meaningfully.

II-iv: Implementing *curriculum*: Curriculum "in a box" as well as using a backwards design model of curriculum design that supports teachers infusing prosocial learning objectives and activities into existing curriculum.

III. Relational/ management-related practices:

III-i: All school personnel have and participate in professional development opportunities that target the development and promotion of meaningful student-teacher/staff relationships, that further students' feeling safe (physically, emotionally, and intellectually), supported, connected, and engaged in school life and learning.

III-ii: All school personnel, including support staff, students and parents/ guardians intentionally plan for a school climate that embodies a genuine pervasive sense of community for everyone in the school community. Such a climate supports and encourages individual school community members to demonstrate high moral character and civic engagement.



III-iii: All instructional staff and curriculum experts participate in professional development opportunities that enhance whole child education.

For more information, see: National School Climate Council (2015). *School Climate and Prosocial Educational Improvement: Essential Goals and Processes that Support Student Success for All*, *Teachers College Record*, May 2015

School leaders cannot possibly focus on all of these goals at the same time. How can and should school leaders think about this comprehensive set of goals, given that we can only focus on one to three goals in a given year?

Yes! This is absolutely true! School leaders need to consider – strategically – what is most important to focus on “now.”

We suggest that what is most helpful is that school leaders are clear about what their strategic goals are. And, what they understand is of the most important school improvement strategies and “drivers” are that will foster improvement as well as what metrics they will use to understand if these goals and yoked strategies are and/or are not fostering change.

For more information, see:

- Blase, K., van Dyke, M., & Fixsen, D. (2013). *Implementation drivers: Assessing best practices*. Adapted with permission by The State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP). Based on the work of The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Available at: <http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/resources/implementation-drivers-assessing-best-practices>;
- Bryk, A.S., Gomez, L.M, Grunow, Al & LeMahieu, P.G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America’s Schools Can get better at getting better*. Harvard Educational Press.
- Fullan, M. (2011). *Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform*. Centre for Strategic Education Seminar Series Paper No. 204, May (Available on: www.michaelfullan.ca/home_articles/SeminarPaper204.pdf).

What is school climate and school climate reform?

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. And, a sustained and positive school climate fosters youth



development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes: Norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe; People are engaged and respected; Students, families and educators work together to develop, live and contribute to a shared school vision; Educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning; Each person contributes to the operations of the school and the care of the physical environment.

A school climate improvement process is an intentional, strategic, collaborative, data-driven and democratically informed process that supports students, parents/guardians, school personnel and community members learning and working together to create even safer, more supportive, engaging and healthy climates for learning that promote school – and life – success.

There is a big different between “what?” school climate is (as well as SEL or Character education is) on the one hand and what an effective prosocial implementation process is or the “how?”

For example, school climate and SEL refer to the quality and character of school life on the one hand and learning about and developing social-emotional competencies on the other hand. But, school climate and SEL implementation efforts each involve a much more complicated process of engaging students, parents, school personnel and even community members to learn and work together over time.

For more, see: <http://schoolclimate.org/climate/> as well as

- Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M, Michelli, N. M & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, teacher education and practice. *Teachers College Record*, 111(1), 180-213;
- National School Climate Council (2007). *The School Climate Challenge: Narrowing the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice guidelines and teacher education policy*. Retrieved from: <http://www.schoolclimate.org/publications/policy-briefs.php>
- National School Climate Council (2012). *The School Climate Improvement Process: Essential Elements. School Climate Brief, No. 4*. Retrieved from: <http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/schoolclimatebriefs.php>
- Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Higgins-D’Alessandro A., & Guffey, S. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(2), 1-29.

What is the history of school climate reform efforts? School climate was first described by a Brooklyn (New York) Principal -- Arthur Perry – in 1908. Over the last 35 or so years, there has been a growing body of empirical support for school climate improvement. In fact, a growing



number of federal agencies and State Departments of Education have endorsed and/or supported school climate reform as the single most important prevention strategy to address bully-victim-bystander behavior and/or high school dropouts. And, there is growing support for the notion that school climate improvement efforts also promote academic achievement as well as effective prosocial instructional efforts.

For more information, see:

- Cohen, J. (2012). Measuring and improving school climate: A prosocial strategy that recognizes, educates and supports the whole child and the whole school community. *The Handbook of Prosocial Education*. Edited by P.M. Brown, M.W. Corrigan and A. Higgins-D'Alessandro. Rowman & Littlefield
- Perry, A. (1908). *The management of a city school*. New York: Macmillan.

What is Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning).

Effective SEL programs can be implemented in a variety of classroom and school-wide settings. Initially, SEL was focused on classroom based skill development and instruction. Over the last dozen years, there has been a growing focus on the essential importance of combining school-wide as well as instructional improvement efforts.

For more information, see:

- Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice*. New York: Guilford.

What is the history of SEL informed efforts? On one level, SEL is virtually as old a formal education. The ancient Greeks wrote the words “Know thy self” on the walls of the Oracle of Delphi. In many ways, this idea was an organizing idea for the society. John Dewey and ensuring generations of progressive educators, articulated a vision for education that explicitly recognized the social, emotional, and civic as well as intellectual aspects of learning. It is also



true that a growing group of risk prevention and health/mental health promotion researchers and practitioners in the late 1950's, 60's and 70's powerfully advanced our understanding of core social, emotional and civic competencies that provide an essential foundation for resiliency, healthy development and democracy.

- Cohen, J. (1999) Social and emotional learning past and present: a psych educational dialogue. (Chapter 1) In J. Cohen (Editor) (1999). *Educating Minds and Hearts: Social Emotional Learning and the Passage into Adolescence*. New York: Teachers College Press and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Cohen, J. (2001) Social emotional education: core principles and practices. In Cohen, J. (Ed.) *Caring Classrooms / Intelligent Schools: The Social Emotional Education of Young Children*. (Chapter 1) New York: Teachers College Press.
- Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In J. A Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of social and emotional learning: Research and practice*. New York: Guilford.

What is Character Education?

Character education includes and complements a broad range of educational approaches such as whole child education, service learning, social-emotional learning, and civic education. All share a commitment to helping young people become responsible, caring, and contributing citizens.” (Taken from: <http://character.org/key-topics/what-is-character-education/>)

A character education improvement process is shaped by the *11 Principals of Effective Character Education* that represent a comprehensive range of school-wide, instructional and relational goals that overlap with and support the essential goals recently outlined by the National School Climate Council (2015).

On the history of character education:

Since the founding of the United States of America, there has been a shared vision and goal that schools need to be places where children learn to be engaged citizens. Thomas Jefferson underscored the notion that democracy rests on education and the character of its people when he wrote, “I know of no safe depository of the ultimate power of society but the people themselves. And if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion” (Jefferson, 1820). Many American K-12 schools’ mission statements emphasize that schooling should support students’ capacity to become engaged citizens in our democratic society.



For more information:

- Character.org (formerly, the Character Education Partnership): <http://character.org>
- Beland, K. (2003). *Eleven Principles Sourcebook: How to Achieve Quality Education in K 12 Schools*. Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership.
- Berkowitz, M. W. & Bier, M. C. (2005a). What works in character education: A report for policy makers and opinion leaders, (Character Education Partnership). Retrieved September 10, 2005. Retrieved January 20, 2005, from www.character.org/atf/cf/{77B36AC3-5057-4795-8A8F-9B2FCB86F3EB}/practitioners_518.pdf.
- Cohen, J. (2014). The foundation for democracy: School climate reform and prosocial education. *Journal of Character Education*, Vol. 10, Number 1, pages 43-52
- Lickona, T, Schaps, E. & Lewis, C. (1995). *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education*. character.org (<http://character.org/uploads/PDFs/Eleven%20Principles.pdf>)
- Jefferson, T. (1850). Thomas Jefferson to William C. Jarvis, 15:278 in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Memorial Edition (Lipscomb and Bergh, editors) 20 Vols. Washington, D.C., 1903-04.

What are Restorative Practices (RP)?

Restorative practices are a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making. Restorative justice is a subset of restorative practices. Restorative justice is reactive, consisting of formal or informal responses to crime and other wrongdoing after it occurs. Restorative practices also include the use of informal and formal processes that proactively build relationships and a sense of community that prevent conflict and wrongdoing and sustain a supportive learning climate. (Wachtel, 2013).

Restorative practices is fundamentally a “lens” or perspective about learning and how we can communicate and foster healing among people who will always hold differing worldview and beliefs. In other words, it is based of sets of understandings and guidelines that support people learning and working together as opposed to people (e.g. teachers) doing things to students. It helps to actualize Einstein’s understanding that “The aim (of education) must be the training of independently acting and thinking individuals who, however, can see in the service to the community their highest life achievement.”

On the history of restorative practices: “Restorative practices has its roots in restorative justice, a way of looking at criminal justice that emphasizes repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than only punishing offenders (Zehr, 1990). In the modern context,

8



restorative justice originated in the 1970s as mediation or reconciliation between victims and offenders.

Restorative justice echoes ancient and indigenous practices employed in cultures all over the world, from Native American and First Nation Canadian to African, Asian, Celtic, Hebrew, Arab and many others (Eagle, 2001; Goldstein, 2006; Haarala, 2004; Mbambo & Skelton, 2003; Mirsky, 2004; Roujanavong, 2005; Wong, 2005).

Eventually modern restorative justice broadened to include communities of care as well, with victims' and offenders' families and friends participating in collaborative processes called *conferences* and *circles*. Conferencing addresses power imbalances between the victim and offender by including additional supporters (McCold, 1999).

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) grew out of the Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy, which since 1977 have provided programs for delinquent and at-risk youth in southeastern Pennsylvania, USA. Initially founded in 1994 under the auspices of Buxmont Academy, the Real Justice program, now an IIRP program, has trained professionals around the world in restorative conferencing. (Wachtel, 2013).” (Taken from: <http://www.iirp.edu/what-is-restorative-practices.php#history>)

For further information, see:

International Institute for Restorative Practices: www.iirp.edu/

Wachtel, T. (2013). *Defining restorative practices*. International Institute for Restorative Practices. <http://www.iirp.edu/pdf/Defining-Restorative.pdf>

What is Culturally Responsive Education?

Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) is known by many names – multicultural education, equity and diversity in education, cultural proficiency, etc. One of the best definitions is from Gloria Ladson-Billings’ 1994 book, *The Dreamkeepers*: “Culturally responsive education is a framework that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning.” This definition focuses on pedagogical goals. The concept of educational equity broadens this focus to include the other two sets of goals described at the beginning of this paper – systemic and relational: “Educational equity occurs when a school system has created policies, curricula, and a social culture that is representative of all students, such that all students have both encouragement and access to engage in high quality learning experiences” (Great Lakes Equity Center, 2015). A more explicit, strengths-based definition says that culturally responsive education is “a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students’ unique



cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student’s cultural place in the world.” Culturally responsive education integrates three dimensions: the institutional (or systemic), the personal (or relational), and the instructional (or pedagogical) (Lynch, 2011).

We are using the term Culturally Responsive Education to include educational equity, multicultural education, culturally responsive pedagogy, etc.

How is Culturally Responsive Education similar to prosocial education?

Prosocial education encompasses CRE and educational equity in that these domains share common concerns for the Whole Child. While CRE and educational equity strongly emphasize academic achievement, they are not “achievement-centric models” (GLEC, 2015). That is, they do not emphasize achievement in ways that exclude Whole Child concerns. They recognize that students feeling safe, cared for, and respected for both their individuality and their connection to their own cultures and group histories is essential to that achievement. They also emphasize a strengths perspective over a deficit perspective, an emphasis that is key to all prosocial/Whole Child education.

The Six Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform, referred to earlier, are (1) Comparably high achievement and other student outcomes, (2) Equitable access and inclusion, (3) Equitable treatment, (4) Equitable opportunity to learn, (5) Equitable resources, and (6) Accountability. While Goals 1 and 4 are primarily pedagogical in their focus, Goal 3 is essentially relational and Goals 2, 5, and 6 have a systemic focus.

How does Culturally Responsive Education differ from prosocial education?

CRE and educational equity differ, however, in one key respect both from the current understanding of prosocial education and from SEL, Character Education, and Restorative Practices. They are explicitly and essentially focused on meeting the educational needs of historically disadvantaged students, their families and their communities. These students, families, and communities are often – although not necessarily – culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). Certainly, socio-economic status plays a major role in students’ lives, but when CLD factors are recognized as well, the challenge for educators truly committed to prosocial education becomes even greater. When CRE emphasizes the Whole Child, it is often with particular reference to the Whole Child of Color.

SEL, Character Education, and Restorative Practices, as with school climate improvement, may be very effective in schools with diverse populations. Certainly each of these models recognizes



the importance of respect for diversity and the cultural competence of practitioners. Restorative Practices in particular has shown significant promise in providing an alternative to discriminatory discipline – a key factor in negative school climate particularly for students of color – in many schools. Nevertheless, each of these models/approaches would also be strengthened by explicitly integrating an understanding of Culturally Responsive Education.

For more information, see:

- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lynch, M. (2011). “What Is Culturally Responsive Pedagogy?” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matthew-lynn-edd/culturally-responsive-pedagogy_b_1147364.html.
- Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, New York University. “Principles of Culturally Responsive Education.” <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/004/913/PCRE.pdf>
- Scott, B. (2006). “Six Goals of Educational Equity and School Reform,” IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity, http://www.idra.org/South_Central_Collaborative_for_Equity/Six_Goals_of_Education_Equity/.
- Whiteman, R., Thorius, K., Skelton, S., & Kyser, T.(2015). “Rethinking Quality: Foregrounding Equity in Definitions of ‘Teacher Quality.’” Great Lakes Equity Center. www.greatlakesequitycenter.org

What is Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS)?

PBIS is a framework or approach for assisting school personnel in adopting and organizing evidence-based behavioral interventions into an integrated continuum that enhances academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. PBIS IS NOT a packaged curriculum, scripted intervention, or manualized strategy. PBIS IS a prevention-oriented way for school personnel to (a) organize evidence-based practices, (b) improve their implementation of those practices, and (c) maximize academic and social behavior outcomes for students. PBIS supports the success of ALL students.

For more information, see:

www.pbis.org as well as

- “The Evolution of Discipline Practices: School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports” (Sugai & Horner, 2002);
- “Effective Behavior Support” (Lewis & Sugai, 1999);



•“Applying Positive Behavioral Support and Functional Behavioral Assessment in Schools” (Sugai et al., 2000).

Is Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) one and the same as school climate improvement? No. There is certainly some overlap and similarities but there are also profound differences between these two school improvement strategies.

How are they similar? They are similar in the following ways: (i) they are school wide efforts; (ii) they are focused on supporting positive change; (iii) they support student learning; (iv) they support student-family-school personnel and community partnerships; (v) they are data driven; (vi) they appreciate that adult behavior and “adult modeling” matters; and, (vii) they are both focused on advancing policies and procedures that support effective practice.

How are they different?

Goals: As noted above, the goals for school climate improvement efforts are to support students, parents/guardians, school personnel and even community members learning and working together in a democratically informed manner to foster safe, supportive, engaging and flourishing schools that support school—and life—success. This is a much broader, positively stated and collaborative set of goals than the PBIS goal to “*prevent the development of problem behaviors and maximize academic success for all students.*”

When applied at the school-wide level, PBIS is called School-wide Positive Behavior Support, SWPBS or Sw-PBIS (www.pbis.org/school/swpbis-for-beginners).

Data: School climate reform uses a different data set to support learning and guide action planning: student, parent/guardian, school personnel and even community member perceptions of how safe the school is (e.g., rules and norms as well as how safe people feel socially and physically), relationship patterns (e.g., respect for diversity, social support), teaching and learning (e.g., support for learning and prosocial education) as well as the environment. PBIS, on the other hand, focuses on individual student disciplinary related data (e.g., disciplinary referral, suspensions, expulsion rates), which is aggregated and analyzed to determine effectiveness.

The model: PBIS is based on a behaviorally informed model that is narrowly focused on providing supports to prevent, teach, and reinforce desirable behavior. PBIS also strives to consider how to modify the environment and adult behavior (adult modeling) in helpful ways. However, it does so in a dis-empowering authoritarian fashion rather than democratically and collaboratively. On the other hand, school climate reform supports the development of social



emotional learning and intrinsic motivation through engaging community members to be co-learners and co-leaders who consider and work on the three essential questions noted above.

Top down vs. bottom up: Rather than being an adult driven or “top down” effort, school climate reform is a much broader, systemic effort grounded in a democratically informed process of engaging students, parents/guardians, school personnel and even community members in being co-learners and co-leaders (under the leadership of the Principal).

Adult learning: School climate reform not only recognizes that adult modeling “counts” but much more than PBIS also explicitly focuses on and supports adult learning as a foundational element of effective school reform. Adult learning and professional learning communities is an explicit and foundational dimension of an effective school climate reform process (National School Climate Council, 2012).

Policy: PBIS’s policy efforts focus on supporting the design and implementation of effective interventions to change student behavior. School climate reform on the other hand is focused on supporting policies that shape systems – the school community – and using data as an engagement strategy as well as a “flashlight” for the whole community to learn from.

Extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation: School climate reform promotes school connectedness and prevents bully-victim-bystander behavior because it is a powerful, effective strategy that engages youth as well as parents/guardians, school personnel and even community members, to be co-learners and co-leaders together with school personnel. School climate improvement is designed to ignite the intrinsic motivation of students, parents, school personnel and even community members to learn and work together. PBIS is a top down, behaviorist model that rests on extrinsic motivation and is not an effective engagement strategy. PBIS uses a systems approach to shape individual (student) behavior, whereas, school climate reform uses a systems approach to shape systems as well as instructional and one-on-one processes.

If there are so many differences, are these two school improvement approaches compatible or not? There is a meaningful debate about this question in the field. There are leading educators – like James Comer, MD and Marvin Berkowitz, Ph.D. – who believe that they are not compatible. They believe that utilizing extrinsic motivation is so profoundly at odds with practices that support positive youth development and prosocial education that they cannot and should not be used as compatible school improvement strategies. There are others – like Jonathan Cohen, Ph.D., Dorothy Espelage Ph.D., and Stuart Twemlow, MD – who believe that PBIS and school



climate improvement are not “either/or”: They can and are often used in complementary ways. But, they are not the one and the same.

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