

Integration of Faith and Learning

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INTRODUCTION

The foundation of my faith and learning statement is my belief that God is the Creator of the universe and Savior of humankind, and therefore I am in awe of Him, accountable to Him, and completely dependent on Him. Believing that God is the Creator of the universe, first of all, gives me the framework and assurance that the varied parts of the world can work wonderfully in harmony with each other from the galaxy to the earth's environment and from quantitative relationships to cultural/social institutions. Secondly, it gives me the assurance that God desires to continually develop and maintain these relationships, working through humankind, to His glory and for our enjoyment, restoring them back to their original goodness after their corruption caused by the fall of humankind. This restoration is made possible and directed both by God's common grace given to all human beings and his special grace given to those redeemed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, our Messiah. As human beings, created in the image of God, we were created to be relational beings, including our interdependencies with God's creation, as well as partnering with God and others to maintain and restore His good creation.

At one time I saw faith and learning somewhat at odds with each other, considering the idea that faith is rooted in our relationship with God and learning is rooted in our intellect or rational thought apart from God. In actuality, both faith and learning are under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and both are formed through human intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual input while existing in a very harmonious and often indistinguishable relationship with each other. When discussing worship with the woman at the well, while the woman is trying to discern the proper place or form of worship, Jesus tells her that *true worshippers must worship God in spirit and in truth*. In a search for truth, I work to develop and understand a true articulation of my faith based on scripture and tradition and live accordingly; I strive to uncover the truths inherent in my discipline; and I design and enact curricula with my students to provide opportunities for us to make sense of our place and purpose in God's creation. Learning is, as Huebner (1991) so aptly put it, "a journey to God" which makes it neither merely an intellectual nor merely a spiritual endeavor. As a Christian, these pursuits are a worship-filled response to the goodness and majesty of God, motivated by my faith in God and the relationship that I have with Him as the Creator of the universe, my personal Savior, my adopted heavenly Father, and my Teacher and Guide who lives in me. I appreciate how Richard Mouw (1996) put it.

We can get beyond merely embracing the tensions between piety and learning by fostering a piety for learning, by becoming the kind of people who see deeply into the reality of things who love that reality - for the Savior who shed his blood for us also descended into the deep places of the creation so that he might fill all things. (p. 5)

Relationships that reflect **spiritual and intellectual integrity**¹, recognized throughout God's creation and in Scripture, serve as the organizing theme for my faith and learning statement: God's relationship to humankind, human relationships important to the learning process (teaching), relationships among students and subject matters (learning), and relationships within content area (curriculum). Integrity, realized through relationships, includes attributes of truth, completeness, harmony, and wholeness.

¹ Essentially, intellectual is contained within spiritual, however by purposefully drawing attention to the intellectual aspects of spiritual integrity, integrity is seen to include the rational, logical, and cognitive aspects of making sense of creation.

What are God's purposes for education? A desire for and pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are recognized both in God's Word and by observing people. Human beings have an innate curiosity, only satisfied with some level of knowledge found in the midst of relationships. Perhaps as a result of the Fall, this relationship between humankind and curiosity is not always evident beyond early childhood. Ideally, education is a way to restore and satisfy that relationship and address one's curiosity, when it is motivated by love. Schools are cultural institutions developed for various purposes that may or may not reflect God's purposes for education. Part of my responsibility as a teacher educator is to discern the redeemable aspects of current schooling and the potentially destructive conditions, then partner with God, my colleagues, my students, and public and private agencies to restore the relationships within schooling back to God's intentions. My relationship with God actually transcends the other partnerships, as I trust God to fill in the gaps and direct my steps. Christian teachers are public servants given the frontline responsibility to participate in this restoration. As servants of God, teachers are professional public intellectuals with the God-given responsibility of creating a learning atmosphere, partnering with colleagues and students to design, enact, and assess curricula, while relating to students in ways that will provide each the opportunity to become agents of renewal (Calvin's Mission Statement) in the restoration of culture. The work that God has given me at Calvin College is in the area of the professional development of practicing and prospective teachers, guiding their development as agents of renewal in their schools and classrooms as they fulfill God's call for their lives with their students.

FAITH AND LEARNING IN TEACHING

I am currently teaching the following courses as part of the Master of Education program in Calvin's Education Department: Theories of Instruction (Education 512), Curriculum Theories and Development (Education 580), Educational Research and the Classroom (Education 594), and the Integrative Seminar in Curriculum and Instruction (Education 597). I am also teaching the undergraduate Introduction to Education course (Education 102), a course still in its pilot stages. Since all of my graduate students are certified teachers, I interact with them both as graduate students and as teachers of their students. In the following sections, using various course themes and the **relationships** described above as a framework, I will describe how the design and enactment of my courses integrate my faith and learning through a search for spiritual and intellectual integrity.

God's Relationship to Humankind

An emphasis in my courses is that all human beings are made in the image of God. Human beings somehow reflect His being and character as the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of his creation. Therefore, ideally, all teachers and their students have *creative intellectual abilities and gifts* and are *intrinsically motivated*, to some extent, *to restore right relationships*. Following these presuppositions, I see it as important to provide space for my students to have the freedom to think, the confidence to trust the worth of their thinking and ideas as well as the courage and freedom to question their own assumptions, and opportunities to investigate the relationships that need to be studied and restored within their own contexts. I invite and encourage them to have a similar vision for *their* students.

We were created to commune with God, walk with him daily, and share openly with Him as we obey His higher wisdom. "Calvinism ...proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creation, God enters *into immediate fellowship with the creature*, as God the Holy Spirit" (Kuyper, p. 21). The Fall, our own sin, separated us from God and resulted in a distant relationship with Him, ruled by laws and consequences and God's mediators – prophets, priests and other rulers. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus paid the price for a renewed relationship with God that is referred to as *adoption* in the Scriptures, obtained by his forgiveness and manifested by a new life that is no longer controlled by sin but instead by the love of Christ. Similarly, the original creation, including animal life, the environment, and social structures were created to relate in both productive and reproductive

relational ways (Martin, 1985). Due to an over-emphasis on productive relationships, materialism, individualism, and institutional and cultural oppression have resulted. As it relates to schools, I am using reproductive to refer to the interdependency, nurture, and connections between teacher and students and their interactions with creation, in contrast with the more non-relational concept of production, which includes fragmented content, isolated individual assignments, texts and grades. In my courses, we investigate the idea that schools might be institutions designed for experiencing, investigating, and building an understanding of the reproductive relationships mentioned earlier, and are therefore reflections of God's purposes. This vision is much different than viewing schools as institutions that aid students in producing to amass information, wealth, or power. One way to fight materialistic obsessions, selfish individualism and the oppression prevalent in today's culture is for teachers to engage students in relevant learning by honoring them as spiritual intellectual people made in the image of God, who therefore somehow reflect His compassion, rational and moral concern about the world around them. It is my intention to model that sort of teaching by engaging my students similarly.

Thus, an important on-going question we investigate in my courses is how to involve K-12 students in this work of restoration as agents of renewal. Our investigations range from addressing questions of faith development to questions of what mathematics tell us about sound waves and how the knowledge of these aspects of creation helps us address issues such as the environment, economy and ethics. In both the introduction to education course (Educ 102) and the integrative seminar (Educ 597), a culminating course in the M.Ed. program, we look carefully at current social issues that affect education, such as poverty and racism, with an eye toward restoring *just reproductive relationships* in culture, which include human relationships, institutional relationships, and relationships within and between academic disciplines. In this context, we come to realize that our relationship with God frees us to recognize aspects of our identity and then to look outward and develop a vision of God's will and purposes for His creation. My students often become overwhelmed by the complexity of their vocation or calling. We discuss that as Christian teachers, our immediate fellowship with God affords us the opportunity to tap into the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit to face and investigate these complex relationships. Otherwise, we often note, the tendency would be to simplify the work and place efficiency above the relationships that are meant to provide opportunities for real learning.

Challenges here include remembering that life on earth really isn't about me. I am an adopted child of God, called for His purposes, whose weaknesses leave room for God's power to be perfected.

Human Relationships in the Learning Process (Teaching)

"Teaching is mostly listening, while learning is mostly talking" (Meier, 1995) is a major theme in my courses. The goal of teaching is learning, which is achieved by students making connections between their current understandings and other sources that will challenge or extend these understandings. If connections are not being made, students will not learn even though they may repeat facts and ideas they were told for a test. In my courses, I see learning as a journey on which I embark *with* my students. Real learning involves this interdependent relationship that is necessary for coming to an understanding of God's harmonious creation that will position my students to co-partner with God, to know as we are known (Palmer, 1993), in the transforming of culture. This implies the necessity of hearing students and dialoguing with them orally and in writing in order to discover how the students are making sense of the content. Consequently, I see myself more as a knowledgeable guide traveling with students than a polished performer.

I work to model interdependent relationships in my own classes for two reasons: 1) Since my graduate students are both students (in my classes) and teachers (in their own K-12 classes), it would be sending a mixed message for me to teach in a way that causes my students to become dependent on me as the disseminator of information while encouraging them to develop interdependent responsive relationships

with *their* students and the material they teach; and 2) I want them to have a real learning experience that will position them as agents of renewal, positioned to both advocate for and enact transformation in their classrooms, schools and community. By orchestrating the courses as seminars, listening closely to my students' ideas and experiences, dialoguing with them in class and electronically, and responding to their work in writing and verbally rather than merely assigning grades, I guide their learning. In planning each class, I use my students' ideas and consider what they have been writing and saying. My students are given the opportunity to verbalize their understandings through various pedagogical strategies that include pairing up, small group work, debates, collaborative projects, sharing required thoughtful and authentic questions, and whole group discussions. This process allows students the opportunity to socially construct knowledge as they verbalize their various interpretations, while being encouraged and rewarded for changing their minds and questioning their own assumptions. As we listen closely to each other, we articulate and adjust our understandings. Dialogue is a tool that creates community and reproductive thinking as we work through our own questions and responses to professionally and theoretically challenging readings. Meanwhile, as we struggle through both our understandings of the material and how these understandings will affect our thinking and our practices, we become a close-knit community of scholars and teachers or potential teachers.

My goal in these investigations and dialogues is to help my students uncover the effects of the Fall in the teaching profession, including insensitivity, ineffective practices, naiveté or ignorance, self-centeredness, and lack of content depth present in the teaching profession. The students examine paths to the restoration of God's good creation as it relates to their teaching and school situations, while expanding and adjusting the vision of their own call in this process. By the grace of God, the students readily adjust to this format and often comment that they are learning in a deep and authentic way, which forces them to reflect on their own experiences, practice or prospective practice and relationships with *their* students. They often bring back anecdotal stories related to what we are studying. One of my students came to class bubbling with excitement as she related the story of listening closely to one of her students labeled with various "disabilities" and had begun to see obvious signs of intense engagement and ability as a direct result. This teacher's application of a fundamental relationship in effective teaching addressed two of the major concerns of many K-12 teachers: motivation and engagement. Hopefully, increased engagement in learning about God's creation will encourage and spur her students to participate with God in the work of conserving the good in today's culture, discerning the effects of the Fall, and participating in the reformation of every aspect of culture, from unbelievers to corrupt cultural institutions.

One of the ways I model the interactivity that reflects our relationship with God in my teaching is found in the Theories of Instruction (Educ 512) class. Students are invited to notice a major argument in the readings and then create or locate an artifact that provides a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic illustration of the argument, using everything from fine arts to household items. These artifacts are then used to structure our conversations and push critique.

The goal of hearing students and developing interdependent relationships is more challenging in the undergraduate introduction to education courses where logistical challenges impinge the interactions possible. The class sizes are quite large (20-39 per section last year and 17-33 per section this semester) and since the course is a one-credit course I see the students for only 50 minutes once a week. I have attempted several strategies to develop community, with varying degrees of success. I provide extensive feedback to the students electronically throughout the semester, however personal engagement and relationships are not so easily formed with so many students (77 undergraduate students this semester) coupled with so little weekly face-to-face contact. I organized bi-weekly 'pizza nights' inviting the "Intro to Ed" students to gather for pizza and discuss education issues that piqued their interest as they consider education as their vocation. Another strategy I have used to interact with the students is to organize times outside of class for them to gather with me in small groups to discuss their observations and questions related to their service learning time in the schools, in lieu of written assignments.

Teaching challenges are many and varied as in all complex relationships. During the summer of 2003 I embarked on a journey that created some dissonance in my own understanding of teaching. I redesigned the final seminar, Educ 597, which was in a stage between an exam paper integrated course to a research project. Since it was a summer course and would include four strong students, with the encouragement of colleagues in the graduate program, I designed the course to be a collaborative endeavor in both the course journey and the final product. In order to research our unique journey, they all agreed to allow me to video tape our course sessions. I am still in the process of analyzing those tapes and other data from the experience. Some of my initial findings include questions around issues of control, gender, dialogue, and power. I intend to learn more about power issues inherent in a discussion or seminar setting where students and instructors are more vulnerable than settings where the format is more top down. Is it easier for students to contain their perceptions, hide their assumptions, and maintain their understandings or at the very least change quietly and privately, when the expectation is that students mostly listen? Does the curriculum end up more hidden, and thus more susceptible to subtle manipulation, when it is woven into dialogue rather than being explicitly identified ahead of time? What are the consequences, possibilities, and issues to consider?

Relationships among Students and Subject Matters (Learning)

Richard Skemp (1978) has written a very compelling article that points out that we can teach for two different kinds of understanding: instrumental or relational. In this view, instrumental understanding is knowing what to do, what will happen, or what happened, while relational understanding is knowing both what and why. In working toward a relational understanding students are creating schema that investigate the relationships between the various aspects of the content, engaging in the complexities rather than simply finding right answers. I use this distinction in my courses by realizing that in order for my students, and subsequently *their* students, to understand their relationship with God and God's purposes for their lives, they need the opportunity to investigate a relational understanding of creation, which includes investigating the philosophical, historical, social, and other theoretical underpinnings of curriculum and instruction.

Positioning a relational understanding as the goal, sets up an atmosphere that encourages my students to ask questions, make conjectures, and develop arguments to prove or disprove conjectures. This kind of thinking will help them develop intellectual discipline and confidence in their own creative abilities to pose and solve problems, while recreating historical and philosophical arguments and building their own understandings – in short, intellectual integrity. In the last two years, agreeing with Huebner's (1991) argument that transcendence is an integral part of learning, we have begun to investigate the place of spiritual integrity in learning. God's creation is much more than the act of Creation itself and is much more complex than an instrumental understanding of knowledge already classified by past generations. God is active in all of the harmonious and interdependent relationships within His creation maintaining and restoring them. A deep understanding of these relationships is dependent on a problem posing curriculum and mentality. In all of my courses, students are required to articulate thoughtful and authentic questions around the issues we are studying, especially as they relate to their own understanding of the way things are and the way they should be. I encourage my graduate students to tap into *their* students' questions, as well as present them with issues that would invite them to ask questions. In the process of asking and addressing meaningful questions the students (both theirs and mine) will be working toward a relational understanding, as we engage in hermeneutical conversations. For example, in the Educational Research and the Classroom course (Education 594), the graduate students address their own pressing questions about their teaching situations by designing related research projects. They come to realize that teaching, researching, and learning all have similar processes and goals: to develop a relational understanding of the knowledge of God's creation and purposes.

As in most classrooms, the abilities, backgrounds, and engagement of graduate students within a specific class varies greatly. The challenges, as in all classrooms, include setting goals and organizing experiences that challenge and engage all students. I need to continue to work through various forms of discourse that create space for and invite growth for everyone, including those who will go on to doctoral work and those who choose to work toward more effective practice in their own classrooms, and that value the contributions of each.

Relationships within and across Subject Matters (Curriculum)

If learning is a journey to and with God in order to become responsive and transformative (Calvin College Teacher Education Conceptual Framework), then curriculum helps the members of the learning community travel together, including the plan, enactment, and experience of relevant issues, concepts, ideas, and skills. It is actually the connections or relationships that give curriculum life and a metaphor that is more organic than mechanical seems more appropriate. In Education 580, the Curriculum Theories and Development course, the graduate students come to realize that curriculum cannot be restricted to a list of facts, concepts, and skills handed to a teacher that are in turn handed to students as passive recipients. By collaboratively developing a yearlong school curriculum, my students realize that subject matters in and of themselves represent a dynamic schema within various contexts that need to be considered. They also come to realize that curricula are greatly dependent on the teaching and learning relationships formed in the classroom, as well as historical, cultural, and socialized relationships that influence their own identity and understandings and the content being studied. Teachers' understandings and methods, students as whole contextualized human beings, and the local and global community and culture all play important roles in the planning and experience of curriculum. Thus, curriculum becomes a dynamic endeavor, which must be designed and enacted by teachers and students within a learning community using a great array of resources. The existence of dynamic and harmful hidden curricula and null curricula that privileges people in areas of race, class, and gender throughout K-16 schooling experiences are uncovered and critiqued. In essence, we are searching for spiritual and intellectual integrity within the subject matters.

Another important issue related to curriculum is the relationship **among** subject matters and the questions that only *integrated* curricula can address. Many of the issues in culture that affect students reside within the relationships among subject matters. Teaching an integrated curriculum provides contexts to disciplines that will enlighten students beyond memorizing isolated facts as it focuses on the Creator's intentions or the ecological relationships within Creation. Integrated curricula provide opportunities to address issues of justice, compassion, and restoration. Many of the students end up creating integrated curricula plans for their project.

In a recent curriculum course, Education 580, the graduate students created an integrated curriculum plan for a high school course focused on *social justice*, inviting students to work through identity issues, an analysis of current world events from a variety of perspectives, and personal response and collaborative action plan. These graduate students decided to forgo the temptation to identify the course as a current subject matter course, but instead imagined it as more of an integrated course that could be taken to satisfy various subject matter requirements, including history, sociology, economics, or Bible courses. They titled the course LOL -25 (Love out Loud based on Matthew 25). Their definition of curriculum was "a planned, yet organic, framework, guided learning experiences and intended learning goals, formulated through the autobiographical interaction between teacher, student, content, and life experience." In their analysis of the plan, they credited the collaborative nature of the planning process for deeper thinking, taking risks, and working outside the structures of traditional high school course offerings (Koetje, Sanford, and Visser, Curriculum Project Plan, Education 580, Calvin College, Summer 2004). Two of the three in the group planned to present the course proposal to the administration in their schools for possible adoption.

Comment [j 1]: Look for a more recent example

The overarching question in the Introduction to Education course, Educ 102, “What am I and who am I as a teacher”? This provides a context for the students to begin to recognize education as both a discipline with important knowledge to uncover and a profession that requires careful introspection and reflection as it relates to themselves, as well as the teachers and students they observe, as socialized human beings. My goal is that as we uncover varying aspects and important issues imbedded in the discipline and profession of education, that their questions, passions, and interests will be piqued in important ways, while preparing them for meaningful engagement in future education courses.

Challenges related to engaging graduate students in the discourse of curriculum theories relate to the students’ perceptions of curriculum and ability to envision a more open, deeper, critical, and interactive scenario. With content including all subject matters and grade levels, modeling and engaging in the details in order to discuss or model possibilities becomes very important. If education students are too inundated with theory apart from applications, they lose the basic connections that allow for the integration of faith and learning, forgoing both intellectual and spiritual integrity within the contents they teach. Another challenge is to move these education students, mostly white middle to upper middle class, half of whom are from or in Christians schools, from a place of comfort and compliance to critique and recognition that traditionally curricula are at best subtly biased (contain a hidden curricula as well as null curricula) and often support the status quo rather than challenge it. The goal to create agents of renewal (in support of Calvin’s Mission Statement) involves recognizing inequities, distortions, and false assumptions within curricula for the purposes of reconciliation. In addition to times of great joy and liberation, this critique becomes a delicate and difficult process with students who have a high level of content with the way things are, at both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

The integration of faith and learning in scholarship is a high calling as a response to God for His faithfulness and majesty, for He is the Author and Source of all that is good and true. The fallen nature of humankind, coupled with the evil forces at work in our world, have distorted and corrupted God’s good creation, originally rooted in harmonious (spiritual, personal, social, cultural, and environmental) relationships. Studying these relationships in their current state, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with the goal of seeing them restored by Christ’s redemption summarizes my view of Christian scholarship. The organizing scheme that frames my teaching and my research is a search for spiritual and intellectual integrity through relationships.

As a member of the Body of Christ, God has called me into His service – to partner with Him in the reformation of His creation, made possible through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, our Messiah. Yet, when humans attempt to uncover reality, they tend to speak for God. Realizing that we see only in a mirror dimly, and given our fallen/redeemed nature, only by the grace of God will we make potentially helpful contributions. My scholarly interests are in the area of education, in particular, the professional development of teachers and the restructuring of curriculum in ways that allow for intellectual and spiritual integrity. My research agenda has the following three components and sets of questions:

- *Theoretical and Practical Norms of Education:* What are the structural/directional roots of education and K-12 schooling? What is a Biblical or Christian perspective or norms related to the nature/direction of schooling as a social/cultural institution? What teaching philosophies and theoretical curricula structures promote the relationships that support these ideals?
- *Restructuring the high school experience:* What characteristics do we want high school graduates to reflect? What would curricula that develop those characteristics

look like in design, enactment, and experience? What is it that we now do in high schools to build those characteristics? What prohibits us from doing more? How might we build systemic change to address the need for transformation?

- *Teachers Becoming Agents of Renewal*: How do teachers understand and enact their profession? What factors will contribute to a transformation of their professional perspectives and knowledge of the discipline or education that will position them to partner with God in the work of reforming schools and teaching in accordance with His will and purposes? How do I involve teachers in the questions and scholarship that invite their participation in the discipline?

In each of these areas, since I am primarily teaching certified teachers and school leaders, and they are both the subjects of my research and co-researchers, my scholarship and teaching overlap. As I have continued to work at the development of the core coursework for the curriculum and instruction program, I have been investigating issues related to the first point above. This foundation helps my M.Ed. students and me think about God's intentions for our work, for education, and for the institution of schooling. I consider this work an integral piece of my scholarship, both teaching and researching my own teaching. In conjunction with teaching, another aspect of my scholarship is to provide opportunities for students to co-author findings in theoretical and empirical research that contribute to the discipline and/or profession as a way to encourage future scholarship and reproduce and develop further my efforts. Presenting this research at professional conferences exposes these teachers to wide varieties of theoretical constructs that are being examined in the field and familiarizes them with venues that might help them feel an integral part of a broader enterprise. Their contributions legitimize teacher research as well as providing a vision for their own future scholarship endeavors.

Although I have taught undergraduate courses at Calvin College only for the past year, it has renewed by questions from undergraduate teaching at Michigan State University. These questions revolve around vocation and God's call and purposes for our lives, how to surround students with both dissonance and safety, recognizing the vast need for redemption and the assurance that it is near.

Scholarly work in the professional development of teachers needs to be both theoretical and applied; in other words, an investigation into the practice of teaching is grounded in a theoretical stance or developing a theoretical biblically based theoretical stance involves seeking the implications for practice. Developing relationships with teachers within their contexts allows for this integration, which constitutes working in partnership with K-12 local schools. Therefore, another aspect of my scholarly work has been to make connections with schools and teachers in the area for the purposes of having them participate in the research, as researchers as well as subjects, and then work with me to translate the purposes, process, and results of these studies in direct application to their schools. I have been in conversation with several local Christian schools related to partnering for this kind of work, specifically related to helping teachers make sense of what it means to integrate faith and learning in their curriculum and teaching.

Another area of scholarship that I have delved into is actually creating curricular material that will help secondary mathematics teachers think about the integration of faith and learning. There are three aspects to this type of research, while still maintaining the goal of searching for spiritual and intellectual integrity: 1) researching situations appropriate for critique that lend themselves to mathematical modeling; 2) analyzing the appropriate applied and pure mathematics that might help teachers frame this sort of work; and 3) the compilation of pedagogical approaches that invite teachers and students into hermeneutical conversations that investigate mathematical concepts, tools, and skills, as well as the use of discernment to analyze the findings and possible appropriate action.

Concluding Remarks

Investigations of the curricular, pedagogical, epistemological, and cultural questions inherent in the field of education, whether through teaching or scholarship, have led me to questions embedded in relationships. Rather than separating intellectual and spiritual integrity, I want to embrace their intersection, emphasizing that integrity is found in the strength of the connections.

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