



Question: What is the impact on reading comprehension of 4th and 5th grade students when they are taught the research process by the media specialist? How will the use of the research process impact student skills with cause & effect?

How will the use of the research process impact student skills with main idea?

Problem: I have become concerned that our fourth and fifth grade students perform well on our state's writing test, but then these same students seem to be unable to use these same skills to read an article and write an extended response to questions. I took a course and attended conferences to learn how to infuse more research skills into the library media program through the use of on-line resources. Research has shown that this will assist students in using critical thinking skills to broaden their knowledge.

Teachers at my school are committed to the students. However, the main curriculum focus is to improve student scores on the FCAT test in the spring. Teachers are totally focused on the reading curriculum. Other subject areas appear to be set aside for THE TEST. I would like to collaborate with classroom teachers, and show them how they can work with the media specialist and infuse library information skills right into their curriculum, teaching many subjects while having the students use the skills necessary to make gains on THE TEST.

The school this research took place in is part of a large urban school district located in a predominately African-American community. The racial

make-up is 91% Black and 9% Hispanic. Twenty-three fourth and fifth grade students participated in this action research project.

Research: Wolf, Brush, and Saye (2003) found compelling evidence of a link between metacognitive skills (thinking about thinking) and the Big6 information problem-solving model. They found that the Big6 acts as a metacognitive scaffold for students to be successful in a variety of problem-solving learning activities. The Big6 can be applied to a variety of learning situations, both inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers can use this and other information problem-solving models to systematically teach problem solving skills.

Joan Yoshina (1995-1997), library media specialist was part of a team consisting of three teachers and Violet Harada, an associate professor at the University of Hawaii. Their action research showed that student progress can be effectively assessed as they worked through the Information Search Process by using journals, rubrics and process-folios.

This action research team is using their findings to improve their current efforts and to use with other teachers in the school to integrate curricula. The results were also shared with educators in other schools at the district and state level.

Data / Tools: Different forms of data are being used. The students took a computerized reading comprehension pretest, as well as a mock FCAT exam. The test shows that the students range in reading level from high first grade to seventh grade. The mock FCAT scores were also analyzed. I decided to focus on two comprehension skills: main idea and cause / effect. Lesson plans, attendance records, classroom teacher's grades, researcher observations, interviews, as well as student work will also be used as data.

The fourth grade students gained 0.27 grade equivalent on the STAR test in the semester before the project began. These same students gained 0.48 grade equivalent level during the project. The fourth grade students also improved an average of 5.42 points on the MOCK FCAT test.

The fifth grade students that participated in the project gained an average 0.11 grade equivalent on the STAR test. They had gained an average 1.14 grade equivalent during the semester before the project began. The fifth grade students improved an average of 6.125 points on the 5th grade Reading Standards Assessment test.

Analysis: So far the research is showing that students are making progress in reading comprehension. They have also reported using the on-line resources with other projects and classes. They are appearing more comfortable with these data-bases. For example, Alexis independently used *Newsbank for Kids* to look up and take notes on background information for her science fair project. The fifth grade students did experience a drop on their STAR test, however, their total average gains for the school year was about the same as their school peers that did not participate in the project.

Policy Recommendations: These fourth and fifth grade students enjoyed doing projects on the computer. Training in the use of the research process for both teachers and students is essential to integrate reading comprehension into the content area.

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How will the uses of the Visual Thinking Skills (VTS) methodologies, combined with writing strategies support and impact the writing of third grade students?

Rationale for Study

There is a definite relationship between writing and reading. One third of my class was identified in the lowest 25 percent of the third grade population. It was important to me to address teaching and learning through innovative means to promote success.

Visual Thinking Skills methodology, developed by Paul Yenawine and Abigail Housen, focuses on the development of critical thinking and observational skills through the use of open-ended questioning techniques.

Background/Context

Myrtle Grove Elementary School is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school located in a lower socio-economic community in Opa Locka, Florida with an ethnic breakdown of 92% Black Non-Hispanic, 1% White Non-Hispanic, 1% Asian/Indian/Multi-racial and 6% Hispanic. There are approximately 638 students of which, 93.3% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, as evidenced by those receiving free or reduced priced lunches. Myrtle Grove Elementary has a student body that is extremely transient in nature. The student population is largely derived from single parent homes. This includes students in foster care and homes where grandparents are the heads of household. Students are in need of extra help in mastering the skills taught and require close supervision and redirection to modify inappropriate behaviors. Several tutorial

programs and flexible scheduling have been established to provide additional assistance for our students.

This study was implemented in my third grade class, which consists of 21 students with an exceptional student population consisting of gifted students and students with learning disabilities and speech impairments. One-third of the students have been retained and five of the students looped with me from the previous year.

Research

Developing, writing, and publishing the Visual Thinking Skills curriculum is the result of over fifteen years of collaboration between Philip Yenawine and Abigail Housen.

- VTS consistently moves students forward aesthetically; everywhere the curriculum has been studied.
- VTS skills have been shown to “transfer” to other skill areas.
- Abigail Housen’s research methodology has proven robust and reliable.

Data/Tools

The Visual Thinking Skills (VTS) uses art to teach visual literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills. Through a series of ten lessons facilitated by Dr. Jill Farrell from Barry University, students have the opportunity to look at and think about art images that represent a diversity of time periods, artistic styles and cultures. Each lesson is designed to last forty-five minutes to one hour, and uses three images. The lessons should not be taught more than once each week and should not be taught more than three weeks apart. The students examine art of increasing complexity, respond to developmentally based questions, and participate in-group discussions to stimulate growth.

Writing is one way to obtain concrete evidence of what the students are learning from VTS discussions. A Pre/Post Writing assessment evidenced the growth of the students. Attendance records, parent surveys, and lesson plans are other tools that were used. Each VTS lesson was video taped and analyzed. During the post-writing assessment, students wrote about one of the images shown in the Student’s site located on the Internet. The students selected the picture they wanted to write about. The students responded in writing: “What’s going on in this picture? The writing assessment is un-timed. The writing rubric was designed to address critical thinking skills. The rubric was developed from the assessment pathmarker designed by Visual Understanding in Education (VUE), for classroom teachers implementing VTS.

Analysis

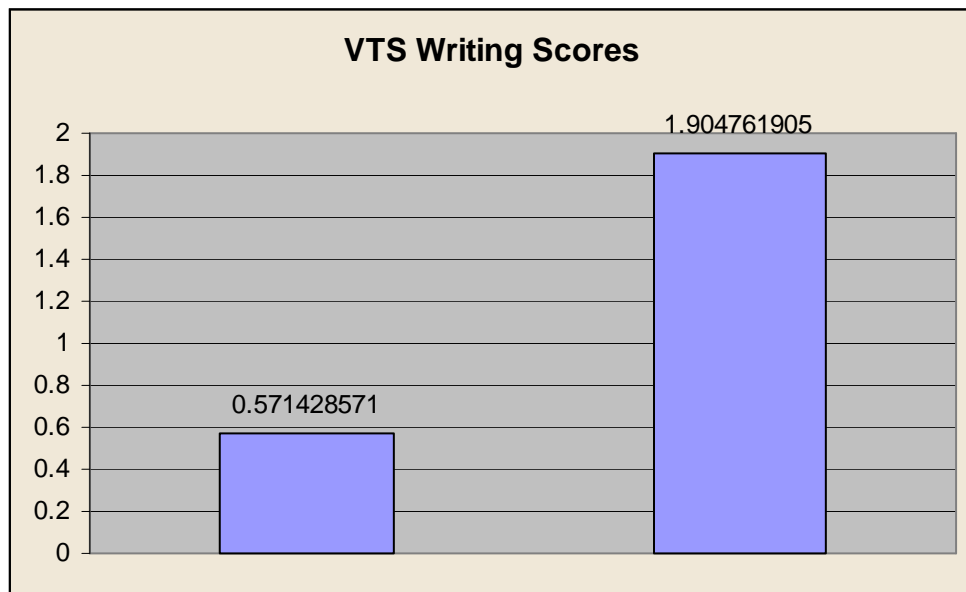
Visual Thinking Skills significantly increases all students’ visual literacy and aesthetic development, as well as, ensured maximum participation, which developed a democratic relationship among the participants. Writing samples provided evidence of growth in language skills and thinking.

Policy Recommendations

The field of education is constantly in a state of flux as a result of a never-ending search for the most effective means by which to educate our children. The policy implications of this project will provide students the opportunity and technological equipment to participate in instructional strategies implemented through the art discipline.

This action research study revealed a number of policy implications, which could benefit students' writing skills through the arts:

- Relevance in curriculum – when learning provides students with experiences that make real world connections.
- Students can indeed learn to think critically by participating in activities that foster critical thinking skills.
- Teachers can infuse technology and enhance students' interest, motivation, and academic learning.
- Training of teachers needs to be consistent and supported by the school culture.



This is sample graph.



Dr. Jill Farrell implementing VTS.

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Question

What impact does looping with exceptional education students from second grade to third grade have on the reading abilities (in the areas of fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) and self-esteem of the students?

Problem (Rational and Background)

Exceptional Student Education (ESE) has evolved dramatically over the past two decades. These changes are due to the growing concern that traditional, isolated educational approaches to teaching students with disabilities were failing in the public schools in the United States. Typically, students with disabilities perform poorly in school (particularly in the area of reading), have low self-esteem, and low graduation rates. These negative outcomes of ESE programs have resulted in a shift in the paradigm regarding the education of this special population of students that has impacted federal

and state laws. These laws now require that students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom, a practice called inclusion.

As a second year inclusion teacher, I have been interested in the impact the inclusive setting has on my elementary students with disabilities. This study was conducted in a third grade classroom at a large Title 1 inner city public school in Miami-Dade County, Florida. This study focuses on five ESE students, four of which are identified as having a specific learning disability (LD), and one of which is identified as educably mentally handicapped (EMH). All of the students are minorities. Four of the students have English /as a second language (ESL) and have been exited from the program for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). All of the students qualify for the government run free or reduced lunch program and therefore represent a low socioeconomic level.

Research (Literature Review)

Tools/Data

The data sources analyzed include standardized tests, norm-referenced tests, the Woodcock Johnson IQ assessment, the Houghton Mifflin informal reading inventory, the goals on the students' individualized education plans (IEP), interviews with the ESE teacher, and a personal journal. The findings from the data collected for this study have been validated using triangulation of the data instruments.

Analysis

In order to analyze the data collected for this study, I organized the information into four categories. The categories reflected changes in reading fluency, reading vocabulary, reading comprehension, and self-esteem. The results of this study developed patterns that indicate that looping with ESE students in inclusive settings has a positive impact on all of the aforementioned categories. In addition, an unexpected pattern of higher expectations set by both the general education teacher and the ESE teacher was revealed through data analysis.

Policy Recommendations

Implications of the findings of this study include modifications for the implementation of inclusion programs in schools. The data supports that the practice of looping in inclusion classes results in high achievement for students with disabilities and high self-esteem. Therefore, I would recommend the implementation of looping practices more often in inclusive settings. In addition, I would recommend further research in the area of best practices in inclusive settings.

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Question:

How will the use of current events in a 9th grade Leadership Skills class impact student's critical thinking skills, attitudes in science, and performance?

Problem: Rationale & Background:

One trend educators keep mentioning in the halls and workrooms is students' apathy. Educators refer to the increase in number of students who shrug their shoulders and make comments like, "So what?" or "Who cares?" Students have apathy towards their learning and their grades. Students do not see the connection between what they have learned in school and the world around them. In the past three years, I have recognized this as a growing trend with my students. My school is an urban school with 3,300 students. The ethnicity breakdown is 70% Hispanic, 28% Black, 1% white, and 1% other with 65% of our students on free or reduced lunch. The particular class I used for this research was added when the district extended our day and added this class to the last hour of school. Students were distressed by the requirement to stay in school an extra hour and take an additional class. Students in this class had low motivation and therefore made it a perfect class to try my intervention. I used current events in my daily lessons in order to establish a clear connection between the curriculum and the real world. Some of the current events were from video recordings of news stories and others were articles from the *USA Today*, *The Miami Herald*, *Popular Science Magazine*, and *Discover Magazine*. After viewing or reading the piece, students had to respond to questions and write their own questions using Bloom's Taxonomy.

Research:

There was an extensive amount of research available on classroom questioning and its relationship between teacher questioning and student achievement. The focuses of the research were: strategies to improve student thinking and comprehension, placement and timing of questions, cognitive levels of questions, wait-time, redirection, reinforcement, and probing. Research that focused on the connection between questioning and student

attitudes as well as research that used current events and questioning strategies were non-existent. Several articles made general statements in regards to making connections, however, they lacked a specific manner in which to accomplish this.

Data Collection & Tools:

I administered a pre and post attitudinal survey in regards to science. I compared their Student Reading Inventory Scores from May 04 to May 05. I collected samples of their questions and answer throughout. I kept a journal of anecdotal comments made by students in the class.

Analysis:

My analysis indicates an increase in students making a connection between the subject matter and their lives as well as their personal confidence. There was little change in students' perceptions of their teacher's attitude. There were statements made by students that indicated to me that my intervention was having some positive impact even though it may not be measurable at this time. In regards to science being in the male domain the students' responses remained mostly unchanged. Students' ability to write questions improved with the use of Bloom's Taxonomy and students familiarity with it. Students' willingness and ability to respond to questions that used Bloom's hierarchy increased with increased use and familiarity, however, the progress lagged behind the ability to write questions.

Policy Recommendations:

This research indicates the need for students to have quality instruction that connects the real world to the academic world. Additionally, students and teachers must be trained on the practice of developing quality questions and answers. Moreover, teachers need time to develop these lessons in order to incorporate them accurately. Therefore, teacher should have at least one-planning period and one-progress monitoring/data analyzing period per day.

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Question

Can it be too late for teacher-directed, child-centered, nurturing interventions to positively impact fifteen underachieving, at-risk sixth grade students' motivation to learn (academic achievement)?

Problem – Rational and Background

Should there be a place for moral education in today's middle school? What is learning? Is there an age and developmental stage when social learning is most beneficial to young people?

Last school year, the 5th-grade students of my homeroom all achieved FCAT scores for mathematics and reading in percentages below what's measured as Level One on those examinations. Severely low scholastic achievement and deficient social dispositions locked my students into recurring failure at school. Severely low scholastic achievement and deficient social dispositions locked my students into recurring failure at school. The students in my class focus (in varying degrees) on conversations with one another, complaints, insults among themselves, and negative attitudes such as disgust. They avoid teacher and school authority but admire students being reported to administration for breaking school rules, students reported for defiance to authority, fights, name calling and anger towards one another, or students reported for lack of attempt at home learning (homework).

My students are fortunate to attend an elementary school so their first year of middle school expectations still provided them a self-contained homeroom experience with one teacher along with a familiar school environment of administrative leadership, school mates and friends.

Research

Middle school education is the critical link in dropout prevention for at-risk, disadvantage students. Abraham Maslow's Needs Gratification theory is built on the premise that each stage of needs has to be SATISFIED before an individual is able to psychologically, emotionally, and socially go forward to meet the next stages of needs to finally become a self-actualized, creative person. Disadvantaged, at-risk students are usually identified because needs of 1) clothing, shelter, 2) safety, protection, 3) sense of belonging, 4) love, friendship, affection, 5) self-esteem, and 6) self-actualization are denied, compromised and unmet in some way. As such, young learners are unable to progress satisfactorily forward to achieve scholastic learning success.

Middle school years encompass a time when adolescent, pubescent teens have to face growth and developmental bodily changes. A less personal school environment, stresses of challenging curricular management, numerous teachers and time periods in addition to their dependence on peers' acceptance (peer pressure) all present challenges for sixth grade students.

Tools and Data

FCAT test scores, teacher observations, student surveys, interviews and seating charts will all be studied for data regarding this action research project. I wrote two grants for my students. One used literature anthology to grow their vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, memorization and FCAT writing strategies. The other grant focused on teaching the 7 habits of effective teenagers and community responsibility as they worked with first graders. Implementation and observation of these grants plus focused use of time on their grade level curriculum were also specific tools used to guide these students towards academic and social achievements.

Analysis

We await FCAT scores from this year's examination. However, on posttests in reading and mathematics, sixty percent of my students have experienced negative progress. Although this is contrary to their focus, concentration and effort they put forth studying for their FCAT examination, they told me, "we worked (studied, tried) for the FCAT exam, but now that that's over we don't have to work hard any more". What? Has learning happened? Honesty from my students is more common now as a response to a question. Tears are common among them when male or female receive severe consequences for deviant behaviors. Labeling me as "cool" because I listen to them nonjudgementively and do not deceive them, cause these students to share more of their personal stories and challenges with me. Trust has developed between us in the student-teacher relationship.

Policy Recommendation

Could it be that because these at-risk, disadvantage students who are struggling with both personal, social needs and the need for academic gains have chosen to focus on the satisfaction of the more emotionally pleasing social need? My major recommendation is for legislators, school boards and schools to provide middle school students nurturing environments with subject specific, challenging curriculum. Support of high teacher certification programs such as National Board Professional Teaching Standards is also needed. In addition, time should be provided in a teacher's work day for teacher collaboration learning communities because the teacher in a classroom still makes a difference with the social development and academic gains for each student before him or her.

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QUESTION:

How does experience in Visual Thinking Skills (VTS) effect the critical thinking skills of the student when communicating about their own artwork?

How can the art teacher support the classroom teacher to identify or track transfer of VTS skills?

RATIONALE:

Third grade students with learning disabilities and who have been retained are weak in their abilities in observational skills, creating a context and providing an interpretation of their visual experience, and communicating about their experience.

Visual art can serve as a focus for observation, interpretation and discussion about student experience. VTS methodology, developed by Paul Yenawine and Abigail Housen, is a teaching strategy based on questioning. "The teacher asks open-ended questions adding more probing ones later." "Facilitation stresses expansive, reflective observation and thought as the desired behaviors." (Yenawine, Phillip)

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT:

I am an art teacher at Charles D. Wyche Jr. Elementary School which is located in a suburban setting of low middle class homes and apartments. This study was implemented in a single third grade class of twenty students composed of students with learning disabilities and who have been retained. They are diverse ethnically, socio- economically, linguistically, and cognitively. This study was implemented with this class which occurs once a week for one hour.

RESEARCH

Research has shown the validity of using art as a stimulus for developing critical thinking skills. "Art can serve as a starting point for analysis, stimulating the experience of the individual. The student's analysis of an artwork can develop their perceptual and interpretive abilities as they identify the image structure and respond based on their experience." (Eisner, Eliot. Educating Artistic Vision. 1997. The Macmillan Company)

The development and theory of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) as Phillip Yenawine states, is based on several antecedent educational theories. "Peers exert greater influence than parents on the shaping of young people's characters and personalities." (Judith Rich Harris) "Through interactions with people and the environment, children slowly evolve a series of ways of understanding what they perceive." (Jean Piaget) "Understanding involves active construction through exploration and reflection. Effective learning, the development of operations that enable an individual continuously to make meaning of new circumstances and use new information, is a slow process." (Lev Vygotsky) (Yenawine, Phillip. Theory into Practice: The Visual Thinking Strategies. Presented at the conference of "Aesthetic and Art

Education: A Transdisciplinary Approach," sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Service of Education. September 27-29, 1999, Lisbon Portugal. www.vue.org.)

Currently VTS curriculum is being implemented in public schools. In a partnership between the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston Public Schools, and Visual Understanding in Education, VTS methodology is being implemented to improve elementary student learning skills. Research shows that students improved in their abilities to articulate their thoughts and in problem solving skills. (Longhenry, Susan.. Thinking Through Art at the

Boston Museum of Fine Arts. School Arts Magazine. Volume 104, Number 7, March 2005.)

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS:

Students viewed and discussed VTS prescribed art images in approximately ten forty-five minute sessions, implemented over an eighteen week period of art classes. Oral discussion was collected through audiotapes of class discussion. Anecdotal teacher written observations supplemented the assessment tools. A written and drawing interpretation of student artwork was implemented in the beginning, middle, and end of the implementation period. An assessment of student abilities to observe, communicate details, and interpret artwork was analyzed through employing an assessment rubric of student behaviors in an analysis of student oral discussion, written narrative, and drawing. Instances of assessed behaviors were tabulated and graphed to illustrate the number and frequency of the behaviors.

ANALYSIS

Several factors influenced the outcomes of the student's critical thinking and communication behaviors including the students prior knowledge/experience, classroom culture, the physical setting, training in VTS strategies by student and the facilitator and implementation time. For example, the social dynamics of the group influenced the student's ability to focus and communicate their thinking orally. Some students were inhibited due to a fear of being judged by their peers. Other students had difficulty maintaining focus on the image or the conversation

over time. Additionally, the homeroom teacher and art teacher did not collaborate in the implementation of the VTS strategy in the regular classroom setting. During a museum visit, student

analysis blossomed, their conversation with a docent revealed a new found comfort in their analysis of

art work. Based on these factors, there was variability in the quality of responses and comfort in

participation by the student. Students who consistently engaged in the activities of the study did show

development in their abilities to articulate detail and interpretation in the artwork of others and their

own art work.

POLICY IMPLICATION

VTS strategies can be an effective method for developing student critical thinking and could be integrated into the instructional strategies of all curricula. Students need a collaborative classroom culture that is supportive of VTS instructional strategies. Training of

teachers needs to be consistent and supported by the school culture, providing training time and interdisciplinary and cross curricular collaboration and planning. Students need more experience in sharing conversation and valuing each other's thinking.

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Question – What happens to mathematical achievement scores when fifth grade students interact in an after school web enhanced tutorial program?

Rationale

Several fifth grade, low achieving math students only become engaged in learning mathematical skills and strategies while using computer based tutorial programs with limited adult guidance. As educators we constantly seek new ideas to empower and encourage children's educational process, and with many of these targeted students having computers at home it is likely that parents and child can utilize the tutorial program to practice important mathematical skills. There is no denying that computer technology is here to stay. It is one of the innovations that creates interactive learning activities and gives educators some additional help in reaching individual students. Accessing the appropriate websites for the purpose of practicing specific skills and strategies can be beneficial to both student and teacher. While the students interact with the web enhanced subject area in an entertaining mode the educator has the capabilities of peering into the students achievement file. The program is designed to keep accurate records of students' scores as they continuously move from one activity to another.

Background/Context

Our elementary school is located in a low-medium income community, where many parents are working professionals. Some of these parents have expressed their desire to become more involved in helping their children but do not know where to begin. The administrators including the media specialist addressed this problem through written communication, informing parents about the locations of various, approved learning websites that can be accessed from a home computer.

Research

According to Dade County Schools' Department of Instructional Technology it is Mandated that students in K- 6 should be given a subscribed amount of computer learning time.

Data/ Tools

Since the student's mathematical achievement is the basis of this research project it was important to review the students' various math scores. This was done by analyzing their Quarterly grade level math test, and their FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test) scores in mathematics. The Quarterly grade level math test is administered at the beginning of every nine weeks to give the district and the classroom teacher an indicator of students' improvement in math skills and the use of math strategies. The FCAT is a test used to assess the achievement of the students within each school district and across the state of Florida.

Parent survey revealed that about 60% of the parents do not like math. This could offer some indications about their children's lack of success in mathematics and would warrant further studies. Even though the parents responded that they do not like math, 100% of them responded favorably to a question about willingness to learn a computer enhanced math program. Their responses strengthens the belief that parents have an innate desire to help their children in their educational endeavors. This researcher will definitely take this into consideration as the program progresses.

Student math attitude survey revealed that many of the students like math and realize that it is very important. They are also very conscious of the fact that they are not very good in the subject and are very receptive to the idea of participating in the after school web enhanced tutorial program.

Analysis

Data collection is on going. There is one very important set back to the progression of the program, and that is the limited amount of computers in the classroom at this time. Each student is required to do individual work which requires approximately forty five minutes of uninterrupted computer time.

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