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## **OUR NEXT MOMENT—PUTTING THE COLLABORATIVE INTO PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH**

### **Abstract**

Representation in research is about power (Hepi et al 2007; González & Lincoln 2006; Henry et al 2002) and where power imbalances exist due to socio-cultural, linguistic or economic difference, ethical practice requires the resolution of ethical conflicts. When the researcher is non-Indigenous and the research participants are Indigenous, as is the case in this study, the cross-cultural ethical challenges present an opportunity for a deeper consideration of the process. The journey itself becomes an important facet of the research.

Major reviews of appropriate cross-cultural research methodology in both Australia and the international context have highlighted the compatibility of qualitative research methods with the emerging directions of collaborative cross-cultural research (Ermine, Sinclair & Jeffery 2004; Henry et al 2002). Within qualitative research, there has been a prediction by Lincoln and Denzin (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.1123) that the *next moment* in qualitative research is one where issues of representation will become a focal point of further developments in the field.

This paper explores the methodology of critical participatory action research and the use of collaborative thematic analysis to position cross-cultural research using video footage as part of this *next moment*. Through a reflective process, the author journeys through the ethics, the parameters and the opportunities of conducting ethical qualitative research in education in a cross-cultural context, to arrive at a posited *ethical space* that can be created through *collaboration* rather *participation*.

This paper details a theoretical framework to create this *ethical* and *collaborative* approach, thus providing a valuable contribution to the exploration of the work being undertaken by qualitative researchers in the use of innovative and visual methods to meet the challenges of representation.

Western knowledge, with its flagship of research, has often advanced into Indigenous Peoples communities with little regard for the notions of Indigenous worldviews and self-determination in human development. As a result, the history of Westernization in virtually all locations of the globe reads like a script of relentless disruption and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples with the resulting common pattern of cultural and psychological discontinuity for many in the Indigenous community. As the same script is replayed from nation to nation, reaction by Indigenous academics and other critics of the West will vary. Critique of research processes serves as a ray of hope that the intellectual community is not oblivious to impacts of a research regime that operates solely from a Western standpoint on the Indigenous community. (Ermine, Sinclair & Jeffery 2004, p.9)

## A learning journey

This paper has been generated from the reflective practice involved in the design of doctoral research into teacher education at Batchelor Institute—*Why Batchelor?*

Batchelor Institute is Australia's only national Indigenous tertiary education provider. Based in the Top End of the Northern Territory, the Institute is a dual sector provider with over thirty years experience in the teaching and training of Indigenous educators. For the author, a non-Indigenous academic working for the Institute, the issues of representation in cross-cultural teaching, learning and research, form a significant part of her professional world.

As a highly reflective practitioner and doctoral student, this reflection has led to the consideration of issues of representation and voice in her own research. This paper has been written as much to clarify the research methodology as to share this thinking and way of working. The learning journey of the doctorate brings with it confronting issues of voice and representation, not in the abstract but in the very present and real context of professional engagement in doctoral research. As a non-Indigenous researcher and educator, working and researching with Indigenous people and knowledges, it is vital that the ethics of the researcher and the ethics of the research hold true at all levels.

This doctoral research is a multi-layer evaluation of Batchelor Institute's teaching degree program over the period 2002–2005. The main research question is:

**What is it about the teacher education degree program at Batchelor Institute that attracted and retained the now graduate teachers?**

The data collection will have two phases:

1. Survey evaluation
2. Paper-based and collaborative video interview evaluation.

### **Phase 1**

Phase 1 is an evaluative review of the teacher education degrees at Batchelor Institute informed by survey data from a range of stakeholders, including students enrolled in the Batchelor Institute teacher education degree program. Analysis and summary of the data from Phase 1 will provide the evaluative themes and context for Phase 2. Phase 1 will posit an evaluation which may be confirmed, or disrupted, by the findings of Phase 2.

### **Phase 2**

Phase 2 is the collection and analysis of published information around quality in teacher education and teaching and learning in the Higher Education sector in Australia, and at Batchelor

Institute; and of the graduates' perspective of their Bachelor teacher education study experience. The findings of Phase 2 may confirm or disrupt those of Phase 1.

It is the aspiration to ensure that the graduates' voices are clearly heard in the final printed thesis that has generated this paper.

### **This next moment**

This paper reports on work done to establish a framework for effective and ethical cross-cultural research—further papers will report on the findings of the project and refine the framework presented here. This paper explores the methodology of critical participatory action research and the use of collaborative thematic analysis to position cross-cultural research using video footage as part of this *next moment* as predicted by Lincoln and Denzin (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.1123). Through a reflective process, the author journeys through the ethics, the parameters and the opportunities of conducting ethical qualitative research in education in a cross-cultural context, to create a framework for an *ethical space* created through *collaboration* rather *participation*.

Qualitative researchers in the next moment will face another struggle, too, around the continuing issue of representation. On the one hand, creating open-ended, problematic, critical, polyphonic texts, given the linearity of written formats and the poststructural problem of the distance between representation of reality(ies), grows more difficult. On the other hand, engaging performative forms of social science can be difficult in many venues. (Lincoln & Denzin in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.1124)

### **Directions and intentions—this ethical space**

Representation is about power (Hepi et al 2007; González & Lincoln 2006; Henry et al 2002) and where power imbalances exist due to socio-cultural, linguistic or economic difference, ethical practice requires the resolution of ethical conflicts. When the researcher is non-Indigenous and the research participants Indigenous, as is the case in this study, the cross-cultural ethical challenges present an opportunity for a deeper consideration of the process. The journey itself may become as important as the end product, in this case, the research findings.

One of the principles of ethical research as given by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is that:

7. Indigenous researchers, individuals and communities should be involved in research as collaborators.' and that '...Research on Indigenous issues should also incorporate Indigenous perspectives and this is often most effectively achieved by facilitating more direct involvement in the research. (AIATSIS 2000, p.12)

An initial intention of the researcher's journey is that the opportunity exists to extend beyond *representation* to *ethical space collaboration* rather than *inclusion*.

The "ethical space" is a concept, a process that unfolds, that is inclusive of a series of stages from dialogue to dissemination of results, each played out in many different codes and relationships at the level of research practice. (Ermine, Sinclair & Jeffery 2004, p.21)

This is the next moment posited by Lincoln and Denzin, where qualitative research does more than *include* Indigenous people; rather Indigenous people become *central* to the research itself. Thus the whole research academy is transformed through the incorporation of practices which are truly ethical, the 'collective struggle for a socially responsive, democratic, communitarian,

moral, and justice-promoting set of inquiry practices and interpretive processes' (Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.1122).

This work has already begun in the field of cross-cultural research and a scan of the literature provides strong guidance. The ethical space positioning is reflected in the work of Karen Martin.

Research ethics: Many of the decisions researchers will face are moral ones, rather than epistemological ones, so ethical behaviour needs to occur throughout the research program. It's about gaining trust and maintaining integrity. To be truly ethical requires the researcher to recognise and respond to the duality of the research contexts and act in culturally safe ways. It expects the researcher to observe codes of ethical behaviour of his/her own professional and personal worlds, and also of the world in which the research is conducted. (Martin 2003, p.6)

Advice and directions are given by the leading Indigenous Australian academics, including Rigney.

Unless Western knowledge orthodoxies are interrogated, the basis of their power will continue to reproduce the colonised as a fixed reality, including the subtext of Indigenous *Intellectual nullius*. The struggle for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty is to move our humanness, our scholarship, our identities and our knowledge systems from invisible to visible. (Rigney 2001, p.10)

In order to undertake cross-cultural qualitative research in this *next moment*, then, requires a journey into an *ethical space*, where true collaboration occurs. 'It is therefore incumbent on Western scholars to reach out in democratic and liberating ways, with great humility, to engage in research collaborations that help to achieve social justice' (González & Lincoln 2006, p.9).

## Methodology in cross-cultural research

Rigney's three principles of Indigenist research provide the standard for research involving Indigenous people. These principles are:

1. Resistance (as the emancipatory imperative)
2. Political integrity
3. Privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices

(Rigney 1997, p.8)

*Qualitative* research practices rather than quantitative provide more space for dialogue and interaction, and *participatory action research* seemingly provides an appropriate methodology to create the space for these three principles to be enacted.

These are narrative, performative methodologies, research practices that are reflexively consequential, ethical, critical, respectful, and humble. These practices require that scholars live with the consequences of their research actions. (Denzin in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.936)

This is supported by major reviews of appropriate cross-cultural research methodology in both Australia and the international context.

Contemporarily, research is tending towards insider research or research that takes place in collaboration with Aboriginal people. Research with Indigenous populations can be currently characterized as primarily qualitative, participatory, collaborative, and community-based. (Ermine, Sinclair & Jeffery 2004, p.13)

Collaborative and participatory research methodologies are generally identified as being compatible with the goals of the emerging agenda for reform of research involving Indigenous peoples in Australia and internationally. (Henry et al 2002, p.7)

The search for an appropriate methodology results in the suggested use of *participatory action research* (PAR).

One research milieu that incorporates the means to address social inequity is found in participatory action research (PAR). The participatory action research approach to community issues is a culturally relevant and empowering method for Indigenous people in Canada and worldwide as it critiques the ongoing impact of colonization, neocolonialism and the force of marginalization. (Ermine, Sinclair & Jeffery 2004, p.13)

And yet the author has experienced a dissonance between the methodology and her application of the methodology. An interesting reaction, given that this research methodology has been used before in cross-cultural settings, with great success (Bat 2003; Ford & Klesch 2003). An experienced researcher in endangered Australian languages, Maree Klesch, has been using this methodology with great success with remote communities for over a decade and challenges the critique of *participatory action research*.

While the area of common ground can be an extremely complex and difficult site of engagement for all participants, it creates a sense of community as it relies on mutual exchange, mutual trust, mutual respect and is a domain where all participants hold the authority of their intellectual property. (Ford & Klesch 2003, p.32)

In order to resolve this dilemma, it is appropriate to consider the methodology in more depth. It is possible that the methodology is not appropriate to the need; it is also possible that it is the implementation of the methodology that is creating the dissonance.

As detailed in Figure 1, action research, in its theoretical form, takes a spiral approach with acting/observing, reflection and revised planning as the typical stages. This reflexive practice resonates with the discussion to this point and provides an appropriate way of working.

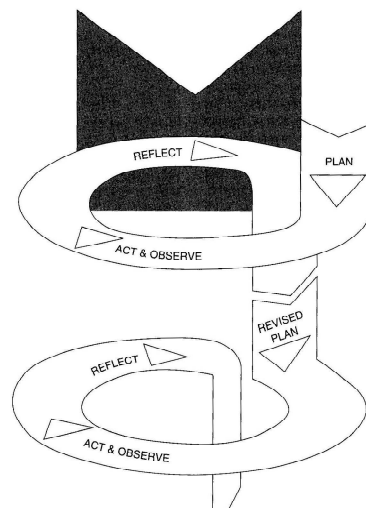


Figure 1

(Kemmis & McTaggart in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.564)

Action research, of itself, correlates with the principles of practice thus far considered and can be taken as an appropriate methodology. However, when one moves to consider *participatory action research*, it is pertinent to consider advice of Michael Christie that the Yolngu people of the Northern Territory say that the *how* you know and renew something is perhaps more important than the *what you know* (Christie 2007, p.2). The *how* of participatory action research may be constructed differently in a cross-cultural context.

Interestingly, in a major review of Australian research methodologies in the light of the reform agenda in the context of Indigenous education, Henry et al made a consistent distinction between *collaborative* and *participatory* research methodologies.

Collaborative and participatory research methodologies have the clear potential of exposing the contradictory power positions of institution-based researchers over other participants, including community stakeholders. This potentiality creates the circumstances for internal critique and contestation through which Rigney's (1999) principles for informing Indigenous research can come to bear on the unfolding of the research work. People dissatisfied with the research in progress can resist. The political integrity of the research can be progressively reviewed, revised and reinstated from an Indigenous stakeholder(s) perspective. Researchers can be incorporated into these collaborative research projects by undertaking action research praxis of their own facilitated by Indigenous co-researchers, thereby becoming full participants in the action research moments of these projects and not simply 'outsider' facilitators of others' action research praxis. This potential for reciprocity within the life of research projects strengthens the likelihood that Indigenous voices will be heard and privileged. (Henry et al 2002, p.10)

This raises the possibility that *participatory* research is not necessarily *collaborative* research.

### ***Participating in Participatory Action Research***

There has been a considerable use and evolution of *action research*, *participatory action research* and *critical participatory action research*. The spiral of action research identifies it immediately. The distinguishing features of *participatory action research* are: 'shared ownership of research projects, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward community action' (Kemmis & McTaggart in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.560). Further to the distinguishing spiral of action research, we are given seven other key features of PAR by Kemmis and McTaggart, which can be summarised as:

- a social process
- participatory
- practical and collaborative
- emancipatory
- critical
- reflexive
- aims to transform both theory and practice.

(Kemmis & McTaggart in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.566–568)

After a considerable review of their work and others in the field of action research, Kemmis and McTaggart describe the latest evolution of this methodology as *critical participatory action research*:

Now, more so than two decades ago, we see participatory action research as a process of sustained *collective investigation* of a topic, a problem an issue, a concern, or a theme that allows people to explore possibilities in action, judging them by their consequences in history and moving with a measure of tentativeness and prudence (in some cases with great courage in the face of violence and coercion) but also with the support that comes with *solidarity*. (Kemmis & McTaggart in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.598)

On critical reflection, the theory of *critical participatory action research* gives a solid framework for the methodology for this context.

### **Who participates?**

The *theory* of PAR is consistent with the need, but is its application? Is *participating* enough or is there something more?

*participatory*—characterised by or involving participation; especially : providing the opportunity for individual participation

*collaborative*—to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavour

(Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus)

*Participation* has an individual orientation, whereas *collaboration* has a group orientation—this has stronger resonance with the requirements for effective cross-cultural research so far presented. This detailed theory of this *participatory* methodology has presented an appropriate way forward, and yet its individual orientation brings dissonance. The role and responsibility of the researcher needs refinement, for clearly it is not just *facilitation* that is required in this research context, but also *collaboration*.

All researchers, one hopes, aspire to ethical practice that will ‘carefully and cautiously articulate the spaces between decolonizing research practices and indigenous communities. (Denzin in Denzin & Lincoln 2005, p.936)

In articulating practice, there must be acknowledgement of the researcher’s own experiences, culture, eccentricities and foibles, for that very humanness is part of the rich interaction that forms a community and it would be naïve for a researcher to say that they were completely neutral or unbiased in their work. This responsibility to refine practice and to ensure that ethical obligations are met in turn form the role of the researcher in this context.

‘Cross-cultural collaborative research is “where [the cross-cultural] research participants and the researchers are equal partners in the research process and where all parties benefit from the research” (Gibbs 2001, p. 674 in Hepi et al 2007, p.39). This is a step further than reflective practice and shifts us from the individual to the community, from *participating* to *collaborating*.

It is not the methodology that creates the *ethical space* but rather its application and the creation of the *ethical space* determines the role of the researcher. Furthermore, the complex human interactions within this space are all real and valid, provided that trust and respect are there. One reported use of PAR in this *next moment* is in the field of early childhood research and Hawkins found it to be an appropriate and collaborative methodology.

This meant that all participants would be afforded a valued voice, debate and discussion would be encouraged, action agreed upon collaboratively would be promoted and each participant would be represented in every stage of the project. It appeared that I was looking for a research design that would in itself become a social practice. Therefore, I sought a research design that would encourage a social process of collaborative learning and transformation, open communicative space (Habermas 1996), uphold prior knowledge and listen to and value the voice of each participant. Gergen and Gergen (2003) contend that the most obvious response to critical concerns regarding representation is empowerment research and cite Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the most developed genre of this type. (Hawkins 2007, p.3)

Martin reminds us that when researching with Indigenous people using her work on ‘Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing’ (Martin 2003, p.3) is an appropriate way forward in an ethical journey, creating the space for Indigenous researchers to fully participate because ‘they are ontologically distinct in prescribing place and group specific knowledges, beliefs and behaviours’ (Martin 2003, p.6).

In collaborative, cross-cultural research it is not the specific methodology that ensures validity, although there are methodologies which resonant with Indigenous methods, but rather it is the use of the methodology that creates this *ethical space* where everyone is welcome, where relationships of respect and trust are created and where the *how* is perhaps more important than the *what*.

### **Appropriate tools**

The implementation of the research—the tools, the *doing*—the data collection and analysis also need to be considered. Through the reflective process undertaken in this paper a number of guiding principles are emerging. The research will be ethical, qualitative and collaborative. In searching for the appropriate tools for the research, there has been a noticeable difference in the number of papers written on ethics and methodology compared with those about the actual tools of research. The former far exceeded the latter. In many instances despite the best intentions of well-written methodological considerations, there is a consistent use of a collection of well-known statistical tools or analytic tools that have in fact been generated from standpoints far removed from this *ethical space*.

Again, Martin provides assistance.

Since the assumptions upon which research is based vary according to worldview of the researcher, then the criteria, categories and themes devised for data analysis will further entrench a worldview difference when working with in Aboriginal lands and/or with Aboriginal people. In what is essentially a process of making meaning from the collected data, categories, themes and patterns based on western ontological and epistemological criteria, lack ‘cultural’ rigour in using categories, themes and patterns. The Indigenist researcher draws upon his/her Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing to identify and categorise data, using internal logic as criteria and referents. (Martin 2003, p.6)

The tools for data collection and analysis in cross-cultural research, to be truly collaborative, must make use of Indigenous methodologies applied by Indigenous researchers—*collaborating* researchers, not *participating* participants. These tools must also be applied within the ethical research space, using a critically participatory research approach. In this way, Indigenous ways of *knowing, doing and being* (Martin 2003) become central to the research. But what are these tools?



There has been an Australian example of collaborative cross-cultural research that utilised a collaborative analytical and visual tool. Called 'Building Bridges', this early childhood research used video footage and a group approach to identifying themes (Fleer & Williams-Kennedy 2002).

The process used by the project team represents a unique, authentic and culturally sensitive approach in cross-cultural research. The methodology can best be described as an 'inside-to-outside' approach to record important Indigenous everyday experiences. (Fleer 2004, p.6)

This project provides some excellent direction where 'Rogoff's [1998] three planes of analysis were used to examine the video and interview data gathered' (Fleer 2004, p.1). This activities model-based tool, with its three layers of community/institution; interpersonal and individual planes may provide an appropriate tool and gives an opportunity for consideration. However, this is an activity-based model, all about the *what* and this tool may itself be situated in a culturally determined analytical construct. Remembering that for Indigenous people the *how* is more important than the *what*, Christie (2007), the use of this tool will require further consideration.

This is another one of Denzin and Lincoln's *next moments*.

We need to learn how to experiment with visual (and nonvisual) ways of thinking. We need to develop a critical visual sensibility, a sensibility that will allow us to bring the gendered materials world into play in critically different ways. We need to interrogate critically the hyperlogics of cyberspace and its virtual realities. The rules and methods for establishing truth that hold these worlds together must also be better understood. (Denzin & Lincoln 2004, p.645)

The use of visual methods provides an appropriate data collection approach. Again, though, when researching the tools of these visual methods the phrases 'study of...' and the word *images* are common, as if the visual methods themselves had been used only as much as they could be controlled. This is too static for these purposes. The use of video footage of interviews as they had done in *Building Bridges* (Fleer & Williams-Kennedy 2002) brought a depth to the study through the collaboration of the families with the researchers. This is an opportunity to further expand this methodology. The challenge is to find the appropriate analytical tool to ensure *collaboration* rather than *participation*. Filters such as Conversation Analysis or software packages are generated out of Western epistemological standpoint and presuppose a way of viewing the world that then impacts on the tool used. The work of Michael Christie in creating databases with Indigenous people for repositories of Indigenous Knowledge gives further insight.

One way or another, digital technologies are in Aboriginal communities to stay. They can be very useful for traditional knowledge practices, or they can be inhibitive and assimilatory. (Christie 2004, p.11)

There is another consideration. Just because a tool is technological or visual, this doesn't ensure that its use will be ethical or collaborative.

## Parameters

This research project has generated some clear parameters to guide its implementation. There is a strong intention on the part of the researcher to ensure that the practice is ethical and rigorous. This is a cross-cultural research context in which critical participatory research will be used in a

collaborative framework. The use of visual data will provide an opportunity for effective collaboration within this methodology.

Having discarded some of the available analysis tools such as software for thematic analysis, it is the question of the *how* that remains unanswered and provides the true opportunity here for further exploration in the field of methodology.

### **Applying these understandings**

The framework developed for this research project makes an important contribution to the identified gap in the field of appropriate analytical tools for the *next moment*.

Collaborative video editing will be used as a tool for thematic analysis in this qualitative research project. The exploration of the use of this tool will further contribute to our growing understandings of the potential and use of visual methodologies in collaborative cross-cultural research and put the *collaborative into participatory action research*.

### **The *what* of the research—the framework**

Initial and individual interviews will be filmed, using a semi-structured approach with some set questions to generate initial responses. This will establish the context of the research question, allow each graduate teacher to tell their own story about their teacher training experience and re-establish the relationship between them and the researcher.

Following the individual interviews, the group will come together and collaboratively edit the video footage to create the group's story as a documentary. This collaborative editing process will provide the thematic analysis of the video interviews, ensuring that not only are Indigenous voices represented, but that Indigenous ontologies determine the very framework that is used to analyse the data. This process itself will be recorded and provide further footage and further data for the doctoral research program.

The group will talk through the content of the individual interviews and generate a number of themes that will be explored further through the documentary. The interpretation and visual representation of these themes will be an important part of this emerging methodology. The completed documentary will be analysed to evaluate the extent to which the graduates perspectives reflect themes from earlier research undertaken using paper-based surveys and literature review.

### **The intentional ethical space—the *how* of the research**

The *what* of the research has been presented, however, the ethical challenge of this work presents the opportunity for deeper understanding and practice, shifting from rhetoric to praxis. As part of the critical reflection that is necessary in critical participatory action research, this posited *ethical space* is one that provides a framework for the *how* of this work.

The management of risk is integral to the success of this research and the efficacy of the methodology. The major identified risk was to ensure appropriate and informed consent. The identity of the participants in this research will be explicitly and intentionally identifiable and so it is necessary to not only gain explicit and informed consent but to give everyone the opportunity to withdraw their consent at any time until the final completion of the project and to have all footage that identifies them and all of their individual contributions fully edited from the footage.

This issue of consent is a continuing one throughout the research as the *ethical space* evolves. At the initial individual interview stage, discussions will be conducted around the research methodology, power dynamics and ethics. This will form the basis for agreements to be made at the beginning of the collaborative editing stage. At this point a set of principles around rights and responsibilities will be negotiated and a process of conflict resolution will be established. Together, the group will decide just what the *ethical space* looks like.

Further to this, is the consideration of the power imbalance that is inherent in this work. A non-Indigenous academic with all of the resources supporting the work is generating this research project. This non-Indigenous academic is a colleague and friend to these graduate teachers and it is possible that personal considerations might impact on the actual data. The graduates might change what they have to say because they do not want to be hurtful, or they may want to say good things to make everyone happy, even if it's not quite what they think or feel. To further support the rigour of this process and to ensure that cultural safety is paramount, an Indigenous academic not connected to the education degree will be asked to act in the role of independent mediator and support person for the participants. If disagreement occurs around content or processes, someone with cultural and academic expertise will be able to assist in conflict resolution.

A consideration of the finished product and our reflection on the journey to use *ethical space* and on the efficacy of this tool of *collaborative thematic analysis* will provide great insight and further direction for exploration on the methodologies of qualitative research.

## Next moments

This paper has presented the consideration of appropriate research methodologies and tools for cross-cultural research. Although *critical participatory research* was found to be an appropriate methodology, its effective implementation will only be certain if the methodology is used in a correctly formed *ethical space*. Through this methodology and from within such a space, *collaborative thematic analysis* of visual research data can be undertaken, ensuring the efficacy of cross-cultural research and bringing us to the *next moment*.

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