

THE VOICE OF AN EDUCATOR FROM AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCHOOL IN LATIN AMERICA, INSPIRED BY THE PHILOSOPHY OF LORIS MALAGUZZI



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ABSTRACT

This work presents an analysis of educational practices inspired by the philosophy of Loris Malaguzzi, developed by a pedagogist and atelierist who works at the Casa da Infância School in the city of Salvador, Bahia in Latin America. The results of the educator's educational practice show how the approximation with the educational principles of Loris Malaguzzi's philosophy are translated into learning strategies, through the one hundred languages of the child, listening, investigation, documentation and participation made an approximation with the approach used in early childhood education schools in Reggio Emilia/Italy, demonstrating how this educational practice enhances and favors the learning of children in Latin America, developing creativity, autonomy, entrepreneurial behavior and child protagonism.

Keywords: Educational focus Reggio Emilia/Italy, Early Childhood Education, Entrepreneurship, Protagonism.

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INTRODUCTION

The voice of a Brazilian teacher

"[...] It's that protagonism of thinking that it's a collective idea for the community, for the whole world."

Educator Márcia Santos⁴ is a pedagogue, atelier and works in a private institution called Escola Casa da Infância⁵ in the city of Salvador, Bahia. His class is made up of 19 children in the age group of four and five years. She has been working in Early Childhood Education for 15 years, five of which were at the Childhood Home. During her career as an Early Childhood Education educator, she has always sought a transformative approach, and when she started her work at that institution, she found her professional fulfillment in the school's identity. Inspired by the educational approach of Reggio Emilia/Italy, she began to develop her educational practices following the principles of this approach and the principle of "Listening"⁶ is one of those used by her to favor the development of child protagonism and the enhancement of entrepreneurial behavior in children.

In this sense, Filippini (2014) corroborates the educator's thinking by saying that the nature of the organization of the municipal schools of Early Childhood Education in Reggio Emilia/Italy, thought by the community, by Loris Malaguzzi and all the other educators who were part of the approach, are structured in the sense of giving identity to the school, aiming at the values and choices of what the educational project proposes. Thus, the organizational choices that characterize the educational project are centered on understanding the broader and cultural daily contexts that aim at the quality of children's learning.

In view of the above, the educational practices observed in the documentation (planning of the educator together with the children, records of projects developed, school documents published in <https://www.casadainfancia.org/>) and in the interview conducted with teacher Márcia Santos demonstrate proximity to the educational practices of the Reggio Emilia/Italy approach, since they favor the development of the same educational principles: that of child protagonism, that of the hundred languages of children, that of listening, that of investigation, that of participation, that of planning, that of learning as a

⁴ Professor Márcia Santos signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF) authorizing her name to appear in the text of this thesis.

⁵ Casa da Infância School, Salvador – Bahia. Link: <https://youtu.be/3il5BXyHlek>.

⁶ "Listening, understood as a metaphor of availability, of sensitivity to listen and to be listened to; listens not only with hearing, but with all the senses: sight, touch, smell, taste, orientation" (Strozzi, 2014, p.82).

process of subjective and group construction, that of design, that of the environment, that of space and relationships, that of documentation, that of the organization of spaces, that of evaluation and that of professional training that collaborate to favor another educational principle that I defend is the of entrepreneurial behavior.

According to studies carried out on the philosophy of Loris Malaguzzi, applied in the educational approach of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia/Italy, I evidenced aspects that lead me to defend that there are, in this philosophy, characteristics that enhance the entrepreneurial behavior of children. According to Dolabela (2003), an entrepreneur is an individual "[...] whose dream is to promote the well-being of the community, the improvement of the living conditions of all" (p. 47). In this sense, I argue, as I have said elsewhere, that entrepreneurship can become another principle of the educational approach of Reggian municipal schools, collaborating with the other principles that impact the lives of children. I describe, below, the methodology and data analysis according to the report of the Brazilian educator who deals with the educational practice inspired by the Reggian approach.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological paths I followed were in order to answer the central problem of this research: How has Loris Malaguzzi's educational approach been developed in the educational practice of four teachers, who work in Early Childhood Education schools in Latin America, in order to develop child protagonism and enhance children's entrepreneurial behavior? To this end, I sought techniques that ensure the credibility of the research, since, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1994), the main objective assumed by a researcher is to build knowledge and not merely offer opinions in relation to the context investigated.

In view of the chosen field of investigation, I opted for a research with a qualitative approach that, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1994, p. 13), "involves the detection of descriptive data, obtained in the researcher's direct contact with the situation studied, emphasizes the process more than the product and is concerned with portraying the perspective of the participants". Therefore, I made use of this research approach because it allows the description of events as they present themselves in their natural context.

The qualitative approach, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1994), is not represented by means of numbers, but in a descriptive form. Godoy (1995, p. 65-71) contributes by

presenting three fundamental characteristics of this research approach: a) the natural environment is a direct source of data - for him, the researcher needs to be inserted in the environment he investigates in order to produce reliable and real material; b) descriptive research - observation is comprehensive, making use of varied materials to describe reality in a "holistic" way; and, finally, item c) the researcher's main concern is to capture the meaning that the participants attribute to the object of the research, the researcher investigates the perception of the research participants in order to understand the reality that surrounds them, checking or confirming with them the interpretations they have reached.

Considering how much teachers can contribute with an innovative educational approach, with a practice that enables an entrepreneurial and protagonist pedagogy, I decided to research and produce data from four teachers, who work in Early Childhood Education in four Latin American countries that are inspired by the educational approach of Loris Malaguzzi. Below I make an excerpt of the research and describe the voice of the Brazilian teacher through an interview, documents and photos analyzed.

RESULTS

At the beginning of the interview, educator Márcia Santos mentioned the research work carried out in the Eucalyptus Square⁷ and stressed that it is not only in Reggio Emilia/Italy, but also in Brazil, that ecological aspects, the environment and the spaces of the school and its surroundings are valued as environments of learning possibilities. Most of the planning of learning possibilities involves, according to the educator, exploration and investigation projects in tune with nature. Among the projects, those that take place in Praça dos Eucaliptos and in other important places in the city of Salvador/BA, such as the beaches and streets in which projects are developed related to reflections on care and preservation of the environment and actions that can improve and give more quality of life to the people who are part of these places. Places that serve to give meaning to the child and to the families of their own existence and of their own performance in the various social spheres. In Figure 7 I present the Eucalyptus Square:

⁷ The Eucalyptus Square is located at Alameda das Algarobas, n. 569. Pitubas, Salvador- BA, Brazil.

Figure 7 - Eucalyptus Square



Source: material collected by Gabriel (2022).

Márcia Santos referred to an explanation she gave to an Uber driver when asked about the importance of educators, children and families investigating in the Eucalyptus Square and discussing issues related to ecology, the environment and the city. The following is an excerpt from the aforementioned report:

So, today I came in the uber, talking to the driver and he asked what space was there, at school. Because now I'm working at the school in front of Praça dos Eucalyptus. So, people pass by trying to understand what it is there, they see the children investigating individually and in groups, they see the educators observing the children and the learning groups in the square. So, we spend hours listening to the children and for us who are part of this educational process, of this day to day, where the child is inserted in everything, it makes a lot of sense to be there, to problematize and reflect on nature [...] (Brazilian Educator).

When the educator says "we", she refers to the educators, the children, the families and a large part of the local community of Salvador/BA. To elucidate the participatory organization of the school, the Brazilian educator presented examples of how the process of participation of families happens during the moments in which she and the children are protagonists in the construction of their learning through the project methodology. Always focused on reflections on the elements of the environment, its care and preservation:

So, I bring some recent examples from the Children's House. It was the arrival of Dobby, a cockatiel, in which the children wanted to have a pet as a pet, a mascot, and then they organized a study group on what care they should have with Dobby. And also to decide how the care of the mascot would be, how they would do it during school recess periods. So, we see the children as protagonists, making important decisions such as: how long Dobby was going to spend at each one's house, what type and amount of food he needs to eat [...] (Brazilian Teacher).

All decisions made in assemblies⁸ by the group of children, mediated by the educator, were shared with the families. Validating, in this way, the process of subjective construction and in the group, of the project of having a mascot at the Casa da Infância school. This whole idea, built with the participation of families, with agreements and disagreements at times, are important for a participatory educational practice. In this sense, Carvalho and Silva (2016) collaborates with this thought by saying that the participation of children takes on a special importance, because, according to her: "Participation has to be something that is at the service of the subject, that gives him tools, that allows him to build his identity, as a citizen and that is useful" (p. 188).

Aware of the importance and value of participating and listening to the protagonist and entrepreneurial children in their work, the Brazilian educator went on to say that for the community this novelty of having a mascot was a process of building responsibilities, which were assumed not only by the group of children who started the project, but by all those who are part of the school. And it worked so well that Dobby got a companion. Another cockatiel named Milke.

When asked about her educational practice, educator Márcia Santos told how permanent research takes place during the projects and the learning possibilities that are offered to children. In addition, how imagination and creativity are part of the cognitive process during the construction of learning. They are not adventures lived by children, but personal and group investigative processes that create creative knowledge capable of interacting with different problems and languages (Vecchi, 2014).

The proportion of investigative processes became even more visible when the Brazilian educator reported on another permanent project of the school: the arrival of three bee hives:

The project started first out of fear. "Oh, because the bee is going to sting me!". Then, we started researching about bee species, we made incredible discoveries about the characteristics of each species, how to take care of them and also how this process of setting bees at school would be. Reflect and build awareness of the importance of bees, there, living together with us in harmony and, especially, their importance for the balance of nature (Brazilian Teacher).

In this way, the project, the educational practices and the various learning

⁸ The educator uses the strategy of the assembly with the children to enhance the participation of children in decisions involving educational projects, the daily problems of the classroom and the school, under the pillars that support democratic management (Brazilian Educator).

possibilities, through the principle of investigation, are carried out by the children and the educator. In view of this, the evidence of protagonism is recorded and documented by educator Márcia Santos during the presentations and discussions held by and with the children, with or without the participation of the families. These records, according to the educator, are important moments for the evaluation of children, as they help to understand the level of learning in the group. They provide clues for the interpretation of documentation and raise awareness in the daily work with children (Vecchi, 2017). In addition to being, in my understanding, a strategy for reflection on the educational practice itself, in which the actions of children can be interpreted in their protagonisms.

The Brazilian educator understands that the observations, reflections and documentation of the projects and learning possibilities, built by the children and mediated by the educator, are only fully understood if they are analyzed from a pedagogical perspective. A perspective that is related to the artistic processes communicated through metaphorical and poetic languages. In the words of the educator:

[...] to see the children bringing their questions, their discussions, solutions, ideas, building materials such as drawings, clay and wire sculptures and poetry, you know, not only to share with those who are inside the Children's House, but also expanding it to families, to society, to the community there in Praça dos Eucalyptos through the production of newspapers (Brazilian Teacher).

As in the experiences of the Reggio Emilia/Italy approach, Márcia Santos carries out experiments with children in organized environments inside the school or in the Eucalyptus Square, which is in front of the school. For her, the school and its mediations constitute a living organism, ideal for children to develop children's protagonism and their entrepreneurial potential, which Gandini (2016, p. 57) defines as "a place of lives and relationships between adults and children". Thus, the educational practices carried out by the children and the educator are always under construction, in movement, in continuous adjustment, expanded towards the Eucalyptus Square and the families with responsibility and ethics.

It is possible to observe in her speech how strong the development of child protagonism is in her educational practice and how entrepreneurial behavior is enhanced. In the reports of the Brazilian educator, she demonstrates actions of autonomy (children's protagonism) that are reflected in thoughts, generating attitudes with a view to understanding and solving problems that involve the collective and the common good of the community (children's entrepreneurial behavior). The Brazilian educator reinforces her

conception of everyday actions and relationships that favor protagonism and entrepreneurial behavior by saying that:

[...] So, that's right, this protagonism is very strong. Many times when we think about doing it, they are already there, everything is ready. So think of these children like that in the future, with the attitude of thinking about the world. But it's not that thinking that "my idea is worth it!", it's that protagonism of thinking that it's a collective idea for the community, for the whole world (Brazilian Teacher).

The report of educator Márcia Santos about her educational practice with children and the didactic material structured, organized and made available by her, demonstrates how the principle of protagonism and the principle of entrepreneurship are present in her practice. Continuing the analysis, I seek, from this moment on, to show how the educational practices of the Brazilian educator favor protagonism and enhance entrepreneurial behavior during the planning and execution of projects. I demonstrate that, although there is an approximation with the educational approach of Reggio Emilia/Italy, there is also innovation and creation, coming from the Brazilian culture.

Each year, according to the Brazilian educator, the knowledge constructions proposed, shared and planned with the children at the Casa da Infância school take different forms, which demonstrates a continuous process of innovation and entrepreneurship. The analysis of the documentation of the educational projects developed in the school, present on the walls and on the institution's website, demonstrate how the school was built considering the model of the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia/Italy. Each environment has been carefully prepared for children and families. Environments that start from the experience and personal experience of each one to build a collective environment that proposes to show innovation in its educational approach, which values the social commitment of quality education. We find in Dolabela (2003), when describing the strategies of how the entrepreneur develops his work, that the context, energy, leadership and relationships are what support creative and innovative practices.

During the interview, the Brazilian educator commented on the ongoing projects that end up transforming the spaces of the classrooms and the schoolyard. Figure 8 shows how the projects take root and are part of the school space.

Figure 8 - Project "Learn to raise bees"



Source: Material collected by Gabriel (2022).

These projects are part of educational practices that seek to innovate the teaching and learning processes, and are provided to children on a daily basis, through active participation in the planning of learning possibilities, led by everyone in the school community. Entrepreneurial behavior is enhanced by the educator during educational practices, allowing children to build their own doing and their own knowledge. We can take as an example the drawings of the investigations carried out with children on the beaches during the development of the "Golden Waves Project". Project in which children recorded the garbage that is deposited on the beaches, such as pet bottles, bags and other polluting objects. In this same project, the children reflected on the importance of clean water for the preservation of marine life and human life.

In the records of the project planning, placed on the murals of the Casa da Infância school, I observed a special concern in the way in which the self-knowledge and development of children's autonomy are built, undertaking and respecting the preservation of the environment, as a good of humanity. The plans are on a panel accessible to the child and, according to the Brazilian educator, right at the beginning of the class she asks one of the children to remove the register from the wall and take it to the planning wheel.

The educator asks if they remember what part of the project they are in and what should be sent that day. Among the actions reported in the educator's documentation is the questioning of how garbage at home should be separated and the procedures on how to wash the glass to deliver it to the collection points.

In the "Golden Waves Project" the ideas and research have already gone beyond

the walls of the school and went to the city, reaching the seaside communities with a joint work of cleaning the beaches. Actions that, according to Dolabela (2003), constitute entrepreneurship, as it supposes a set of external and internal actions, organized and planned based on the needs of the community.

These are educational practices that demonstrate how the principle of entrepreneurship empowers children in the sense of being and having. To be better people and to have a better world. To this end, the questions and problems raised by the children: "[...] *fresh water comes from salt water, it is salty because it is polluted*"; "[...] *seawater comes from another planet and we must take good care of it*"; "[...] *How should we help people take care of seawater?*", are valued from the beginning of the project's investigation to its developments and completion. The image presented in Figure 9, of the "Ocean waves" panel, illustrates, through drawings, the problem of water pollution on planet Earth.

Figure 9 - Documentation of the Golden Waves Project



Source: Material collected by Gabriel (2022).

When drawing, the children suggest investigative possibilities, they think about the way they intend to carry out the research and how they will structure and shape the project.

[...] The children think about it, and from the drawings the actions begin, such as collecting water from many places to observe, bringing empty bottles... So, we see how they develop this thinking and grow and how this shapes the project (Brazilian Teacher).

The planning of the learning situations suggested by the group of children are

examples of living experiments, generating confidence, existential opportunities and with entrepreneurial characteristics. The protagonism with actions that enhance entrepreneurial behavior in children was evident when they designed the various stages of the "Golden Waves Project". Steps that, as previously stated, were directed at thinking about how to improve and change the course of seawater pollution.

To do so, they used investigative strategies, observations, information from written notes and poetic language⁹. In short, everything that enables multiple choices, problem solving, the educator's interference in the moments of exchange of experiences through the principle of listening, as exemplified in Figure 10.

Figure 10 - Planning moment



Source: Material collected by Gabriel (2022).

The moment, illustrated in Figure 10, presents the teacher and the children gathered in a conversation circle in order to remember where they were in the "Golden Waves Project". To this end, the Brazilian educator questioned: "[...] *Do you remember what we did yesterday? And what was it?*" and the children answer, "*We have seen what animals live in the sea of Australia.*" The educator continues, "*And today what are we going to do?*" and the children reply: "*Let's watch the movie about humpback whales*".

The identity of the educator, protagonist and entrepreneur is passed on to the child

⁹The poetic language in Reggio Emilia's educational approach values the text, exploring the combination of words and figures of speech giving meanings and feelings to the expressions used by the children (Vecchi, 2017).

when she participates in the constructions carried out by the children, when she instigates the children with the questions during the planning of the "Golden Waves Project". And also, during the artistic works, the investigations in the Eucalyptus Square and even during the drawing of observations of fruits and vegetables, as shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11 - Fruit and Vegetable Observation Drawing



Source: Material collected by Gabriel (2022).

For the Brazilian educator, it is not the final product that makes children protagonists, but their attitudes during the process, as they act in a protagonist way, building their identities through the development of perseverance, initiative, creativity, energy, leadership and imagination. Hoyuelos (2020) reinforces this thought by saying that: "We must always think – comments Loris – that children have the need to find meaning in what they do. This meaning is linked to the meaning that adults give to their profession" (Hoyuelos, 2020, p. 258). In this sense, the Brazilian educator reported the search for meaning in what she does and her dream. She said:

[...] since I was studying for a Pedagogy degree, I was looking for an organized and structured school with political and ethical projects to form a citizen, aware and active in the world around him, and now I see my dream come true, when I come to work at the Casa da Infância School (Brazilian Educator).

A life determined by a professional dream qualified the educator Márcia Santos with characteristics of an enterprising person that, according to Dolabela (2002), are present in people who:

[...] By learning to dream and to seek the realization of the dream, the individual triggers processes that involve critical factors, such as learning to learn, learning to

be, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to know. That is: it activates and develops the characteristics of the entrepreneur (Dolabela, 2002, p. 13).

The process of drawing the sea waves, carried out by the children during the structuring of the "Golden Waves Project" (Figure 3), exemplifies the protagonism and entrepreneurship present in the group of children while they draw, elaborate their interpretative theories of how the waves are formed. While drawing, someone says: "[...] *it's when a ship passes at sea,*" another child says "[...] *That's when it rains a lot in the sea*" and the other complements by saying "[...] *that's when a storm happens.*" And so, with their speeches, they get a sense of and give meaning to what is being done through verbal interaction at the time of recording on paper. According to Dolabela's (2003) conception, it is possible to infer that this moment experienced by children is entrepreneurial, because, according to the author, knowing how to undertake is to have "the ability to represent reality in a differentiated way and to the degree of congruence between one's own self and the individually constructed reality" (p. 28).

Being a protagonist and an entrepreneur do not only mean planning new projects, creating new sculptures and drawings, producing new concepts, getting involved with technologies, but, above all, "it means modifying reality in order to obtain self-realization from it and offer positive values to the collectivity" (Dolabela, 2003, p. 29). In this sense, the Brazilian educator has mediated the construction of intellectual wealth in children through poetry, art, philosophy and games that impact the daily life, daily life and future of children as entrepreneurs.

The principle of protagonism and entrepreneurship are present in childhood policies¹⁰, however, in my understanding, childhood is still considered an investment that will guarantee a financial return for world economic development. However, in the educational approach of Reggio Emilia/Italy, in which the educator of the Casa da Infância school makes approximations, children are seen as powerful, competent, autonomous subjects and protagonists in the construction of their identity and citizenship. This way of thinking requires visibility by all the protagonists of the school, because only when children become visible in the school context, they come to be understood as competent and powerful and even regulators of a future economic market, but in an intelligent, sustainable and ethically conscious way.

¹⁰ Policies such as: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the National Common Curriculum Bases for Early Childhood Education.

DISCUSSION

From this perspective, it is necessary to build participatory teaching contexts, involving the family and everyone in the school, in offering support so that children's skills can be built for their lives. In this sense, the Brazilian educator, the school and the families recognize children as protagonists of their learning. This recognition ends up guaranteeing an educational practice that provides resources and opportunities in the school and family contexts in which the relationships between children and adults take place. This allows the emergence of valuable experiences in the construction of their self-knowledge and autonomy, privileging self-learning.

To highlight the network of protagonist and entrepreneurial relationship that is established between the educator, the families and the children, I describe an excerpt from the interview in which the strategies and methods used during the educational practice for conflict resolution illustrate the moments in which the children's self-learning occurs. These moments are mediated by the Brazilian educator so that the relationships of daily coexistence enhance the children in relation to confidence, opportunity and time to develop their ideas, their experiences and build concepts of values. In this sense, educator Márcia Santos reported:

[...] So, thinking about this conflict resolution that happens during everyday life, in which ideas and values are different among children. It's just that we start to think together with them about strategies so that they can resolve their conflicts in the best possible way. [...] How did they [...] that we started to think of strategies in a way that they could listen to each other, could have time to talk, you know, could come to a conclusion on how to relate, not only with the other, but with the world, with the family, with the parents, with the siblings (Brazilian Teacher).

With the report of the Brazilian educator, I observe how important she considers conflict mediation in the construction of emotional learning.

The participation of families in the search for teaching strategies is not, according to Fortunati (2021), understood as a complement, but a fundamental element for educational practice during the development of work projects. To this end, the Brazilian educator, the children and the families thought of the strategy called 'conflict resolution table'. In her report, the educator explains how this strategy works:

So, something that happens between us is the conflict resolution table. It's even funny to see very young children in this situation of sitting down to talk even "me, I don't agree with what you said", "oh, I didn't like how you did it. How can we solve this?", "why are you like this with me?", "How can I help you?", [...] before all this, there is that process of them sitting down, of taking time to reflect on their idea and

behavior, moments of pause, time to look at the other, even if they say nothing, but it is a time to be there thinking about it (Brazilian Educator).

In this case, relationships, confrontations, and agreements lead children to elaborate ideas in which the strategies used by each one can find space for expression, and personal growth when it occurs in the individual achievement of new levels of awareness and confidence in their own potentialities (Fortunati, 2021). Educator Márcia Santos continued the report by validating the importance of the resource used by children for their personal growth. She said that she always mediates between the children using the words "[...] *you can also convey this in a drawing, on paper, put your anger out, your emotions*" (Brazilian Educator).

According to Dolabela (2003, p. 59) "it is emotion that brings out the entrepreneurial characteristics inherent to the human species, because how can we assume characteristics without being possessed by the emotion that triggers them?". Thus, the educator considers that many behaviors such as initiative, rebellion against imposed standards, leadership, imagination, energy are present in young children and are behaviors inherent to human beings and that are present in a positive way in the entrepreneur. For this reason, she always thinks about possibilities for emotional learning. According to her, it is necessary to:

[...] to put in the plan of possibilities, learning situations to be carried out together with other educators such as English, possibilities of working with emotions, fantasies and dreams, both individually and in the group. Because children are very young and are beginning to understand how they communicate, how they relate and interact with the group. [...] Thus, the strategy of the conflict resolution table favors democracy, cooperation and for me it is a moment in which it is possible to perceive how wise children are, how they interpret the world (Brazilian Educator).

CONCLUSION

In view of all that has been explained so far, I understand that the educational practices of Educator Márcia Santos are close to the philosophy of Loris Malaguzzi, at the same time that they build her repertoire of knowledge and experiences about childhood, making use of different strategies to favor children's learning. The development of protagonism and the enhancement of children's entrepreneurial behavior is permeated by the protagonist and entrepreneurial profile of the Brazilian educator.

Dolabela (2003) contributes to this thought when he says that: "[...] the entrepreneurial spirit is a potential of any human being and needs some indispensable conditions to materialize and produce effects" (p. 24). In this way, experiences with the

environment, in a sustainable way; permanent research; The favoring of participation and conflict resolution, exemplified by the use of the conflict resolution table, are configured, in this context, as conditions for the materialization of the expansion of children's protagonism and entrepreneurship.

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