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ABSTRACT

Despite evidence of the importance of parent involvement in their children's schools and learning, such involvement is not the norm, and working with parents seems to be one of the main challenges for new teachers. The School-Community Partnership Development (SCPD) at the Teachers Academy for Mathematics and Science is a 3-year process which engages parents and community members in whole school change in the improvement of instruction, especially instruction in math and science. The explicit goals of SCPD are: (1) to facilitate the identification of a core parent/family leadership team within each school; (2) to facilitate the development of a strategic parental/family involvement plan; and (3) to increase the appreciation for and knowledge of math and science among parents and community members. During the first 2 years of the SCPD process, model Parent Facilitators, along with the Parent Teams enlisted from their school communities, attended workshops at the Academy in which they developed strategic planning and other leadership skills, gained knowledge of the structure of Chicago school reform, and learned constructivist approaches to mathematics and science. The SCPD model was piloted at a group of 20 schools beginning in 1993. After 2 years of the process, parents had difficulty translating what they had learned at the Academy into their own contexts, and it was concluded that only a portion of the learning needed could take place at the Academy. Parent Consultants were added to provide ongoing assistance to the schools in the form of Parent Team Support, Resource to the Academy, Formative Evaluation, Family Math and Science Summer Workshop, and Reform Community Involvement. This parent consultant process deepens and extends the new views of home-school relations by providing on-site professional development to parents at the time they most need it: when they are attempting to translate new ideas into new ways of acting at the school; and by explicitly defining parents as consultants to all members of the school community. (Contains 21 references.) (DCP)

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# Parent Consultants for Whole-School Change

Paper Presentation  
as part of  
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*New Views of Home-School Partnership:  
Parents as Consultants*

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## Parent Consultants for Whole-School Change

*“With any [teacher education] student that I feel is at all uncertain about how committed they are to teaching I just tell them to think about working with parents. That’s the real test. Can they deal with parents, who are the often the biggest obstacles to what they’re trying to do.”* (A preservice teacher educator)

### Introduction

If a visitor from another planet were to come to earth to try to understand how we educate our children, one piece of that puzzle would prove particularly confusing: the relationships between parents of children and the schools their children attend. Suppose our visitor looked first to the “official” information on home-school interactions. In most written documents on school change and teacher education she would find references to how important it is that schools and teachers work with parents if they are to educate effectively. They would hear administrators and politicians give speeches describing parents as their children’s “first teacher” and emphasizing the importance of parental participation in education. In teacher education programs and inservices they’d hear ideas for enlisting the support of parents to help teach children reading, math, social studies and science. If our visitor looks over educational research for the past two decades she would see a growing body of evidence showing the influence of parent-school relationships on student achievement. Although she might find an occasional contradictory image, such as those provided by Lightfoot in her 1975 article “Families and Schools: Creative Conflict or Negative Dissonance”, she’s more likely to find descriptions of “links”, “connections”, and “collaborations”. She might also notice a trend in the language on parent-school relationships from descriptions of *parent involvement* in children’s education, to recent emphases *on partnerships* between home and school. From this part of the investigation our visitor might surmise that

parent-teacher partnership is a taken-for-granted in America's schooling which has grown stronger over the past few decades.

However, if this visitor were to go to schools and listen, the stories she would hear would be far different. Our visitor would be likely to hear teachers making statements such as these: "I can never get the parents to do anything." "The truth is, the parents who care about their children send their kids to parochial school not here." "If only the parents cared more about their children's education." "Everytime we try to do anything new at the school we have to fight with the parents." "I try to talk with parents at Open House night, but they're not even paying attention. They're thinking about whether their slip is showing, or what they're going to watch on TV when they get home." "When I first started teaching another teacher told me, 'You gotta watch out for the parents. They'll start talking to each other, and then you're really in trouble'" (Hulsebosch, 1992, 1995b, 1996). If this visitor spends more time in schools she would be likely to see parents and teachers sitting awkwardly across from one another at tables, talking in tense tones, appearing relieved when the exchange was completed. While parent-teacher relationships are idealized in most literature on teaching, learning and school improvement, anyone who spends much time in schools is aware of the contrast between the "official" and the "unofficial" stances on parents.

### **Assumptions Underlying Home-School Relationships**

Ideas of how home and school should interact are as varied as the people involved in school communities: the students, principals, families, community members and researchers. Yet, even as educators talk about partnerships with parents and communities, they seldom acknowledge the assumptions that underlie their efforts or the requirements for a real partnership: assumptions regarding parents, and assumptions regarding partnerships.

Assumptions regarding parents Whether schools are trying to recruit more parent volunteers, request support for homework, achieve a good turn-out on open house night, or enlist parents as members of local school councils, the focus is on the needs and practices of schools. The model of learning is one in which knowledge is transmitted from teachers to children, and from the schools to parents to children (Auerbach, 1990). The assumption is that school personnel, especially those in urban areas, possess all the wisdom about teaching and learning. The unilateral focus on the value of schools for communities and their children is often rooted in a myopic belief that families, communities, and children are deficient in the qualities, traits, and skills needed to educate. Environmental risks encountered in big cities translate into student deficits, especially when the students are poor and African-American or Latino. Schools then attempt to "overcome" what they see as the deficits of students (and their families) by developing programs to compensate for what they believe to be lacking. These programs are often based in a skills approach which aims to "break down" learning (Haberman, 1991). School personnel, operating from racism and other biases, overlook the real capacities, experiences, and culture that students and their families offer schools.

Assumptions regarding partnerships Partnership is based on the premise that collaborating partners have a common basis for action (in this case the positive growth of children), as well as on a sense of mutuality that supports their joint ventures (Swick, 1992). In other words, in a partnership both parties consent to the relationship, look to one another as a resource, and derive benefit from the interaction. In parent-school partnerships, however, the actual relationships between families and schools often reflect distrust in families' abilities in their commitment to education. This is especially true in the inner-city and in schools with economically poor students who are African-American and/or recent immigrants where the assumption is that parents will be apathetic,

adversaries, or challenges to be dealt with by schools (Lightfoot, 1975a; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon, 1994).

In the last two decades an opposing group of educational activists, authors, and researchers has been discussing education and schooling in economically poor and/or ethnically diverse communities from a different perspective. Instead of *breaking down* school learning, Clark (1983), Cummins, (1989), Delgado-Gaitan (1990), Delpit (1995), and Moll, (1992) all discuss the need to *break up* the hegemony of school-like practices by focusing learning on the assets students and their families bring to school. In education based on an "asset model" parents and communities are understood to be equal contributors of understanding, knowledge, and skills to the educative process. As equal contributors, parents and schools have a foundation for mutuality in their interactions which opens the door to new (and true) partnership between home and school.

### Methodology

The data reported here is part of a larger ethnographic study which was initiated in the summer of 1992 in order to document the evolution and influence of the School-Community Partnership Development unit (SCPD) within a larger school reform organization-- the Teachers Academy for Mathematics and Science. Forty-six Chicago school communities have enlisted the support of the Teachers Academy and SCPD for school improvement. Of these 46 schools approximately one third are on Illinois' academic watch list, meaning that reading and mathematics scores on standardized tests persist in remaining in the lower quartile. The families, working class and low income, whose children attend these schools are predominantly African-American and Latino. In the first three years over 400 parents were involved in some aspect of SCPD. The key informants for this study have been the 90 parent facilitators who link their school communities and the Teachers Academy.

Linda Logan and Bruce Rickley, two of the authors of this paper, are community organizers and Chicago Public School parents who are active in their children's schools and full-time staff members with the SCPD. Pat Hulsebosch, the third author, is a university-based evaluation consultant to the Academy who has typically spent one day a week, for four years (1992 to 1996) participating in SCPD meetings, workshops, and training sessions at the Academy and meeting with Linda and Bruce to discuss the progress of SCPD. In addition to fieldnotes from participant observation, data has included program records and documents, surveys, and semi-structured interviews with SCPD staff and parents.

During the first year data collection focused on planning and piloting various elements of the model for partnership development. In the second, third, and fourth years data was collected as Linda and Bruce tested the model. Throughout these years SCPD was continuously assessing the effects and revising the model as a new group (or cluster) of schools began the process (see Hulsebosch, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994a, 1995a). The chart below outlines SCPD activities and data collection over four years.

### DATA COLLECTION: 1992 to 1996

<u>Year</u>	<u>SCPD Activity</u>	<u>Type of Data</u>			
		<u>Fldnts</u>	<u>Docs</u>	<u>Srvy</u>	<u>Interviews</u> <u>Staff</u> <u>Parents</u>
1992-93:	Planning & Piloting: Family Math and Family Science Workshops piloted; Model developed	X	X	X	X
1993-94:	SCPD begins development with 20 schools at the Academy	X	X	X	X

DATA COLLECTION: 1992- 1996 (continued)

Year	SCPD Activity	Type of Data				
		Fldnts	Docs	Srvy	Interviews Staff	Parents
1994-95:	SCPD continues with the 20 Cluster A schools and begins development with 15 new schools (Cluster B schools)	X	X	X	X	X
1995-96:	SCPD continues with Cluster A & B schools and begins development with 11 new schools (Cluster C schools) <i>Parent Consultant Development begins</i>	X	X	X	X	X
1996-97	SCPD continues with Cluster B & C schools along with six returning Cluster A schools. <i>Six Parent Consultants begin providing service to 24 schools</i>	X	X	X	X	X

This presentation will present some preliminary case studies of parents coaching other parents at school sites. Through these cases we intend to extend the understanding of the challenges and supports in school-community partnerships, and to discuss the potential of *parents as consultants* to schools.

### School-Community Partnership Development

This presentation will describe one aspect of a model of professional development whose goal is to develop school-community partnership for whole school change. The model, called School-Community Partnership Development (SCPD), follows current thinking in professional development: it is long-term, constructivist, and combines inservice with on-site coaching (see Table 1 for an overview of the process). However, unlike most development initiatives aimed at school change, this initiative is *for and by parents*.

SCPD is one unit within a school reform organization--the Teachers Academy for Mathematics and Science--in which mathematics and science are used as the vehicle for whole school change with all members of urban school communities. The School Community Partnership Development (SCPD) of the Academy provides professional development to parents which parallel the efforts of other Academy units with teachers and principals.

The School-Community Partnership Development at the Teachers Academy for Mathematics and Science is a three year process which engages parents and community members in whole school change towards the improvement of instruction, especially instruction in math and science. The explicit goals of SCPD are: 1) to facilitate the identification of a core parent/family leadership team within each school; 2) to facilitate the development of a strategic parental/family involvement plan; and 3) to increase the appreciation for and knowledge of math and science among parents and community members. The implicit goals of SCPD are to 1) to tap into and cultivate parental and community desire for the best possible education for their children; 2) to cultivate the capacity of parents for school leadership; and 3) to equalize relationships among members of the school community (i.e., parents, teachers, administrators). It is in the pursuit of these goals that parents become catalysts and levers for change in their school communities.

During the first two years of the SCPD model Parent Facilitators<sup>1</sup>, along with the Parent Teams enlisted from their school communities, attend workshops at the Academy in which they develop strategic planning and other leadership skills, gain knowledge of the structures of Chicago school reform (i.e., the Reform Law, School Improvement Plans,

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<sup>1</sup>Parent Facilitators consist of two parents recruited by the principal and, where available, the School Community Representative (SCR). Parent Teams consist of ten parents and include the Parent Facilitators. All interested parents are welcome.

budgeting, and Local School Councils), and learn constructivist approaches to mathematics and science<sup>2</sup> (Hulsebosch, 1994a). In addition, the parent teams are expected to conduct seventy-two hours of *Family Math* and *Family Science* workshops at their schools and plan ways to institutionalize parent partnership in their schools. Development through the Academy sessions is supplemented with ad hoc “coaching” through telephone calls to Linda and Bruce, and annual school site visits.

### The Parent Consultant Process

The School-Community Partnership Development model, developed during the 1992-1993 academic year, was piloted on a group of twenty schools beginning in Fall of 1993. These schools were to go through a process of development at the Teachers Academy, while simultaneously putting into practice the leadership and training skills they were learning out in their school communities. Parents who had expressed an interest in becoming active in the school were chosen by principals to become SCPD Parent Facilitators. Parent Facilitators attended monthly sessions at the academy and were encouraged to attend Family Math and Family Science Leadership Sessions at least once during the year. Meanwhile the Facilitators were asked to organize a Parent Team back at their school which would strategically plan for parent partnership with the school. After two years of this process Linda and Bruce realized that parents had difficulty translating what they had learned at the Academy into their own contexts. They would run into obstacles, conflicts, and limitations. Some of these challenges they were able to meet through problem-solving with other parent facilitators at meetings. Others they resolved with coaching (by telephone and before and after scheduled meetings) by Linda and

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<sup>2</sup>Parent Facilitators attend monthly sessions while the full Parent Team meet at the Academy quarterly. In addition, they are asked to attend Family Math and Family Science Leadership Sessions (two full days each) once.

Bruce (for specific examples see the cases described in Hulsebosch, Logan and Rickley, 1996). But often they were unable to move their school communities forward towards any real change for partnership. Again and again facilitators would talk in meetings about how much more difficult it was to use the strategies they were learning out in the complex world of their schools. Frequently parents, unsure of their own abilities and knowledge, would ask Linda and Bruce to come out to a school: to lead a workshop, talk to a principal, describe the process to a Local School Council meeting, or meet with a parent team. Linda and Bruce would honor these requests as often as they could, always doing so as a coach, alongside of the parent, rather than as the "expert". In the second year of the process Linda and Bruce institutionalized an annual school visit which would enable them to meet the people the facilitators were talking about, answer any questions, and assess progress.

Over three years the number of schools grew from 20 to 35, and eventually to 46. Now, more than ever, a once a year visit coupled with ad hoc assistance was not meeting the needs of all schools. After three years of struggling to respond to the concerns of parent facilitators for assistance out in their communities, Linda and Bruce began to see that there was an important link missing in the process. They realized that only a portion of the learning that they hoped for could take place in a classroom at the Academy. Here parents could learn facilitation skills and could even practice them in simulations with other parents. Here they could hear resource people talk about school reform laws and community organizing. They could also share and strategize about challenges they were facing back at their school communities. And, perhaps most important, they could gain inspiration, encouragement, and support from others who were facing the same kinds of challenges in their schools. But when they returned to their communities they were sometimes overwhelmed by what seemed like an insurmountable task: to change their school so as to support partnerships with parents. Linda and Bruce members realized they

alone could not provide adequate resources for the kinds of learning and action that they asked for from the parent facilitators. Furthermore, although they, themselves are parents of students in the Chicago schools, they knew that in this process they were one step removed from change these school communities. They believed that what was needed were parents who would be available as resources to the schools as they worked towards partnership. Since these parents would be providing advice and coaching based on their knowledge, experience, and education in parent partnership they were called “parent consultants”.

During this, the first year of Parent Consultants, there are six consultants, each of whom is responsible for providing assistance to four schools. Consultants constructed and committed to a set of key values, as well as the key beliefs of the Teachers Academy, all of which provide a framework for SCPD. These values: a) Praising others; b) High expectations; c) Encourage parent involvement; d) Team work; and e) We may fight, but do not fall out. Consultants attend monthly sessions which, in addition to providing forums for problem-solving on the work in which they’re currently engaged, develops new knowledge and skills and strengthens old ones. These skills range from *conflict resolution* to *brainstorming* to *using Power Point for presentations*. As they continue to learn and develop their skills, Parent Consultants provide coaching and mentoring to schools and other interested parties in the following areas:

- 1) *Parent Team Support*: Parent Consultants might assist Parent Facilitators in planning and/or attend local team meetings and workshops as well as assisting Parent Facilitators in recruiting team members. Their presence provides a source of support and information. They might also co-facilitate a meeting or co-teach a workshop.
- 2) *Resource to Academy Math and Science Faculty*: As the focus of SCPD and the Academy shifts to greater partnership between teachers and parents, the Parent

Consultants have begun to act as a liaison and sounding board to Academy faculty who are doing parallel development work in math and science with teachers.

3) *Formative Evaluation*: Parent Consultants will, in the future, participate in “Grand Rounds” in which the progress of specific schools in school reform is discussed by all Academy personnel working in those schools. They are also part of a team which is developing and piloting a School Organization Assessment Profile (SOAP).

4) *Family Math and Family Science Summer Workshop*: Consultants are co-facilitators of these week-long workshops for Chicago area parents and their children.

5) *Reform Community Involvement*: Like many school districts (especially in major urban areas), Chicago has a variety of reform and/or partnership initiatives, such as tutor and mentor projects. In addition, with the current emphasis at the national level (e.g., “Strong Families, Strong Schools”, Dept. of Education, 1993), various groups express an interest in engaging parents in the education of children (e.g., Regional Educational Laboratories and businesses). Many of these initiatives contact the Teachers Academy for input and support. Parent Consultants act as liaisons between the Academy and these initiatives, making presentations, attending conferences, and staffing tables from which they demonstrate hands-on math and science activities.

### Consulting With and By Parents

*That's why I believe people should always testify in what you're going through because a lot of people are going through the same thing and they don't know how you made it through and they don't feel like they can make it through.*

Mary Bradford<sup>3</sup>: SCPD Parent Consultant (Hulsebosch, 1996)

With nine children in the public school system, Mary Bradford brought a great deal of experience with her to her role as Parent Facilitator for Danforth School. Yet, she was

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<sup>3</sup>All names of schools are pseudonyms. Parents were given the option of having their real name used, or of using a fictitious name. At her request we use Mary Bradford's real name.

typical of many mothers in that she often wasn't aware of how much she did know, or how and where to put it to use. Although Mary's husband had always been the one to take a more active role in the schools ( most recently as President of the Local School Council of Danforth) by the spring of 1996 Mary was beginning to see herself as a leader in her own right. Mary says that before then, "I thought that parents were just parents, but I found out that we are not just parents anymore."

Mary began as a Parent Facilitator for the first group of schools (Cluster A) to work with SCPD in Fall of 1993. Initially Mary was quiet when she came to Facilitator meetings, but slowly began to talk about situations in which she and her children had been involved at the school, asking questions, offering suggestions. When Linda and Bruce put out a flier offering "Capacity-Building Opportunities for Parent Facilitators", Mary was one of the first to sign on. In the early years of SCPD these "opportunities" included committees at the Academy to plan future Parent Team meetings and edit a *Voices of Parents* newsletter for SCPD participants. When organizations (such as the *Tutor-Mentee Connection*) contacted SCPD to ask if they could provide a speaker or workshop leader, these too became "capacity-building opportunities". Over her two and a half years as Parent Facilitator Mary took advantage of many of these opportunities. Between 1993 and 1996 she helped plan and facilitate Parent Team meetings and Summer Institutes at the Academy, researched and written articles for the newsletter, and participated in school site assessment visits with Linda and Bruce to other schools. Back at Danforth she had also led two series of math and science workshops at her school. Perhaps even more important, she moved from a passive to an active role in her relationship to the school. Mary talks about this change:

*At our board [Local School Council] meetings it was a time when the parents would just sit there and never have a word or [a] say so until that meeting was over...So one day I went to the meeting and I stood and I told them, 'Why are we*

*here. We're not voicing our opinion until the end, but it's too late then.' I said, 'I feel like after each question's put up we should have our say so whether we want it passed or not, because we're parents...And they changed their ways so now parents see if they come they have can have a voice.. (Mary Bradford, Danforth Elementary parent; Hulsebosch, 1996, p. 11)*

She goes on to say, "If you knew me a couple of years ago I was a quiet person. I sat back and took whatever, but now I know that I have power, and I have say, so I'm going to use it."

When Linda and Bruce realized that it was not humanly possible for them to respond to the needs of *all* the developing Parent Teams they added the "Parent Consultant Development Process" to their list of opportunities for the Parent Facilitators. Once again Mary signed on and, within a few months, was finding time in her already busy schedule for additional development sessions at the Academy and making the commitment to become a Parent Consultant to schools beyond her own.

The plan was to spend nine months or so in "preservice" development before asking the new consultants to assist other Parent Facilitators and Parent Teams. But in Spring of 1996 Joanna James, one of Mary's colleagues from Princeton Elementary, another Cluster A school, was in desperate need of assistance. Joanna had a principal who, after two and a half years of involvement with SCPD, was finally ready to support a parent initiative at Princeton; she had allocated money, time, and space for parent led *Family Math and Science Workshops* at the school. But Joanna had felt unable to recruit additional parents to work with her to conduct these workshops and the partnership process was floundering. Mary had recently been part of a school site visit to Princeton with Linda and Bruce, during which she had asked some questions and offered ideas which Joanna and the principal of Princeton had found helpful. It seemed natural, then, for Linda and Bruce to approach Mary to ask if she'd consider working with Joanna at Princeton to plan and lead these workshops. Mary describes the workshops:

*It was a little scary because I didn't know none of the parents, but once I just opened up ...and it was fun. There were teachers there, there was the principal and there was the parents, and they both-- all of them --were saying, "Can you teach me? Can you tell me how to do this?" And I said, "No, but I would like you to try and in the end I'll give you a hint, but I'm not going to tell you.*

(Hulsebosch, 1996)

Because Mary came out to the school as a "consultant" parents, as well as teachers, looked to her for advice and answers. Because Joanna knew and trusted Mary she was willing to move ahead with the *Family Math and Family Science Workshops* with Mary at her side. Out of these workshops came Princeton school's first Parent Team.

## Sowing the Seeds for Parent-Teacher Partnership

*Calling on All Silent Minorities*

HEY

C'MON

COME OUT

WHEREVER YOU ARE

WE NEED TO HAVE THIS MEETING

AT THIS TREE

AIN' EVEN BEEN

PLANTED

YET

(June Jordan, 1989)

Parent-teacher partnerships seldom take root in schools. In fact, in most schools parent-teacher partnerships "ain' even been planted". How does one go about planting these partnerships?. This paper suggests that a shift in perspectives --about parents and about partnerships--must first be sowed. The Parent Consultant process of the School-Community Partnership Development model is one way of sowing these seeds. Parents, along with teachers, have unarticulated assumptions about their value (or lack of it) to schools. Before they can use their own knowledge, resources, skills, and power they must see themselves as "more than *just* parents". Therefore, the first two of three years of the SCPD model are intended to cultivate and further develop the capacities that parents

already have so that parents can both offer and expect mutuality in their relationships with schools. It is only in the third year, after parents have shifted their assumptions, that the SCPD model focuses on efforts to act in partnership with school personnel. But as professional developers have seen with other members of the school community, it is not enough to only shift your paradigm to a new way of thinking about what occurs in schools. When the time comes to change practice, ongoing support in the form of coaching is needed to get through the many obstacles.

The Parent Consultant process deepens and extends the new views of home-school relations in two ways. First, it provides on-site professional development to parents at the time they most need it: when they are attempting to translate new ideas into new ways of acting at the school. Second, the model explicitly defines parents as *consultants* to all members of the school community. Principals, teachers, and parents alike are made aware that parents can be in roles which are dramatically different than those which had previously been considered appropriate (basic needs, communicating, volunteering, supporting at home) (Epstein, 1995). In this role, as consultant, they “testify in what they’ve gone through”, as well as offer advice, opinions, and ideas based on a body of knowledge and experience which they bring to the setting. In doing so, they bring something to exchange--a basis for reciprocity -- and the possibility of true partnership.

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	Parent Consultants	
Change in School-Community Culture		☐ Family Math Workshops
		☐ Family Science Workshops
		☐ Parent Team Meetings
School-Community Organizing		☑ Parent Summer Institute
		☑ Core Team Meetings
School Improvement Planning		☑ Parent Facilitator Sessions
		☑ Family Math Leadership Workshops
		☑ Family Science Leadership Workshops
		☑ School Leadership Team
Change in Instruction		*Parent Facilitator
		*Parent Facilitator
Development activity at the Academy		*School-Community Representative
		*Teachers
Development activity at the school site		*Administrators

**Table 1: School-Community Partnership Development Mode**

Parent Consultants for Whole School Change; AERA, 1997; Hulsebosch, Logan and Rickley!



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