How can we evaluate the long-term impact of environmental education sector provision?

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FORUM

Conference Report

11 October 2006

Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Oxford Island
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### Workshop Sessions

1. Identify ways in which Forum members can assess the impacts of their programmes
2. Identify ways to look at long term impacts of ESD awareness in the revised curriculum
3. How do we take the lessons learnt in the classroom and make sure that they are put in to practise at home in order to positively impact upon the environment now!

### Feedback

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Lough Neagh Discovery Centre
Introduction – Background Papers

The Environmental Education Forum’s Autumn Conference was held on Wednesday 11 October 2006 at the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Oxford Island Nature Reserve, Craigavon, Co. Armagh. The purpose of the day was to bring together groups, both statutory and voluntary, and those working in the field of Environmental Education to look at, discuss and explore how we can evaluate the long-term impact of environmental education sector provision. There were to be three expected outcomes for the day:

1. Identify ways in which Forum members can assess the impacts of their programmes
2. Identify ways to look at long term impacts of ESD awareness in the revised curriculum
3. How do we take the lessons learnt in the classroom and make sure that they are put into practice at home in order to positively impact upon the environment now!

Welcome, Introduction and Background

Robert Scott
Conservation and Promotion Manager
Belfast City Council (BCC)

Robert Scott introduced the Conference with a welcome to delegates and a thank you to Oxford Island for providing the venue for the day’s proceedings.

Robert then presented a background to the theme for the day. It was commented that the environmental education sector need to be assessing and reviewing our work to assess and determine whether or not our programmes are leading to any long term change in behaviour and attitudes to the environment.

The dangers are all too evident, namely that sustainable development messages are being ‘left behind in the classroom’ when children leave formal education. This conference aims to address some of those concerns and point organisations to a variety of ways in which we can evaluate the effectiveness of environmental education in the long-term.
There once was a wee kid called Ryan,
Who was not renowned for his tryin’,
But a school learning spree,
With the RSPB,
Means he now can name all the birds flyin’.

Is Estimation just Guesstimation?

Catherine Gleave
R.S.P.B

Catherine Gleave from the R.S.P.B introduced her presentation with a look back at the history of Environmental Education over the past 40 years and commenting that in 2007 the RSPB itself will celebrate 40 years of Field Teaching provision in the U.K. In Northern Ireland the R.S.P.B has been delivering teaching work for the past 15 years. All of the R.S.P.B’s programmes are constantly evaluated and reviewed but, as Catherine pointed out, what has this actually told us?

It has certainly told us about the quantity and quality of provision and the Curriculum relevance and knowledge gained by participants, but has it told us about the long-term impact of environmental education experiences and whether those experiences lead to behavioural change.

Catherine posed the question ‘Is our environment in better shape after 40 years of Environmental Education?’

After all we still have problems of: Habitat loss
Species decline
Resource consumption
Climate change

Therefore we seriously have to ask ourselves “Are we doing any good?” Is the investment in environmental education really the way to address these problems? or are there other or better ways - e.g. technology?

“Despite the optimistic tone adopted, quite rightly, by many environmental educators, it is nevertheless clear that education is far from realising its maximum potential in terms of helping people understand and appreciate the environment and their role with respect to sustainable development” (Palmer, 1999).

Catherine then went on to talk about what we want our sustainable citizens to look like 40 years from now, what characteristics do we want them to display? e.g. have a broad understanding of how the environment works, be able to translate this understanding into positive action for the environment, make educated, committed decisions for the benefit of the environment and be able to influence other people around them. One of the main ways to achieve this is by using the outdoors as a catalyst for behavioural change in later life. The R.S.P.B is carrying out some research into this through the T.E.D education database. The framework now exists through the NI Biodiversity Strategy and the NI Sustainable Development Strategy for us all to make this difference and affect this change.

Catherine finished her talk by outlining some of the challenges for EEF members:

- Refine our current evaluation processes
- Explore how we, as providers, can work more effectively within the secondary and higher education sectors
- More local short-term research and the integration of current research findings into EE programmes
- Longitudinal study into the impact of EE
There once was a student called Claire,  
Who was always washing her hair,  
When her drier blew a fuse,  
She soon learned to use  
The wind blowing freely out there.

**Education is not enough:**  
The role of values in the transition to sustainability;  
lessons from a study of objections to wind energy’

**Dr John Barry**  
School of Politics and  
International Studies and Philosophy  
Queen’s University, Belfast

Dr John Barry gave a talk on the role of values in the transition to sustainability. He started by detailing the research that had been carried out, the main aim of which was to explore discourses of opposition and support for renewable energy and to map, describe and interpret the arguments, positions and values of key stakeholders in the debate over wind power. The study was NOT about making a judgement either for or against wind energy. The study employed two research strategies:

- Detailed analysis of documents that frame the wind power debate and national and local levels.
- Detailed case study of the Tunes Plateau, using Q-methodology.

Dr Barry also set the research into its wider context, namely the importance of energy as a key societal challenge: ‘Peak oil’; ‘energy security’; climate change, the nuclear debate, high level of public debate on energy and the renewables sector etc.

The research made various assumptions including the following:

- Key issue is ‘trust’ between citizens and public institutions, scientific community etc.
- Paradox of an increasingly technologically dependent society becoming more sceptical about technological innovations and developments.
- Unhelpfulness of ‘NIMBY’ in explaining local opposition to wind farms.
- The conventional view that more ‘information’ and (authoritative) ‘knowledge’ is the solution to the ‘problem’ of local opposition is questionable.
- The debate is not simply one of knowledge vs. ignorance, but of clash of values.
- Importance of replacing antagonism of ‘supporter’ vs. ‘opposer’ with more nuanced sense of varieties of positions within and between these positions.
- Potential of shared ‘problem-solving’ approach through deliberation and identification of shared values.

The research found that

- Most support idea of renewable energy and distance themselves from climate change deniers.
- Most see objection as a matter of principle and not open to compromise.
- Most recognise the need for vocal opposition to overcome assumed pro-development mainstream.
- All feel strongly about visual quality of coast and not worth sacrifice for wind power.
- Difference on basis of objection – some concerned about specific scheme, some about wind power itself.
- While all held concerns over visual quality, some had wider concerns such as economic impacts.
- Some focused on long term impacts, some on immediate effects.
The understanding of the research led Dr Barry’s team to look at the nature and role of values in environmental issues.

- The nature of participation and discursive policy debate.
- Failure to appreciate the nature and value of objection and critical debate.
- Parity required of the social, as well as environmental dimension to sustainability.
- The importance of tone and manner of stakeholder debate.
- Centrality of establishing trust early on
- Encourage greater community ‘buy in’ and ownership in the project rather than post-hoc ‘compensation’ – community centres etc.

Conclusions of Research

- Key is engaging with peoples’ values and not just providing expert delivered education/awareness-raising.
- Consensus is a naive aspiration – but striving for negotiated settlement may be possible.
- There is a need for a paradigm shift in participation: accommodating objectivity but acknowledging subjectivity

Dr John Barry speaking at the EEF Conference
There once was a boy called John Duff,  
Who found the sciences tough,  
But one lesson with Liz,  
And now he’s a whiz -  
And does all this environment stuff.

Attitude and Behavioural Change

Liz Wallace  
Magilligan Field Centre

Liz Wallace from the Magilligan Field Centre (WELB) began her presentation by looking at what is meant by attitudes and behaviours, attitudes being a way of behaving either positively or negatively and behaviour being the actions or reactions of people. Liz mentioned that values inform behaviour through a variety of mechanisms including:

- **Building Bonds:** Through teamwork and collaboration  
  Competence at promoting cooperation  
  Team-Building
- **Communication:** Skill at listening and sending out clear convincing well tuned consistent messages  
  UN Decade for ESD 2005-2014
- **Change Catalyst:** Proficiency in initiating new ideas and leading people in new direction
- **Conflict Management:** The ability to orchestrate resolutions
- **Direct Experience:** First hand practical experiences  
  Multiple intelligences  
  Opportunities to make connections  
  Consistent messages
- **Developing Others:** Bolstering the abilities of others through feedback / guidance
- **Influence:** The ability to wield a range of persuasive tactics
- **Visionary Leadership:** The ability to take charge and inspire with a Compelling Vision

Liz went on to describe a compelling future for EE / ESD in Northern Ireland through:

- Sustainable Development Strategy leading to sustainable consumption and production, learning and communication and governance and sustainable development

Learning and Communication

- Sustainable Development to be formally incorporated into the NI school curriculum from 2007
- Provision for all teacher trainees to be given ESD awareness training
- All schools to receive ESD 2005 guidance
- All school development plans to incorporate ESD 2005 guidance
- BY 2009 25% of all NI schools to achieve Eco-Schools accreditation
Biodiversity

- Biodiversity Implementation Plan
- DE and CCEA will seek to ensure that opportunities to promote Biodiversity is explicitly stated in teacher guidance materials
- Maximising opportunities for Biodiversity and its understanding through school ground management

Liz then outlined the ‘Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework and the ‘Taking Responsibility and the Five C’s’

Education outside the Classroom

The most memorable learning experiences, those that stay with us into adulthood and influence our decisions in the future, are those that require us to do something ourselves.

“I hear, I forget, I see, I remember, I do, I understand” – Ancient Chinese Proverb

Great Expectations

- Concern for others and tolerance
- Curiosity and creativity
- Determination and resourcefulness
- Integrity and commitment
- Optimism and self belief
- Personal responsibility and a sense of community
- Pragmatism and openness to new ideas

A case study from St Patrick’s Primary School was given to demonstrate the above themes. St Patrick’s had installed a wind turbine on the school grounds and there emerged from the project a whole range of benefits for the school and pupils in terms of learning and teaching, these included:

- Sustainable energy source for the school
- Catalyst for activities in Maths, Science and Technology, The World Around Us and Energy Conservation
- Raising of self esteem through the use of Video conferencing and other mediums
- Raise awareness in terms of Green Issues within the school and their local government
- A landmark icon for the school

Quality Programmes

- Education outside the classroom has to carefully planned, delivered and followed up, so that the experience is engaging for all participants, and reinforces classroom learning
- Collaborative Pilot projects with CASS
- Quality Assurance – ‘Quality Mark’
There once was a school that used joules
of energy from fossil fuels,
But a different Cole,
Help them alter their goal,
And be-come one of the ecoschools.

Is Eco-Schools Working?

Ian Cole
(Tidy Northern Ireland)

Ian began his talk on Eco-Schools by detailing what has been happening with the programme in Northern Ireland at present. Currently over 300 schools have registered for the programme, with 120 obtaining their Bronze award, 69 the Silver award and 93 receiving the Green Flag - of which 19 have permanent flag status.

Ian commented that the award is school’s does have an effect on pupils overall environmental awareness, with recycling levels of glass, paper/cardboard and aluminium along with levels of home composting being higher within the homes of Eco-Schools students than within the homes of non Eco-Schools students. As a result of the scheme 20% of waste has been diverted away from landfill of schools in the programme. The theme of energy conservation in schools was cited as being one topic that pupils take on board and influence parents in the home.

80% of eco-school students will influence their parents on environmental issues and 96% of students believe that they needed to do something to care for the environment, the main problem being Litter!

Ian went on to talk about how most political parties in the U.K are now ‘up to speed’ on local and global environmental issues and that the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties are at least on the public face of it acknowledging the seriousness of issues such as climate change, the point was also made that there appears to be little or no recognition to these issues from the main local political parties.

Ian concluded his talk pointing out that the pupils that left school in 1999 are 21 now, and in 1996 are now 24. They are influencing what happens at the present time. They are the adults who are now offsetting their CO2 emissions, Recycling more - 23% UK wide and reducing energy usage - solar and wind power increasing - 10% this year.

Some of this success is indeed down to the Eco-Schools programme. This influence will increase over time. This year alone 200,000 students will leave Eco-Schools world-wide. There is a lot more to be done but great potential to positively impact on the awareness and understanding of young people as to their role as future contributors to a sustainable society.
Steps in the Process of Life Long Learning

Elaine Nevin
(Director of Eco-Unesco)

Elaine Nevin gave an overview of Eco-Unesco, having been established in 1986 and having the remit of Environmental Education and Youth Organisation. It is affiliated to the World Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations (WFUCA) and specialises in environmental education and environmental work with young people.

Elaine then detailed the Young Environmentalist Awards programme and outlined its aims and objectives. The YEA scheme is an all Ireland award that facilitates young people in protecting their local environment, preventing environmental damage and promote environmental awareness.

All Eco-Unesco programmes are evaluated through the following methods:

- Internally to ensure programmes are effective and are reaching our targets, through Annual implementation plans with goals and success measures and by quarterly reviews and evaluation of our work.
- Evaluations within programmes such as Teacher and Youth Leader Evaluation forms following all activity e.g. training, workshops, participation in YEA. Student Evaluation Forms following all activities and end of programme evaluations carried out Support Service.

Students are asked what did they learn by doing the project, what skills did they develop, what benefits do they think the project has brought their friends, school, youth group or community and do they do anything differently or think differently now than before doing a project. Teacher or group leaders are given a Learner assessment on ownership, knowledge development, skills development and personal development.

The YEA programme is a step in the process of life long learning, it encourages active citizenship – long term, develops environmental skills and affects personal development and community behavioural change. It also complements green/eco schools – sews seeds of environmental interest in young people and helps maintain interest once schools have achieved eco-school.

Other long term benefits of the programme include skills based as apposed to subject focused. Cross curricular.
Prepare students for working world e.g. managing projects, working in teams, report writing, seeing how systems work, confidence building.
YEA projects build upon prior knowledge and formative experiences of students in relation to Environmental Education.

There once was a class who was bored
And renowned as an unruly horde,
But they worked as a team
On an YEA scheme,
And thus won a Unesco award.
Available Funding from Big Lottery (BBC Breathing Places)
Jill Kennedy
(Big Lottery Fund)

Jill Kennedy from the Big Lottery Fund gave the assembled delegates an overview of the current funding available for groups in Northern Ireland.

The overall mission of the Big Lottery Fund is to ‘bring real improvements to communities and to the lives of people most in need’. There are three themes and outcomes linked to the funding streams, these being:

- Community learning and creating learning
- Promoting community safety and cohesion
- Promoting well being

For the period of 2006-2009 there is £90 Million available through the Big Lottery Fund these are divided over several different grant programmes.

Improving Community Buildings

- Improving Community Buildings is a one-off refurbishment programme aimed at enhancing the quality and use of community venues across Northern Ireland. We anticipate a very high demand for this programme and we foresee funding approximately 100 projects. This will be a very competitive programme. Grants from £25,000 to £50,000 will be awarded to community based organisations. The total project cost cannot be over £75,000. All costs including VAT and contingency. Planning permission and building control approvals must be in place at the time of application. Applications must be submitted by 24 May 2007 at 5pm at the latest.

Strategic Programmes

- Safe and Well and Live and Learn are two strategic programmes which we will launch this Autumn. Together they will have a budget of over £30 million in Northern Ireland. Under these programmes, we will make a smaller number of larger grants. The grant size will be around £1 million. These grants will be available to partnerships that comprise all the sectors.

- Live and Learn will launch in October and will focus on community learning and well-being. Safe and Well will launch in November and will focus on supporting people to have a better quality of life through living in better quality communities. If you would be interested in finding out more on these programmes please request to be added to our mailing list in writing—you can fill out a form with me.

Big Trust Fund

- BIG Trust Fund is designed to support change in organisations in Northern Ireland's voluntary and community sector through a period of significant restructuring and rationalisation. It is a long-term investment, possibly up to ten years, to support all the changes that will need to happen to the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. It is likely to launch early in 2007.

Reaching Communities NI

- This programme is for you to tell us what projects you want funded as long as your project aims to meet a clear need in your community and also meets at least one of our key outcomes mentioned earlier.
There is £18 million available until 2009.
Minimum grant size is £100,000 with the maximum we will award is £500,000.
And projects can be funded for up to five years and we don’t anticipate funding projects for less than 3 years.
The next full application deadline is 2 May 2007 and we recommend Outline Proposals are received 3 months in advance. There are further deadlines in September 2007 and in May and September of 2008. The programme will close to applications in September 2008.

Awards For All

- Awards for All is a joint Lottery grants scheme aimed at local communities. From April 2006, Awards for All Northern Ireland will give grants from £500 to £10,000 and in 2006-07 we have £5.35 million available.
- It's aim is to help not - for profit organisations run projects where the beneficiaries live in Northern Ireland and which:
  - Bring people together and increase community activity
  - Involve more people in a wide range of community activities
  - Increase skill and activity
  - Improve quality of life
  - Organisations cannot be in receipt of more than £10,000 of Awards for All grants in any 12-month period, from the date of first award (either via single or multiple awards)
- Projects only hold one award at a time.

Big Deal

- Fund projects that help young people to make a difference in their own life and to the lives of others.
- The Big deal can only make awards directly to individual and informal groups of children and young people aged 0-25. An individual can apply for awards of £500 and a group can apply for an award between £500 and £2,500. Outline Proposal Forms must be in by 30 September 2009 and you should allow 3 months for a decision to be made.

Breathing Places

A breathing place is a green space that benefits wildlife and the local community. The Breathing Places grants programme is a UK wide small grants programme, developed in partnership with the BBC. It complements the BBC's Breathing Places campaign by providing funding for small groups inspired by the campaign.

The Breathing Places grants programme has two aims, to:
  - Increase participation and access to local breathing places by encouraging people to become actively involved in them, and by supporting activities that are open and accessible to everyone.
  - Make a lasting improvement to the local environment by supporting activities that develop existing breathing places or help create and sustain new ones.

As a result of our funding, we want to bring about the following changes:
  - Improved biodiversity, and wildlife habitats which are accessible to all
  - Increased community use of local breathing places
  - Increased opportunities and support for volunteers
  - Improved skills to manage local breathing places

This autumn, we are particularly interested in applications from communities to create or improve woodland, in conjunction with the BBC’s ‘Win a Wood’ campaign. Voluntary and community groups, schools, local health bodies and district and town councils can all apply. We will only make one grant in each breathing place, and you must be able to spend your grant within one year. If you have any queries about this programme, please contact the Big Advice Line on or visit the BBC website.
A PGCE student Geoff,
Was to all things sustainable, deaf
But environment days,
Changed his ignorant ways,
And now he supports EEF.

WORKSHOPS

In the afternoon of the conference, three separate workshops were run. They were as follows:

**Group 1**  
*Identify ways in which Forum members can assess the impacts of their programmes*

**Group 2**  
*Identify ways to look at long term impacts of ESD awareness in the revised curriculum*

**Group 3**  
*How do we take the lessons learnt in the classroom and make sure that they are put into practise at home in order to positively impact upon the environment now!*

**WORKSHOP 1**

*Identify ways in which Forum members can assess the impacts of their programmes*

*Facilitated by Anne Hayes and Maia Taylor (EHS)*

**Current Assessment**

- Tend to consider:
  - How many participants
  - Quality and use of programme to teachers in relation to the curriculum

- Methods:
  - Primarily one-off feedback forms within a week of the experience
  - Primarily feedback from the teacher
  - Occasionally through informal conversation, a record of which may or may not be kept
  - RSPB operates TED database which can correlate what other RSPB programmes and activities a school has taken part in
  - Eco-Schools is a 9-year progressive project for whole school, measured through awards which are a result of action primarily *in school*
  - TACT undertook short survey one year later to ask schools what they remember and what they have done since then

- We are missing:
  - Information and experience has developed understanding
  - Understanding has positively influenced values
  - Understanding and values have translated into action:
    - *in the individual*
    - *in school*
    - *at home*
    - *in the community*
    - *in parent’s work places*
    - *Continuity between providers to be able to assess the big picture*
    - *Young persons perspective*

**Future Assessment Needs**

For both individual programmes and the sector as a whole we want to ensure that we are delivering an ESD message (tempered to the focus of our individual organisations) targeted to achieve understanding that influences values and translates into action that has a positive effect on the environment. We need to be able to assess that this process has occurred.

For NGOs, individual organisations have a mission to deliver messages. This ESD message should be linked to the curriculum but not be curtailed by it – the message we deliver envelops ESD and citizenship and could not help but deliver the curriculum. Similarly the curriculum evolves to
encapsulate much of the teaching required to develop the understanding of the detail needed to implement our messages.

Long-term survey – of schools or families in the street (if schools then need to look at continuity between primary, secondary, tertiary, community, business, 3rd age holistically in selected locations to assess whether there is a continuity of effect)

- Programmes they have taken part in
- Knowledge gained
- Values developed
- Action they have taken as a result
  - As individuals
  - In school
  - At home
  - In community
  - Parents in their workplace

In terms of decisions and actions we should assess not just the environmental information/experience that has affected the action taken/not taken but what other factors affected the decision:

- Economic
- Social
- Political

We need to:

- Identify the questions we need answered first, then the method of evaluation - the 4 basic questions regarding earth education from Steve Van Matre provides a useful starting point
- Correlate evaluation forms between providers – joined up surveying! Have methods that different providers can all input into so that methods of delivery/programmes can be compared and the effectiveness of the whole sector can be encapsulated, assessed and gaps identified
- Quality Assure ourselves
- ID who we do reach and who we don’t reach and why

Evaluate:

- Young people’s views
- Teachers
- Providers
- Funders

A desk study should be conducted first to assess what research and results have already been conducted and methods that have – consult Environmental Education journal and Collette Murphy

One possible recording mechanism would be to develop the RSPB TED system to include information from other providers, Eco-Schools and the providers database.

Perhaps also survey our volunteers to identify how much of an influence past experiences have had in bringing them to volunteer.

Workshop 1 in action with Anne Hayes from the EHS
WORKSHOP 2

Identify ways to look at long term impacts of ESD awareness in the revised curriculum

Facilitated by Vivien Kelly (SELB)

- Research to measure where we are now
- Identify good practice in schools (case studies)
- Use student expertise to draw up baseline survey
- Develop shared understanding of ESD (more than Environment Education)
- Target parental attitudes
- Self-evaluating by teachers (role models)
- Model outdoor lessons with parents and other adults
- Lobby media (‘green’ character in Eastenders?)
- Involve students in self evaluation
- Support staff in schools involved (and Management, Education and Library Boards etc.)
- Child as agent of change at home / in community – taking action, doing

Vivien Kelly feeding back to conference delegates on the Workshop 2
WORKSHOP 3

*How do we take the lessons learnt in the classroom and make sure that they are put into practise at home in order to positively impact upon the environment now!*

*Facilitated by Mike Rendle (Irish Hare Initiative)*

Perceived difficulties in taking environmental education into the home

The workshop recognised that difficulties were encountered with school/home communication:

- Limitations with verbal methods of communication, either from children or from ‘school notes’ (questionnaires, feedback forms etc.)
- Verbal methods of communication often attract a poor response
- Environmentally aware families were most likely to respond (‘preaching to the converted’)

Alternative methods of communicating and measuring environmental activities

There was a consensus that practical tasks were an effective way to introduce environmental activities and knowledge into the home as well as providing feedback and some measurement of the activity.

Activities already employed by members of the workshop included:

- Trees from seed - seeds were planted in pots in school to be taken home and nurtured. (taking knowledge home). At the appropriate time, the seedlings would be brought back to school to be planted outdoors (providing measurement of activity).
- Lunch box activities - lunch box items are assessed by the children in terms of healthy eating, packaging, waste, recycling etc. (taking knowledge home). As a follow-up exercise, lunchbox contents are inspected and rated against environmental factors (providing measurement of activity).
- Writing stories
- Recycling
- Composting

Implementing effective practical activities

Suggestions how effective practical activities could best be implemented were:

- Employing objects or products found in the home environment (e.g. packaging)
- Outdoor environmental education

Advantages of practical tasks

Well-constructed practical tasks had the potential for improving activity compliance by:

- Offering choice and decision-making within the activity
- Empowering the child to engage
- Raising self-esteem

To be effective, activities should be realistic and achievable for children, parents and teachers.

Other channels of communication

Other channels of communication suggested were involving PTAs and after-school groups.
Feedback

Feedback from conference attendees was, overall, very favourable. Many appreciated the opportunity to get together and network with a range of other people both from the statutory and voluntary sectors. The speakers were praised for their effective and informative presentations and it was felt by many that the conference will greatly aid them in the course of their everyday work. The catering and venue were generally also mentioned as being of good quality. The one criticism from several people was that the workshop and feedback sessions were too rushed, and there were not enough tangible outcomes from the workshops themselves.
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