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## Importance of Transition Planning

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Importance of Transition Services  
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## Chapter One

Every parent dreams for their child to be as successful as possible in the real world. However, that level of success also depends on one's child's ability. For parents who have children with disabilities there is the goal for independence. Stemming from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), it is mandated that transition services are provided. These individualized plans help students transition from high school to college and/or adulthood with the goal of reaching the highest level of independence for that individual. Individualized Education Plans (IEP) are to discuss goals at age 14 and implement them into action by no later than age 16 (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). For some students, a goal may seem as basic as using the restroom on their own or learning to feed themselves, while for another student it may be a goal of learning to use the transportation system on their own or balance their own finances. While these goals are vastly different and require very different abilities, both have the goal of achieving a task without the assistance of another individual.

My first encounter with individuals with exceptionalities was in college, but not through my education degree requirements and not with school age children. I worked with a 24-hour adults care agency. I was with my clients over 40 hours a week and they also went to work for 7 hours a day. The women I helped every day had an array of disabilities and conditions. To mention a few, there was, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Autism, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), multiple sclerosis, physical impairments, nonverbal, diabetes, incontinence, and aggressive parents that were self and non self-injurious. With this array of challenges and more that are not mentioned it was incredible to see how much these women could learn and grow. Whether it took a day, a week, a month or more. It was incredible to see each of them

continuing to develop into their own individual ways even at ages above 30. In those moments, I realized how important transition planning is in the early high school years.

My teaching career began when I moved to teach in Houston, Texas. As my graduate courses continued, I began my Transition Planning course for my Graduate work. It was then that my heart broke. Through attempting to complete my course work I discovered, that my high school, of over 3,000 students grades 10-12, no transition services were applied for students in the general classroom. Transition planning was only provided to students with extreme disabilities in the alternative setting. Despite them receiving IDEA funding, which requires transition services to be provided there were none.

This was not the first concern that I had had with my school in its lack of services to the special education populous. I had students who had never attended an ARD or had awareness of the accommodations they had access to. Some that were told they could not have services removed or were pulled to an alternative setting for all classes, even the ones they were exceeding expectations in. With so many disservices to the special education populous in my high school it was my incredible experience as a direct service provider in Minnesota that drew me to look further into transition services. It was then that I wanted to investigate this further and see where the miss communication was and how a school could be such a disservice to their students.

### **Subjects and Setting**

**Description of subjects.** The individuals for this study are from a suburb of Houston, TX. The high school that they attend consists of grades 10 through 12 and has approximately 4,500 students. These students come from a variety of socioeconomic back grounds. Some students receive no funding while others qualify for 100% free or reduced lunches. Of the 4,500

student body populous, 24% of the student body is socially economically disadvantaged. The demographic of the high school is as diverse as its socioeconomic diversity. The demographic of the school is comprised of 12% African American, 29% Hispanic, and 54% Caucasian. (Conroe ISD).

**Selection of criteria.** The participants for this study are 32 students in whole and all students will be picked at random. The 32 students will be comprised of twelve 10<sup>th</sup> graders, twelve 11<sup>th</sup> graders and twelve 12<sup>th</sup> graders. From each grade level, two students will be male and two students will be female. The two male and two female students from each grade level will be paired with one of the opposite sex, and three levels of disabilities will be represented by a pair from each grade level. The levels of disabilities will be represented by the Life Skills classroom, those who receive alternative resource setting support and those who receive Co-Taught services.

**Informed consent.** All parties including, teachers, parents and students will be made aware of the study and sign an acknowledgment and permission form to use the information they provide. They will be made aware that they may withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, all participants will be made aware of any and all benefits and/or risks from this study and will at all times remain confidential. This study will have gone through the local university and Institutional Review Board (IRB) board for permission and clearance along with clearance from the local district and high school in with the study if occurring.

### **Review of Literature**

Transition planning has one goal, 'to mature into independent, productive adults and become increasingly responsible for their actions and accomplishments' ("Transition Planning: A Team Effort", 2010); however, this goal is only attainable if the skills acquired 'are of value in

the world of adulthood.’ (“Transition Planning: A Team Effort”, 2010). The skills necessary for individuals with exceptionalities to learn cover a vast array of task performances. Some services include basic life skills, while others include high functioning adult activities like balancing a check book. Regardless of the type of services, it is in agreement that the student will have a smoother transition into the adult world based on a combination of support and effort by themselves, their families, and their educators (“Transition Planning: A Team Effort”, 2010).

Per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), transition services are to begin at age sixteen. Although, ideas for transition planning, in creating a statement, is to occur at age fourteen before services begin at age sixteen. These transition years are crucial because post-high school holding a job is simply not enough... as often times individual with disabilities will lose those jobs 2-3 months after graduation’(Cobb & Alwell, 2009). Transition planning requires Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to include appropriate measurable post school goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments related to such areas as education and training, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills to ease the student’s movement from school to post school adult life (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011).

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined for the better understanding of this study.

Transition Planning: In accommodation with a student’s IEP “refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in postsecondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships” (Powers, K. M., Gil-Kashiwabara, E., Geenen, S. J., & Gretzel, E. E. 2005).

Life Skills: “Life skills include a wide range of knowledge and skill interactions believed to be essential for adult independent living. . . . Examples include the ability to dress and groom properly, use appropriate table manners, make decisions about money, and use transportation to get to work. The three major skill areas that need to be addressed consist of daily living, personal/social, and occupational skills” (Goodship, 1990).

Networking: A way through which “people gain an awareness of available resources and discover how to access or refer individuals to those services” (“Transition Planning: A Team Effort,” 2010). For example, an educator’s transition team speaking with local businesses to see who is willing to provide training to students for practical job skills in an real working field reflects a utilization of networking within the community.

Coordination: “Assists in the selection and scheduling of services.” Coordination includes arrangement amongst service personnel, whether between student and agency or other entities, to coordinate something that is conducive to the both the students’ and the employers’ needs, such as a schedule (“Transition Planning: A Team Effort,” 2010).

Cooperation: Is “to *support and complement* one another's transition services”(trans Art).

Collaboration: Is composed of, “networking, coordination, and cooperation and then requires team members to *share decisions, responsibility, and trust*. It requires that team members invest time and energy to come up with options and design strategies for carrying out these plans. Because collaboration requires extensive time and energy, it is impossible to make all decisions collaboratively” (“Transition Planning: A Team Effort,” 2010).

Self-Assessment: One’s own awareness of growth or lack thereof. One is always aware of one’s weaknesses and strengths when self- assessing. A questionnaire utilizing a series of

questions can aid a student in increasing their self-awareness or in progressing successfully through their transition plan. For example, a questionnaire may include the following questions:

“You generally remember more from a class lecture when:

- 1. You don't take notes but try to listen carefully
- 2. You sit close to the lecturer and pay attention to him or her
- 3. You take notes even though you may not bother to reread them

You can solve problems best by:

- 1. Talking issues over with friends
- 2. Organizing yourself with lists, charts, schedules, and the like
- 3. Pacing the floor or some other kind of physical activity

You can remember telephone or fax numbers best by

It's easiest to remember new people you meet by:

- 1. Their names, as you often forget their faces
- 2. Their faces, as you often forget names
- 3. Their particular features or unusual mannerisms

You can easily be distracted by:

- 1. Noises
- 2. People
- 3. Surroundings

Which of these choices appeals most to you?

- 1. Talking with a friend
- 2. Watching TV
- 3. Relaxing on a comfortable couch” (Dolber, 1996)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A piece of federal legislation with the purpose “to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living” (Etscheidt, 2006).

### **Statement of Problem**

The overall purpose of this study is to determine the types of transition services and planning implemented in high school age students. The comparison of services will be examined



based on the levels of disability and the transition services received at each level of disability; however, the predominant issue stands that ‘transition planning goals... must be more than graduation’ (Etscheidt, 2006).

### **Parental Involvement**

In the world of education, parental involvement and support have proved one of the most important factors in determining postsecondary student success. Parents’ expectations also affect youths’ expectations for themselves ‘in that youth who hold higher expectations tend to have parents who hold higher expectations’ for them (Grigal, Hart, & Migliore, 2011). However, the importance of parental involvement is not limited to the success of traditional students; instead, a multitude of education studies support that parental involvement is a key factor in the successful post school transition of young adults with special needs into the adult world (Defur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001). Since the inception of special education law, parental involvement and participation have proven a cornerstone of the special education process. With the 1997 passage of IDEA and its requirement that “parent participation be sought in all aspects of decision making on behalf of their child’s special education , including the transition process” parental involvement has received ever-increasing emphasis from educational professionals (Defur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001).

Unfortunately, however, families of youth with disabilities continue to report a perception of being valued or heard as they participate in the special education transition planning process and decision making (Defur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001). This perceived lack of respect, as well as a “frustration with a system that treats them as less than equal and places their sons and daughters in the category of second-class citizens” create barriers that necessitate an enlightened approach by special education professionals in order to ensure that students

receive the most benefit from the transition process (2001). In light of this, the transition planning process should “yield a vision for the students’ lives after high school and should enumerate steps leading to post school goals.” In order to empower families, both the visions and plans should be shared and understood by the students [and] family members to promote successful attainment of desired outcomes after the student graduates from high school (Thompson, Fulk, & Piercy, 2000).

### **Importance of Collaboration**

When an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) occurs, many people are involved in order to guarantee success. Those included are but not limited to, ‘General educators, a school administrator, parents, the student, and others who become involved in the planning meeting’ in order to best determine the right plan for the individual (Woods, Sylvester, & Martin, 2010). Assessment, targeted instruction, vocational rehabilitation, community mental health, community experiences such as work experience, public transportation and the development of employment and other post-secondary adult living objectives cannot happen with the work of a student alone or them and their teachers (Poppen, Sinclair, Hirano, Lindstrom, & Unruh, 2016).

It is important to note that IEP meetings include more than the student, the family and educators. Business personnel are also invited to IEP meeting as efforts to see elements from the working field. Employers bring in a different view from what is needed in the field, and to what the individual is doing well or where they might need improvement, creating a sense of accountability for the student (Povenmire-Kirk, Diegelmann, Crump, Schnorr, Test, Flowers, & Aspel, 2015).

Studies have shown that the most involvement a student has in developing their transition planning elements into their IEP the more successful they are. When a student is directly

involved it is called a, 'Student Directed IEP'. In addition, in cases seen as teacher directed IEP's, the student tends to be minimally involved and passive so the need of Collaborating heightens (Woods, L.L., Sylvester, L., & Martin, J.E., 2010). Interestingly, collaboration even takes place after high school and at the National Level. The Vocational National Rehabilitation Center, works with qualified individuals with disabilities in job placement and training. The training could even consist of college work or vocational schooling. This resource should be made known of to the student while still in high school (Dolber 1996). Yet, collaborating has its faults. Despite knowing the benefits of collaborating in transition planning, the truth is that collaboration tends to 'be limited and inconsistent' (Tayorla, Morgan, & Callow-Heusser, 2016).

### **Statement of Hypothesis**

While commonly, individuals with severe disabilities demand the need to learn life skills along while those at higher functioning levels will not. It is hypothesized that as the students level of disability increases, the number of transition services provided will increase. This hypothesis moves to the extreme, such to the point that when there are minimal disabilities present in the child that transition services may become absent.

## Chapter Two

Diving into research means that there needs to be a plan. Questions have to be previously thought out so one can attack a certain avenue of research. Subjects and collection of data also needs to be planned out in advance in order to have a smooth process of the research and collection and to ensure that your desired data can be collected and analyzed.

### Research Questions

When I was unable to complete many assignments and having to have others modified for my Transition Planning course I wondered how my school was validating their services to our special education students. From questioning this, I developed the following questions:

1. What is the student's involvement in developing their transition services plan?
2. What is the parent involvement in aiding and supporting the student's transition services plan?
3. If transition services are minimal, how is funding still granted?

Upon changing school districts and discovering that they do have an extensive Transition Planning process I developed further questions.

1. What elements does no one know?
2. How aware are subjects of their strengths and weaknesses?
3. What is the Transition Plan awareness amongst subjects?
4. Are there differences in ability to respond in detail on subjects between SPED teachers and their level of involvement in the subject levels?

When I am able to answer these questions, I will be able to understand where a disconnect lies. Whether it be with the school personnel, parents or both? I will also be able to understand

and identify the level of awareness that the staff and parents have of rights that are given to those with disabilities.

### **Research Plan**

**Methods and rationales.** Natural data will be collected, which will mostly derive from the existing school records. The records including the student's active IEP will be the most crucial data along with the questionnaire. Questionnaire will be given to special education teachers, parents of the students and the students themselves. As this study falls into qualitative research looking at existing data and finding current and past knowledge and systems and support will be most beneficial.

**Schedule** The data will begin being collected following the students first IEP meeting of the year. This way if new transition planning needs to be worked out, it will be in place to review. Over the course of four weeks data will be reviewed and questionnaires will be sent to teachers, parents and students to complete.

**Ethical issues.** One potential ethical concern is discovering last of services being provided, making aware the breaking of federal law under IDEA. There is also an area of concern that as students become more aware of their rights and the services they should be receiving, panic, frustration or other negative thoughts and/or behaviors may set in if the feel inadequately served.

**Anticipated response.** I will address any ethical problems professionally and promptly to ease the mind of those involved. With concerns from parents and/or students, I will assure them that they have time to still adjust IEP's to include transition planning if it were absent and that their child will be successful after high school.

### Chapter Three

First, a meeting was organized with our campus Special Education director to introduce myself, as I was a new teacher to the district and campus, and to inform her of the desired research project I planned to conduct. I shared with her the survey, that had been generated from other Transition Plan survey and based on reviewed literature, the subjects to be involved and that process Minnesota State University Moorhead takes to ensure legality and confidentiality. Originally, it was intended to have one male and female from high socioeconomic status and one of each from a low socioeconomic status, but my director informed me that our Special Education populous was not large enough to include that. She also directed me that it would be most efficient to have the students case managers or Special Education teachers collect the research for me, as parents can be hesitant to comply with strangers, especially with me not being a special education teacher.

Next, I approached a Life Skills teacher, Resource teacher and Support teacher and asked if they would be willing to aid me in my research. All three complied. I asked how many of the 12 students they would be willing to take on. The Life Skills teacher and Resource Teacher agreed to take all twelve, but the Support teacher only wanted to take on eight subjects. This was accepted and I asked an additional Support teacher if they would partake in my research and take on four students, to which they complied.

I explained the consent document and the survey to each teacher and instructed them to get the consent form back first and to fill out the survey for themselves based on what they know about their subjects. After this step, I told them to have the parents fill out the survey and the students. If they student had reading comprehension difficulty the teacher could read the questions and record their answers. After initial directions, they inquired about alternative

response methods. I generated an email to be sent to parents, it would serve as a way to grant permission for their child to participate, an attached copy of the consent form and an attached copy of the survey if parents wished to print it out and scan it back, or send back an attached completed copy.

Through the month that the teachers had the forms to complete, I checked in with them two to three times a week for progress and questions. Each time I offered to call parents or pull students to get the surveys filled out. I also offered to pull students during our campus study hall, that is help twice a week for 45 minutes, or if it would help for me to watch the class for the teacher while they worked on their own forms. No one asked for my help or time and ensured me that things were going well and that they were getting the forms for me and would have it done.

**Chapter 4**

**What is the student’s involvement in developing their transition services plan? What is the parent involvement in aiding and supporting the student’s transition services plan?**

All students who participated in the survey answered all questions in completion. However only Teacher B returned all the paperwork in total completion for all four of their students. Teachers A returned 50% of their paper work four of eight subjects. 100% of the four student completed all of their paperwork in completion. Teacher C returned 8% of their paper work, three of twelve students. However, 100% of the students who participated completed 100 of their survey. For students that participated teacher filled out a survey on the student at a 100% response rate. Teacher D did not participate giving a 0% response rate across the board.

	<i>Paperwork returned</i>	<i>Paperwork not returned</i>
<i>Teacher A (support)(32)</i>	50%	50%
<i>Teacher B (support)(16)</i>	100%	0
<i>Teacher C (resource)(48)</i>	0%	100%
<i>Teacher D (life skills)(48)</i>	0%	100%

*Figure 1.3 Completed Paperwork Response. Data for reflecting turn in rate for Support Teacher A, Support Teacher B, Resource Teacher C and Life Skills Teacher D.*

	<i>Paperwork returned</i>	<i>Paperwork not returned</i>
<i>Teacher A (support)(32)</i>	50%	50%
<i>Teacher B (support)(16)</i>	100%	0
<i>Teacher C (resource)(48)</i>	8%	92%
<i>Teacher D (life skills)(48)</i>	0%	100%

*Figure 1.4 Paperwork Response Rate. Data for the amount of paper work that was turned in out of total paperwork amongst Support Teacher A, Support Teacher B, Resource Teacher C and Life Skills Teacher D.*



	<i>Complete Responses</i>	<i>Incomplete Responses</i>
<i>Parent (8)</i>	7	1
<i>Student (15)</i>	14	1
<i>Teacher (3)</i>	3	0

Figure 1.0 Total Response Completions. Data showing of those who completed the survey, how many subjects answered the survey in total completion and those who did not amongst subjects; parent, student, teacher.

Despite Teacher C having the greatest detail in their responses on students, suggesting good rapport, they had the second lowest response for surveys to be completed. Upon speaking with this teacher, I was told ‘this is why they do not give homework, because things don’t come back’. This generates a big challenge as the students will face these types of responsibilities in the real world and this teacher is not preparing them for this.

**If transition services are minimal, how is funding still granted?**

New school abides by IDEA regulations. Therefore, funding is granted. Since research was not conducted at old school, this could not be researched.

**What elements does no one know? What is the Transition Plan awareness amongst subjects?**

No results of zero awareness of any topic. However, next lowest rate was on the awareness of what a Transition Plan is. Data showed that 50% of parents did not understand a Transition Plan, 80% of students did not understand a transition plan and 0% of the teachers did not understand a transition plan. Again, no results were 100%.

	<i>Yes, I understand</i>	<i>No, I do not understand</i>
<i>Parent (8)</i>	50%	50%
<i>Student (15)</i>	20%	80%
<i>Teacher (3)</i>	100%	0%

Figure 1.1 Understanding of a Transition Plan. Data for the percentage of subjects that clearly understand what a Transition plan is and those that do not.

This goes against most findings in that parent involvement increases student awareness and success. Also, due to the school reviewing Transition Plans at yearly ARDs it was very surprising to find that the majority of parents and students did not know what a transition plan was. This suggests and are for growth by the school and teachers in communicating with parents and students.

**How aware are subjects of their strengths and weaknesses?**

Four of the eight students selected all of the three answers options when asked about strengths and weaknesses. Beings a key element of Transition Plan is student self-awareness this is very concerning. One may ask if the words, ‘best’, ‘most’ and ‘least’ are the reasoning for students not answering the questions correctly. To reassess this question, reading the question to the child and rephrasing it, may generate better comprehension.

**Are there differences in ability to respond in detail on subjects between SPED teachers and their level of involvement in the subject levels?**

Support Teacher A and Resource Teacher C had more in-depth answers than Support Teacher B. Teacher B completed the forms inaccurately. However, this led to data showing an error in transfer of information. This can be found on the table below.

	<i>Matched</i>	<i>Missed</i>
<i>Teacher A (support)</i>	80%,0%,80%,100%,20%,80%	0,6+,2-,12-E,0,6-E
<i>Teacher B (support)</i>	N/A	N/A
<i>Teacher C (resource)</i>	100% 100% 100%	2+, 4+, 1+
<i>Teacher D (life skills)</i>	N/A	N/A

*Figure 1.2 Mismatched Learning Based Responses Between Subject and Teacher. Data for comparing the response differentiation among the student’s responses and the teachers responses on the strengths and weaknesses of the subjects.*

This was interesting to find as one would assume the answers would match between the student responding form themselves and then the teacher recording their answers. However, it could

suggest a reading comprehension barrier, audio comprehension barrier or a lack of rapport between the teacher and student as the student's response was more detailed.

**Problems.** The greatest challenge in this research was actually getting forms back from all parties. One subject, Teacher D did not collect any forms from students or parents, not did they fill out any surveys for themselves. I had a similar response issue with Teacher C as they only brought back six surveys out of 32. This made it difficult to compare data across different levels of subjects. I think that the directive given to me from my school, to have the Special Education teachers administer the survey to students is where then issue came from. There is always the burden of paper work in Special Education. To collect more paper work, that did not have personal relevancy to the teachers themselves, I believe created a return rate issue. Had I administered the surveys on my own and contacted parents myself as originally planned, I feel that they response rate would have been grater.

The survey may have gotten a better response rate had it been shorter. However, I do not think this was an issue as my high school has a similar survey, but it is around 10 pages long with many more questions. The parents and students fill it out annually to bring with to the students ARD to adjust their Transition Plan if needed. So, their familiarity with surveys for a Transition plan are familiar and 25 questions is much shorter than the form used at our school.

### Chapter Five

As an Advanced Placement I have few encounters with students on an IEP. I have many 504's but the students on and IEP with a Transition Plan are very, very limited. I began this study as I encountered problems in a system and wanted to know if it was a common issue or just due to my initial job setting. However, after conducting my research and still finding gaps in the basic practice of Transition Planning and the basic knowledge base of these practices it has affected me tremendously, to the point where I am considering becoming a Special Education teacher when looking for new jobs. When there is a problem, you can try to educate those around you or be the solution yourself. Moving forward, I am considering both.

Directly in my classroom I am applying things a bit differently. One take away from this research was that there can be a disconnect between students and their parents. Even when one would assume the involvement is great with Special Education students there is still a disconnect, so I question, 'what could the disconnect be with general education students, and with my Advanced Placement students, as they are usually the highest academic achieving, could there be an even further disconnect as parents assume, they will do and get what is needed done?' Even if there is not a disconnect, I still take on the role to ensure that their transition, any student I have, that their transition from high school to college is as smooth as possible and that they are prepared for what they will personally invest in, in their next steps. Transition Plans do not need to only be served for Special Education students but all students. Therefore, in my immediate classroom I will do more than teach a curriculum. I will make sure I know each of my student's future plans, whether it be vocational or academic. I will assign non-related content homework, such as college application, scholarship application, and completing a resume to help them ensure future success.

Outside of the classroom, I plan on following up more extensively with each of the Special Education teachers that were part of this study. I plan to ask them what challenges they found in this study and what things they found to be easy to execute, if they were to change anything what would it be? I also plan to meet with our Special Education Director at my campus and gain more insight on how the ARD meetings are conducted each year while addressing the student's Transition Plans. I also want to know how active parents are in filling out the school's Transition Plan survey that is used to generate the students Transition Plan. After gaining some of this information I will be discussing my findings from the study and making suggestions to ensure that parent and students better understand a Transition Plan and its purpose.

Next, I will encourage our director to communicate these elements to our Special Education Staff and general teachers in multiple forms. They could be covered during our yearly in service, when all staff is educated on Special Education services, or a staff development or district development could be offered to better educated our teachers, especially if this is a district wide issue across all six high schools.

Last, I have spoken to two Special Education teachers on my campus, one being a resource teacher and the other being the Emotional Behavioral Disorder classroom teacher; both who were not part of this study but were made aware of it. We have discussed creating a campus team in efforts of bridging gaps between Special Education staff and general education staff. They asked if I would be interested in spearheading this team as I have a unique perspective of the Special Education knowledge but am an Advanced teacher. As a team we want to gain information to help better support out general education and Special Education teachers based on what they say they could see as beneficial information and tools for themselves and one another. This would

end up being an initiative that would be spear headed a the beginning of the next academic school year and introduced to staff and our yearly in service.

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