

Teacher Professionalism and Curricular Change - the Tension between Governance, Control and Professionalism in School

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Abstract

Through looking at the process of Norwegian curricular change from the 1990's reforms till today, we discuss how the different curricula in different ways affect the possibilities teachers have to act as professional agents in the classroom. Using Bernstein's concept of the pedagogical discourse and how knowledge produced at the micro level, the level of pedagogical research and practice, we discuss how knowledge gets transformed and recontextualised as it becomes part of the curriculum, the 'official field' in Bernstein's terms, and instead acts as mechanisms for controlling the teachers' practices. In this paper we argue that curricular change affects the teachers' potential for professional and autonomous action in the classroom. Furthermore, we point to the implications this has for teacher education, and the need for giving the students the competency to transcend and critically act and reflect on the implications the curricula have for their future teacher professionalism.

Key words: Teacher Professionalism, Curricular Change, Educational Governance

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Profissionalidade docente e mudança curricular - a tensão entre governance, controle e profissionalidade na escola

Resumo

Analisando o processo de mudança curricular norueguês operado desde as reformas dos anos 90 até hoje, discutimos como os diversos currículos afetam de modo diferente as possibilidades que os professores têm de atuar como agentes profissionais na sala de aula. Através da utilização do conceito de Bernstein de discurso pedagógico e de como o conhecimento produzido ao nível micro, nível de pesquisa e prática pedagógica, discutimos como o conhecimento se transforma e se recontextualiza à medida em que se torna parte do currículo, o "campo oficial" no dizer de Bernstein, atuando como mecanismo de controle das práticas dos professores. Neste artigo, argumentamos que a mudança curricular afeta o potencial dos professores para a atuação profissional e autônoma na sala de aula. Além disso, apontamos para as implicações que isto tem para a formação de professores, e a necessidade de dar aos alunos a competência para transcender e agir criticamente, refletindo sobre as implicações do currículo na futura profissionalidade docente.

Palavras-chave: Profissionalidade docente, Mudança Curricular, Governança Educativa.

Profesionalidad docente y cambio curricular - la tensión entre governance, control y profesionalidad en la escuela

Resumen

Analizando el proceso de cambio curricular noruega operado desde las reformas de los años 90 hasta hoy, hablamos de cómo los diferentes planes de estudio afectan de manera diferente las posibilidades de los maestros en su desempeño como agentes profesionales en el aula. Al utilizar el concepto de discurso pedagógico de Bernstein y la forma en que el conocimiento se produce en el nivel micro, el nivel de la investigación y la práctica docente, discutimos cómo el conocimiento se transforma y se recontextualiza ya que se convierte en parte del currículo, el "campo oficial" en las palabras de Bernstein, actuando como un mecanismo de control de las prácticas de los docentes. En este artículo, se argumenta que el cambio curricular afecta el potencial de los profesores en su desempeño profesional y autónomo en el aula. Además, señalamos las implicaciones que esto tiene para la formación de los maestros, y la necesidad de dar a los estudiantes el poder de trascender y actuar de manera crítica y reflexionar sobre las implicaciones del currículo en la futura profesionalidad docente.

Palabras clave: Profesionalidad Docente, Cambio Curricular, Gobernanza Educativa.

Introduction

In this paper we aim to discuss the tensions created through increased state governance over the curriculum and how curricular reforms affect the potential for teachers to act as autonomous professional agents in the classroom. We will exemplify these processes through looking at the educational reforms taking place in Norway from the 1990s till today and describe and discuss the central tenets of educational policy and curriculum development from the 1990 till today. Furthermore, we aim to show how the curriculum became important for furthering political ideals through governance and control and how this created tension between the teachers' wishes and needs for professional development and the perceived control the curriculum exerted over the teachers' 'action space' and autonomy.

The educational reforms in Norway in the 1990s represented a break with earlier educational politics in Norway, and can therefore be described as an ideological turn when it comes to the influence of the macro level (the level of state governance) and its desire to control the educational system (i.e. the kindergartens, schools and adult education).

In this paper we aim to discuss how the central discourses on school governance and teacher professionalism can be seen as competing in a battle over educational hegemony and definitional control through the regulation of curriculum content. Firstly we will look at the different levels of curriculum construction and what they offer in terms of the view of the teacher as a professional actor.

School, society and the curriculum

The school is the primary institution for the socialisation of children and young people into the socio-political ideals that govern the current society, and the schools role as a social institution aimed at conveying social values and interests is becoming more and more apparent. Therefore it is becoming evident that controlling the content of the curricula, and thereby also the values and interests

conveyed to learners, becomes of the essence for those who want to control the development of a society. There are always different understandings and values related to political ideals on how societies prosper and grow and the schools' role in this process. This leads to what Bernstein (2000) calls a fight for symbolic control over the pedagogical discourse of the schools, i.e. how different social groups "fight" over the governance and control of the content of the curricula.

The curriculum is, therefore, often seen as a tool for administrating the current envisioned socio-political ideals that govern the day to day running of the schools (HOVDENAK, 2000; PINAR 1995; APPLE 1990). These ideals are manifested in the curriculum through specifications of the goals and content of schooling, and sometimes even through prescriptions of how schooling is to be performed. This makes the field of education and schooling, and especially the field of curriculum development and research, a contested terrain with contesting ideals, knowledge and discourses (BERNSTEIN, 2000; YOUNG, 2008). One of the leading questions in curriculum development and research, therefore, is who gets to decide what should be the content of schooling, 'how' should schooling be performed (the educational form of schooling) and who gets to control the form and content of schooling (HAAVELSRUD, 2009; YOUNG, 2009; APPLE, 1990).

The micro and macro levels of the curriculum

The macro level, in this paper, relates to the state and how the curriculum discourse is that of school governance, where the curriculum is seen primarily as an elongation of the socio-political discourse. This discourse is based in the societies' current socio-political views where the school is seen as the foremost contributor to social growth and development and where the aim of the content of the school is to contribute to these processes.

The micro level of the curricular and school discourse is where the curriculum, and thereby also the school and the teachers' practices, are primarily influenced by the teachers' adaptation of the content and methods to the

learners' needs, wishes and the diversity present in the classroom. The content presented to learners acts not only to enhance their knowledge, it also affects how they create meaning and sense of the knowledge they are given. This process of meaning making, or what Dahlberg (1985) and Bernstein (2000) call the individuals 'orientation-to-meaning', affects the learners' understanding of self in society, their identity as well as their future goals and aspirations (APPLE, 2011).

However, often the schools guidelines and curricula are formed by both the macro and micro discourses. Therefore, in the battle over which perspective is to be given the most priority, challenges for the professionalism of teachers arise - as the focus of the school and the possibilities within the curriculum changes, and we will argue in this paper that so does the view of what constitutes a professional teacher or 'teacher professionalism'. To understand tenets of curriculum reform and how it affects teacher professionalism there is a need to look at where knowledge is used and (re)produced.

Knowledge production/ pedagogical discourses/ re-contextualisation

Knowledge is not an objective entity – what is represented in the curriculum is always a matter of discursive positioning and different interests, or in the words of Apple: "Whether we like it or not, curriculum talk is power talk" (APPLE, 2003:7). By discursive we here refer to how knowledge is given different meanings and interpretations depending on the context (or discourse) it appears within. Knowledge therefore is never neutral it is always the result of a social discourse of which interpretations or 'signs' should be given priority (BERNSTEIN, 2000, CHOU-LIARAKI & FAIRCLOUGH, 1999). As such, the process of deciding what should be the content of schooling is a matter of formation and re-formation, where some forms of content are given priority, whilst others are either re-contextualised and given a different appearance and meaning, or disappear altogether (BERNSTEIN, 2000). Bernstein refers to this process as recontextualisations of the pedagogic discourse, where knowledge is lifted from one context and used in another. An example is how Pia-

get, whose theory initially was a developmental theory on how children develop cognitively, was largely based on the observation of his own children, and has been appropriated by the educational field as a theory, largely forming the basis for the development of structure and hierarchization of knowledge in the modern school (cf. ATKINSON, 1995).

According to Bernstein the school accomplishes the trick of making the content of the curriculum and the school appear to be neutral and not as the result of power games, i.e. what you learn in school, how this is sequenced and how this is taught is just naturally "given", and not the result of a process of domination. Bernstein (2000) refers to this process as 'symbolic control' i.e. a way of controlling the interpretation of symbols and how they are to be understood. This process of power games in the curriculum has also been pointed to for example by Young (2009).

Recontextualising arenas

Bernstein claims that the fight over power over the ownership of the pedagogical discourse is played out in different recontextualising fields. He refers to two such fields: the 'official recontextualising field' – from now on referred to as the official field, and the 'pedagogical recontextualising field', referred to as the professional field. Both these arenas are found at both the macro and micro levels of governance, and the strength between these fields are of particular interest. The state's exertion of knowledge and educational policy are placed in the official field where amongst others the premises for educational policy and curricula are constructed. The official field is controlled by the state, politically and administratively through legislation and bureaucratic resolutions. At the macro level in Norway this is found in the Ministry of Education and Research.

The professional arena represents the pedagogical field of expertise in its broad sense, and is placed within different university and college environments, teaching practices in different schools and also educational research literature. This field is where we find the

professional pedagogical discourse, and it consists of both researchers and teachers who both produce and convey knowledge at different levels of the educational system. For actors in the official arena it is seen as a point to reduce the professional field's autonomy in order to achieve a more powerful hegemonic position. In this paper it is our aim to discuss how different forms of curricula allow for different possibilities for achieving this hegemonic position and furthermore discuss how this affects the perceived 'action space' of the teachers (and educational researchers).

Teacher professionalism

Teacher professionalism can be seen to encompass different levels of practice and understanding (FOSSE & HOVDENAK, 2014; DALE, 1997; LØVLIE, 1973). It can be related directly to the pedagogical practices happening in the classroom – to the didactical competencies and practices related to classroom teaching and how these are adapted to meet the needs and competencies of the learners in the classroom. Furthermore teacher professionalism is also related to happenings that occur outside of the classroom but which directly or indirectly impacts the teachers' possible practices. This level of professionalism can be related to theoretical developments, for example different teaching practices that come into favour, new knowledge to be implemented, etc. It can also relate to changes at the socio-political macro level signalled through the policies, guidelines and curricula that structure the school and which ultimately also frame or structure the ideals that guide the teachers' classroom practice.

A professional teacher then is one that can act on and balance the influences of both these levels, and have a critical and reflexive stance in implementing the different curricula into the classroom. In this paper, therefore we ask the questions of what happens to teacher professionalism in the gap between the top-down discourse of government curricular control and the bottom –up discourse of teacher autonomy and agency.

Smedby (2008) and Heggen (2010) show that higher education is central for knowledge-based professions.

Smedby points to the fact that theoretical knowledge is seen as important for professional practice. "The supposition is that knowledge which is gained through education, can be transferred almost directly to professional practice where it is maintained and developed in a professional community" (SMEDBY, 2008:87, our translation). It is underlined that knowledge, which is gained through university education, forms the basis for professional autonomy and the practice of professional discernment. In Norway, teacher education takes place at the university or university- college level and teachers are now often being described as professional actors. Furthermore, Smedby and Heggen (2012) show how coherence is a central topic of teacher professionalism. The concept of coherence here entail that the teacher is able to relate critically and constructively to different theoretical perspectives and arenas of learning both where there is agreement, but also where there is disagreement and discrepancies. These concepts are therefore, as we see it, characteristics necessary for the development of teacher professionalism, especially in relation to the schools work with curriculum development and implementation.

Agency, autonomy and action space – The teacher and the curriculum

In analysing the effects of the different levels of professional practice the teachers' perceived autonomy, agency and action-space become pertinent categories of analysis. By autonomy, i.e. the possibility or freedom to decide for one self, we here refer to the teachers' felt possibility to decide the content of their lessons, i.e. what should be taught, when it should be taught and how (educational form) in a manner that they feel is best suited for their learners. In terms of the curriculum, autonomy refers to the possibilities the curriculum offers for the teachers to independently decide either the form of teaching e.g. how the content best could be taught, or sequence, when something should be taught. In other words autonomy relates to the teachers perception that they have a freedom to make a professional choice based on adapting the form and content to the needs, abilities and wishes of their learners, and the possibility to exert their own creativity and

talent in their lessons. An important aspect of autonomy is the individual's perceived agency. Agency refers to the perceived action-space of an actor i.e. the possibilities for action or influence that the individual perceives him/herself to have in a given situation. Agency is often seen to be opposed by (social)structure (BOURDIEU, 1984; GIDDENS, 1984) which limits the action space of the individuals by imposing outside structures limiting the space in which the individuals' agency can be enacted. In terms of teacher professionalism, the perceived agency of the teachers refers to the possibilities they have within the structuring frame of the current educational policies and the curriculum. As defined by Robinson (2012):

"Professional agency may be defined as the extent to which control is achieved by a group of teachers, and is reliant upon the dialogical relationship between external constraints and structures and the political and economic environment, in balance with the individual and collective life experiences of the group" (ROBINSON, 2012:234)

Educational reform and curricular change in Norway from the 1990s

During a few hectic years in the 1990s the whole of the Norwegian educational system was reformed by a minister of education whose intention was to achieve reform as speedily as possible with as few obstacles as possible. Formerly, dialogue, especially with the professional field i.e. the teachers and educational researchers, had been seen as the key to successful educational reform. However, the new minister saw this dialogue only as interfering with his aims for a streamlined, high-speed process. In the end, what became characteristic of this process were ad-hoc solutions, high speed and exclusion of the professional field (HOVDENAK, 2000), and as such the reforms of the 1990s represented an ideological break in Norwegian educational politics.

The 1990s reforms

In Norway this political trend can be seen to begin with the 1988 White Paper "With Knowledge and Will"² (HER-

NES, 1988) with Gudmund Hernes, a representative of the left wing parties, as the leader of the committee. What very few people understood at the time was that the content of this White Paper would influence the development of the Norwegian educational policy for years to come. Hovdenak (2000) claims that the message found in this report (HERNES, 1988) was more governance and control of the educational system, which would lead to a top-down process of state governed meaning making. The importance of core knowledge was highlighted to secure future economic and technological growth. It was further stressed that the knowledge and educational politics had as their main goal to get the most out of the populations' talent. At the same time the report (HERNES, 1988) emphasised the message of creating good conditions for economic growth and sustainable development. In this process it became important for the political leadership to gain the power of definition i.e. to control the content of the educational system. This form of enactment of power thereby happened through a high degree of control and governance from the macro level (the Ministry of Education and Research), using the curriculum as the important tool to gain this control over the educational system.

Looking back at this process it is important to note that the current curriculum (M-87) (MER, 1987) had only been in operation for a year when the 1988 report (Hernes, 1988) was presented. Even though this curriculum had never been evaluated, it was still thoroughly criticised. The critique was especially directed at the main principle of school based curriculum development, affording the teachers and the schools a high degree of autonomy and control over the educational form and content. This critique was clearly politically and ideologically based, but not theoretically and professionally grounded, and this led the way for the state governed, macro level, curriculum reforms of the 1990's which we describe here (HOVDENAK, 2000).

The minister of education, surprisingly and very uncharacteristically of these processes (GUNDEM, 1993) wrote the core curriculum³ himself (the "core curriculum" outline the ideological visions for schooling in Norway, and can be

likened to Goodlad's 'ideological level' (GOODLAD, 1979) of the curriculum). This act can only be seen as a wish for strong governmental control and governance over the educational system. A central and new aspect of the new curriculum was the introduction of yearly plans, which was justified by a seeming need to develop a strong national identity. Halsey et al. (1997) argue that this action reflects the interests of a social elite, an argument which is also supported by, amongst others, Apple (1997).

The analysis of the reforms of the 1990s show that the minister of education questioned the schools', teachers' and students' ability to contribute to understanding and meaning-making without a strong nationally governed curriculum. But controlling the curriculum was not enough – even the control over the content of textbooks had to be under state control and the textbooks had to conform to the politically stated objectives. The analysis also showed that the minister of education downplayed the meaning of the students' social and cultural belonging at the expense of macroeconomic values and interests (HOVDENAK, 2000).

Critique of the reforms

Obviously, these educational reforms were met with massive critique, especially from the professional field, which had been almost entirely side-lined throughout the reform process. It is impossible to give a complete picture of the ensuing critique, but a fuller picture can be found in the works of Hovdenak (2000) and Trippstad (2009). The reform process met massive resistance and critique from the teachers and their organisations. The critique was directed at amongst others, the tight centralisation that contributed to, in the view of the teacher organisations, reduce the view of teachers as professional actors, and they felt that the curricular content and guidelines offered little room and scope for flexibility and professional discussions and teachers were reduced to just carry them out. The teachers' organisations claimed that the ministry's strong curricular control would contribute to impede the development of a pedagogical discourse amongst the schools' staff.

Trippstad has called Hernes' rhetoric for "commando humanism" – reflecting the strong grip the state, through heavy governance and control, now takes on the school. Trippstad (2009) claims that Hernes acted unethically and presented simplifications, selective and polarising argumentation and employed manipulation techniques to dispel arguments from his opponents. The main goal of the process, Trippstad (2009) argues, was for the minister of education to become the "head teacher" of the nation.

In essence there were many who criticised the reforms of the 1990s, and the critics represented various theoretical and practical viewpoints. However, the common denominator was that they were very critical of the way the reform had been implemented and they were very critical of the curriculum's organisation into yearly plans (objectives) and to its content.

Reforming the reform

Due to political changes from a left wing to a right wing government, and because of the immense critique of the 1990s reforms, a new curriculum reform was heralded in 1998. During this period the White Paper "Towards Richer Goals"⁵ (Stortingsmelding nr 28 1998-99) was presented. The pedagogical tone of this paper was different from the one governing the reforms of the 1990s and the government now emphasised that they wanted dialogue and guidance in important educational matters. The White Paper underlined the importance of individual educational adaptation and local diversity and the importance of school-based and local curriculum development. The importance of keeping and further developing the pedagogical action space was also emphasised, possibly in an attempt to resurrect the confidence in the teacher as a professional actor. These conditions, as mentioned above, were introduced to reduce the state's hegemonic position. The new government wanted to highlight pedagogical professionalism through expanding the local, school-based pedagogical action space. Through eradicating the yearly plans, the revised curriculum instead organised the curriculum around the principle of objectives management.

In 2006 a new curriculum was introduced named "*The (LK06) National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion*" (MER, 2006). The intention of the curriculum reform was that it would lead to increased pedagogical action space and a more localised school-based curriculum development. However, a new left wing government came into power during the implementation of the reform. This change leads a plethora of policy documents aimed at changing what they saw as immensely measurement and objectives orientated curriculum leading to intense individualization. However, instead of leading to an enhanced pedagogical action space and localised school-based curriculum development, what became common for all these new policy documents and white papers were that they instead indicated a need for stronger government control (HOVDENAK & STRAY, 2015).

The curriculum '06 (MER, 2006) has been thoroughly evaluated and the evaluations all point to that the result of the reform has been tighter government control (KARSETH, MØLLER, AASEN, 2013). Power, governance and control over the educational system seem to be very important at the macro level of political control.

Analysis and discussion

Through the curricula, the educational politics sets the premises for the development at the individual and societal level. The education and knowledge politics govern not only the school and the teachers, but also influence the individuals' consciousness and understanding through setting the premises for the school based development of knowledge and identity. As mentioned above – Bernstein (1990) named this 'symbolic control' – through controlling the form and content/ knowledge of schooling one also exerts power over the individuals' meaning-making and in the end their identity. Popkewitz (1991) is critical to those who claim that reforms do not affect practice, and he also claims that instrumental control becomes more apparent after a while.

Bernstein (2000) claims that in the 1990s there was a clear tendency towards the state, representing the official field, dominating the professional field. He shows that the

official arena, represented by the state, is trying to reduce the influence the professional arena has on the pedagogical discourse. State dominance over the educational field becomes more prominent as the educational politics are becoming more geared towards economic development nationally as well as internationally. Bernstein (2000) furthermore claims that when it comes to the autonomy of the pedagogical discourse, it will depend on the status that the professional field has in relation to the official arena (i.e. who decides what form and content of schooling is most beneficial for the future generation/ future of the nation). Possibly creating a tension between those at the 'coal face' of schooling (the teachers and educational researchers) and those deciding the politics and future of schooling (bureaucrats/politicians). By the official field's domination over the professional field, the state is able to control the politics of education, i.e. who gets to have power and control over a field which is rapidly becoming a field which is increasingly becoming significant for the development of the society as well as the individuals in that society.

In the description of the reform process of the 1990's we see how the official field seeks to strengthen its power and influence at the expense of the professional arena by for example "high speed" reform processes, leaving the professional field - actors that normally would be part of such a process - out of the process of educational reform. In her analysis Hovdenak (2000) has pointed to how the considerable amount of work put into the educational reforms that occurred in the 1990s suffered from a democratic deficit. According to Foucault (1993) exclusion procedures are a well-known form of power exertion often used by the political field to render potential opponents passive. In this "fight" the official field clearly won over the professional field, and the state became the strong and governing part and the teachers, as the professional part, were seen as an easy match. Even after the second educational reform – the introduction of K06 (MER, 2006) - which had as its intention to strengthen the teachers as professional actors, the official field again fortified its position at the expense of the professional field. This time however, the control was as we described above implemented through different means - through White Papers and legislation and "official interpretations" - rather than

directly through the curriculum. Again the professionalism of the teachers was put to the test, and the official field achieved a great degree of control over the professional field, even at the micro level of teacher autonomy and classroom practice. Analysis however, shows that the left wing wanted to govern and control the curriculum from the macro level at the expense of teacher professionalism and autonomy at the micro level.

However, these processes of centralisation of the curricula and the following macro level control over schooling are not uncommon internationally (cf. LUNDGREN, 2015; SIVESIND & KARSETH, 2010). To a larger and larger extent schooling is being controlled through political means, either in the form of governmental prescriptions or content in the form of objectives orientation and management. This control can also be achieved through national and international standardisation, educational measurement and testing, which indirectly shape the form and content of schooling (SIVESIND & KARSETH, 2010) and reduce the possibilities the teachers have for exerting autonomy and agency in choosing when and what to teach students, as they have to make sure learners can perform on these tests.

In terms of teacher professionalism, a macro-oriented perspective of curriculum design can be seen as a top-down perspective, where the government prescribes and the teachers act upon these prescriptions. A micro-oriented view of curriculum design, however, takes into account the experiences of the teachers, and may be seen as a bottom-up perspective of curriculum design. In the Norwegian context the challenge of curriculum development is finding a balance between the wish for control and governance at the macro level and the teachers' wishes and needs for a professional practice in terms of meeting the needs and contributing to the individual development of the learners in their classrooms.

In processes of curricular change thus, teachers with knowledge of and the ability to analyse the power relationships between school and educational governance – i.e. the interplay between the pedagogical discourses at the macro levels of state governance and the micro level of teacher

autonomy and 'action space' – become important. Furthermore it is important that teachers understand how the official field recontextualises and appropriates discourses from the micro level of educational research and practice and, as we showed above, makes this transition seem neutral and power free. In this connection we need to ask to which degree this is reflected in teacher education. Teacher education should, in our opinion, have as its goal to establish a teacher professionalism that can transcend the political fluctuations and their following gaps in the curricula. Future teachers need to learn to act critically and reflexively and adapt the changes in the curriculum in a manner that will allow them to act in the best interest of the learners. Furthermore, they need to develop and argue for educational or pedagogical strategies best suited for their learners and not only act according to the latest political governmental fads and fancies. In teacher education therefore, there is a need to develop knowledge not only directed at the micro level of classroom teaching but also to convey knowledge concerning the relationships between the macro levels of political and ideological control and its possible influences on teaching practice in the classroom. As the curriculum is the backbone of schooling, learning about curriculum development and educational governance, therefore needs to play a part in the development of an integrated teacher professionalism directed at teaching in the schools of tomorrow.

Summary

In this paper we have on the one side discussed the relationship between state governance of the educational system at the macro level, and on the other the teachers' needs for professional agency and autonomy at the micro level. In the fight between state governance and teacher professionalism, we have discussed how controlling the curriculum becomes the main battlefield in the battle over who should have the most influence over the schools and the educational system. In this paper we have discussed the nature of this battle i.e. the battle over the content and form of schooling and the curricula in Norway from the 1990s till today. Finally we have pointed to the need for teaching about this tension between the macro and micro level of educational governance in teacher education.

Notas

1 "Med Viten og Vilje"

2 Norwegian core curriculum http://www.udir.no/globalassets/upload/larerplaner/generell_del/5/core_curriculum_english.pdf

3 "Mot rikare mål" (Stortingsmeling nr 28 1998-99)

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