LITERACY LEARNING, CLASSROOM PROCESSES, AND RACE
A Microanalytic Study
of Two Desegregated Classrooms

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Detailed descriptions of what is occurring in classrooms and schools serving poor and minority students can illuminate the successes and failures of educational institutions in meeting the needs of these groups. Detailed examination of literacy learning and literacy activities as they occur in classrooms and schools serving poor and minority students is particularly salient, because of the roles that reading and writing play, not only as the foundation of learning in the content areas, but as indicators of academic success. This article explores the nature of one set of contexts for literacy learning, focusing on how three key issues—race, literacy learning, and classroom pro-

cesses—have manifested themselves in two junior high school classrooms.

Prior to the research presentation, it is important to discuss some of the theoretical assumptions that guided the study. This is followed by a brief discussion of the research methodology, and a discussion of the larger context, or background in which the study took place. Following that, the data collected from each classroom are presented and discussed.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The exploration of classroom processes, literacy learning, and interracial interaction described in this article is based on theoretical constructs that are related to the following questions: (1) What is the unit of context within which classroom processes, literacy learning, and race should be studied? (2) What is the nature of classroom processes—How are they captured? and (3) What is the nature of literacy learning? Recent theory and research from the fields of sociolinguistics, the ethnography of communication, and child language development provide a basis for responding to these three key questions.

UNIT OF CONTEXT

Discussions that focus on units of context typically involve debates concerning whether to utilize macrostructural or microanalytical approaches. Macrostructural approaches focus on the relationships between societal structures and the institutions and events embedded within them. Such approaches tend to examine educational issues and processes at the societal/community level. In contrast, microanalytic approaches focus on smaller units of context, such as that of a classroom, and examine the patterns of behavior of individuals in these smaller contextual units. Microanalytical approaches

are often based on the underlying assumptions (1) that smaller units of context are embedded in larger units of context—i.e., show-and-tell time is embedded in a classroom, which is embedded in a school, which is embedded in a community/ ideological context—and (2) that such smaller units of context can be "pulled out" of the larger contexts in which they are embedded without a loss of integrity.

The macrostructural/microanalytic debate has important implications for the study of classroom processes, literacy learning, and race. Ogbu (1978) has suggested that microanalytic approaches ignore the constraints which the society places upon the individual. He encapsulates this perspective by asking, "Can a nonracist school emerge within a racist community?" (1978: 291).

Microanalytic approaches, with their focus on patterns of behavior within smaller units of context, tend to look at macrostructural constraints as they are expressed through face-to-face interaction. Clement underscores this in her assertion that, "by ignoring these processes [microanalytic processes] sources of variation and change are obscured" (1978: 246). Thus, one important function of microanalytic approaches is to document and to describe how larger societal constraints are operationalized at the level of face-to-face interaction.

The approach taken in the research presented in this article is microanalytic in nature. Detailed descriptions of recurrent patterns of social and communicative behavior are provided within the context of face-to-face interaction of students and teachers. The purpose of the approach is to examine the complexity of the relationships between the three issues— classroom processes, literacy learning, and race. Although focusing on the microanalytical level, background information on the larger context in which these classrooms are embedded is also presented. (The macrostructural data were collected as part of the larger ethnographic study of literacy activities in school, home, and community setting; see Bloome, 1981; Bloome and Green, 1982.)

NATURE OF CLASSROOM PROCESSES

In this study, classroom processes are defined as social and communicative behavior at the level of face-to-face interaction in the classroom. That is, classroom processes were defined as the creation of a context for generating and interpreting behavior in the classroom. As Erickson and Shultz (1977: 5-6) suggest:

> Contexts are not simply *given* in the physical setting (kitchen, livingroom, sidewalk in front of a drug store) nor in combinations of personnel (two brothers, husband and wife, firemen). Rather, contexts are constituted by what people are doing and where and when they are doing it. As McDermott puts it succinctly (1976) people in interaction become evnironments for each other. Ultimately, social contexts consist of mutually shared and ratified definitions of situation *and* in the social actions persons take on the basis of these definitions [Mehan et al., 1976].

Contexts, then, are negotiated by people, as they interact with each other. The meanings and intentions that participants want to share are "visibly" signaled through verbal, nonverbal, and prosodic cues (Gumperz, 1976). These cues are interpreted in terms of (1) the negotiated context, and (2) past experience in analogous situations.

The capturing of classroom processes neessitates describing ways in which people create context through dynamic interchange. Because the creation of context is a shared event, it requires that participants make their intentions visible to each other through the use of contextualization cues: verbal, nonverbal, and prosodic signals (Gumperz, 1976). And just as the contextualization cues are accessible to the participants, they are also available to the participant observer/researcher. The key is to capture the recurrent patterns of social and linguistic behavior that are made visible through the use of contextualization cues. An ethnographic framework is appropriate to such a task, because of its emphasis on recording the cultural/social behavior of individuals through long-term

participant observation, fieldnote taking, audio and video-taping, and ethnographic interviewing.

NATURE OF LITERACY LEARNING

The previous section emphasized the social and linguistic basis of classroom processes. Literacy learning can also be viewed as a social and linguistic process. Such a view of literacy learning is based on recent research and theory in the field of sociolinguistics, child language development, and the ethnography of communication. As indicated in Bloome's (in press) observation about the reading process:

> As a social process, reading is viewed as an activity by which people orient themselves to each other, communicate ideas and emotions, control others, control themselves, acquire status or social position. acquire access to social rewards and privileges, and engage in various types of social interaction.

Given this perspective, literacy learning can be viewed as an activity that occurs within a social and linguistic context. Understanding literacy learning thus requires understanding the contexts in which literacy activities occur (Bloome and Green, 1982; Cazden, 1981). These aspects of literacy learning can be captured similarly to the capturing of classroom processes discussed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical assumptions discussed above provide both a framework and a rationale for the research methodology employed in this study. The methodology was both ethno-graphic and microanalytic in nature. As part of a larger ethnographic study of literacy activities, several key literacy activities were identified for videotaping and microanalysis. Key events refer to those instances in which social, psycholog-

ical and physical rewards were selectively distributed to students. Key literacy events were videotaped and micro-analyzed according to microanalytic procedures that call for the extraction of patterns of structural and thematic cohesion, as described in Bloome (1981) and Bloome and Green (1982).

Once recurrent patterns were identified, the validity of the patterns was determined in two ways. Internal validity was determined by looking for recurrent patterns in analogous settings, while the external validity was determined by asking participants to confirm that the identified patterns had validity from their perspectives.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted over ten months in an industrial midwestern city during the academic year 1979-1980. The research site, an inner-city junior high school, was exper-iencing its first year of court-ordered desegregation. The desegregation plan, which required the busing of 80% of the students, both Black and White, also called for faculty transfers that increased the teaching staff, and that called for the designation of a new principal for the junior high school.

The students selected were those enrolled in a special program for low-track seventh graders whose placement was determined primarily on the basis of their reading scores. The students had all of their classes together, and were integrated with other students only during physical education, lunch, science, and mathematics. Almost all of the Black students lived in one of two housing projects within the school district, while the White students resided in a small, predominately White, ethnic neighborhood, embedded in the predominately Black side of the city.

Racial relations in the city were characterized by both pro- and antidesegregation protests. The elected political leadership frequently voiced opposition to the desegregation plan, and the

antagonistic relationship between the school board and the federal court was both overt and well publicized. The economic situation was typified by increasing unemployment, which rose to near 50% among young Black males who were out of school (either drop-outs or high school graduates).

LITERACY LEARNING IN
TWO DESEGREGATED CLASSROOMS

The data presented in this section concern patterns of social and linguistic behavior involved in literacy learning activities in two desegregated classrooms. The data from the social studies lesson and then the data from the English lesson are successively presented and discussed.

THE SOCIAL STUDIES LESSON

Ms. Jones's (pseudonym) social studies class frequently engaged in question and answer discussions in the social studies context. The students would be assigned a few pages in a social studies textbook and would answer worksheet questions or would complete other exercises concerning the subject matter. The teacher would then question the students orally about the social studies content, frequently using the same questions that appeared on the worksheets.

There were several purposes for this classroom procedure, according to the teacher. First, it gave students an opportunity to learn the content and to use their written work to foster classroom participation. Second, it provided an incentive for students to complete the classwork/homework assignments. As the classroom activities focused on reading, and the teacher focused on the students' comprehension of the text, students had to read the text in order to complete required worksheets or to answer questions in class.

The following interaction typifies those observed and re-
corded in the social studies class, and in other classrooms
observed as well, i.e., other social studies classes, mathematics
classes, physical education classes, among others. The inter-
action presented is composed of a transcript of the events,
followed by a discussion of recurrent social and linguistic
patterns observed in the classroom context. (Although the
nonverbal cues were recorded on the transcript, space limita-
tions prevent a detailed presentation of nonverbal and pros-
odic cues.)

The students had been studying geographical features of the
southeastern United States and had been assigned classwork
that required them to use their texts to answer a set of written
questions. The students had worked on the assignment in a
previous class, and had been allowed to complete the assign-
ment for homework the night before the interaction presented
in Figure 1 was recorded.

Several key aspects in the segment in Figure 1 are worthy of
discussion. The first aspect involves the nature of the teacher's
response to Charles, after Charles had already answered the
question. Although Charles presented the correct answer, the
teacher continued the interaction by asking Charles to com-
plete another task: "to put it in his own words," and
simultaneously to "put it in a complete sentence." Although
Charles accomplished this task, it was not accomplished in a
manner that was satisfactory to the teacher. The teacher
wanted not only a complete sentence, but a complete sentence
of a particular type. In effect, although Charles had correctly
answered the original question, and had completed the task
demands of the second question, he was treated as if he had
given a wrong answer.

This pattern of student-teacher interaction is best illumin-
ated through comparison with the pattern of teacher-student
interaction discussed by Mehan (1979). Mehan found the

Source	Line #	Message Unit
T	001	FIRST OF ALL WE'RE TALKING ABOUT/NATURAL FEATURES// X X X X X X X X X X X
T	002	IF I TALK ABOUT THE NATURAL FEATURES OF THE LAND///

*T - Ms. Jones (teacher)   Sd - Darnel   Sx - unidentified student
Sc - Charles   Sk - Carl   Ss - many students in the class
Solid underline - stress   Intermitte   iderline - message spoken rapidly
Broken line underline - message spoken   1   / - pause

T	003	IF I TALK ABOUT THE NATURAL FEATURES OF THE LAND//
T	004	/AA/ CHARLES WHAT AM I REFERRING TO/// X X X X X X X X X r
Ss	005	Oh oh
Sc	006	Would you please repeat that
T	007	IF I'M TALKING AND ASKING ABOUT THE NATURAL FEATURES OF THE LAND/ X X X X X X X X X X X WHAT AM I REFERRING TO
Sc	008	looks down holds his head in his hands)
T	009	PUT YOUR HANDS DOWN GIVE CHARLES A CHANCE///
Sc	010	(Carl sits upright, raises both arms out to side, palms up)
T	011	DARNELL r
Sd	012	Huh r
T	013	WHAT AM I REFERRING TO WHEN I SAY NATURAL FEATURES/ X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
Sd	014	Ohhhh//
Sd	015	I forgot that one
T	016	CARAL
Sk	017	Huh
T	018	WHAT AM I REFERRING TO WHEN I SAY NATURAL FEATURES
Sk	019	Ummmm///
Sc	020	Oooooooo
Sc	021	I know I know I know I know Mrs. Jones X X X X X X X X X X X X X
T	022	CHARLES
Sc	023	Unmm//
Sc	024	Plains hills/
Sc	025	And/ plantons mountains lakes and rivers. X X X X X X
T	026	OKAY SO PUT IT IN YOUR OWN WORDS AND GIVE ME X X X X X X X X X X X X

Figure 1: Sample Interaction   *(continued)*

T	027	EXCUSE ME/
T	028	GIVE ME A COMPLETE SENT'NCE CHARLES
Sc	029	That's plains hills..
T	030	THAT'S NOT A COMPLETE SENTENCE
Sd	031	Ooooo I know/
T	032	GIVE ME A COMPLETE SENTENCE
Sd	033	Do it do it do it refer to plains X X X X X X
T	034	NOPE
Sc	035	Mountains lakes and rivers
T	036	MOUNTAINS LAKES AND RIVLRS/
T	037	IS THAT A COMPLETE SENTENCE JOSE r
Jose	038	NO
T	039	NO
T	040	CAN YOU GIVE ME A COMPLETE SENTENCE USING NATURAL FEATURES/ AND MOUNTAINS AND LAKE AND RIVERS/
T	041	THAT'S NUMBER ONE ON YOUR DEFINITION///
T	042	OKAY JOHN
T	043	WILL YOU HELP US OUT r
John	044	The natural features are mountains lakes and rivers.
T	045	CHARLES WILL YOU REPEAT THAT//
Sc	046	Natural mountains lakes and rivers.
T	047	JOHN WILL YOU SAY IT AGAIN
Sx	048	Don't say it//
John	049	Natural features
Ss	050	(Laughter. General class noise)
T	051	CHARLES
Sc	052	I ain't helping him is fool was talking///
John	053	Natural/
Sc	054	(Charles points arm at John)
T	055	ill
Sc	056	The natural features
Sc	057	lakes mountains and rivers

Figure 1 (Continued)

1	058	NO YOU FORGOT THE VERB//
T	0	°F NATURAL FEATURES
Sx	060	Are/
1	061	CHARLES
Sc	062	Are
T	063	ARE
Sc	064	Mountains lakes and rivers
T	065	MOUNTAINS LAKES RIVERS
Sc	066	I got it right

Figure 1 (Continued)

following pattern in the teacher-student questioning inter-action:

TEACHER INITIATION
STUDENT RESPONSE
TEACHER EVALUATION

Mehan also discovered that if a student gave the wrong response, the teacher would ask additional questions or allow for additional responses, until the initial student or another student arrived at the expected answer. Mehan suggests that the teacher and the students work together through this framework in order to accomplish the teacher-designed in-structional task.

The teacher-student interaction pattern transcribed in our study fits into Mehan's pattern with one major difference. Although there is a TEACHER INITIATION (or question) and a STUDENT RESPONSE, the TEACHER EVALUA-TION differs as it is a NEGATIVE TEACHER EVALUA-TION; instead of asking questions or allowing for responses so that the students would arrive at the correct answer, the teacher has structured the interaction so that the student who orig-inally answered can receive only a negative evaluation.

A second aspect of the teacher-student interaction is the teacher's choice of who would model the correct response—the complete sentence. The teacher selected a White student to model the answer for a Black student in this desegregated setting. To explore further data concerning this issue, during one year of frequent participant observations in two social studies classes and in one English class, there was not one recorded instance in which a Black student modeled a correct answer for a White student *as a result of a teacher directive.* There were, however, several instances in which Black students modeled correct answers within student-student interactions. To sharpen the contrast further, a careful review of fieldnotes and the corpus of videotapes indicates that there was not a single segment in which a White student was asked to rephrase an answer in a complete sentence, while both White and Black students answered numerous questions in incomplete sentences. (It should be noted that there were several instances in which both White and Black students were corrected for slang, i.e., ain't.)

It is important to note that the interactional pattern found in the instructional segment discussed above was not triggered by a Black student's use of an incomplete sentence. For example, the interaction pattern reoccurred within that same lesson when another Black male student was asked about the climate in Florida. Although the student answered the initial question correctly, a follow-up question was answered incorrectly by the same student; at this point, the teacher initiated a series of questions and designated a White student to model the correct answer for this Black student.

Further review of the videotapes and the fieldnotes shows that the same Black students seemed to be involved in this pattern of teacher-student interaction, while some Black students, primarily female, were never involved in this teacher-student interaction pattern at all. Furthermore, it should be noted that the interaction pattern, with some minor modifications, was found in both social studies classrooms, which were part of the study, as well as in other classrooms observed during the study as a whole.

Before discussing the English class, it is important to stress that the pattern of student-teacher interaction discussed above cannot be dismissed as being idiosyncratic to one particular teacher. As mentioned earlier, the pattern was observed in other classrooms in similar question-and-answer situations. (It was not observed in all classrooms.) Further, the patterns cannot be dismissed as mere teacher reactions to nonstandard English (i.e., sentences that omit the verb "to be"), for the interaction pattern occurred even in instances in which the "correctness" of the language used by the students was not an issue.

THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

The students in the English classroom were the same as those observed in the social studies classroom. Although there were question/answer sessions in this classroom as well, they were not characteristic of classroom procedure. If a difference between the interactional pattern used with Black males during question/answer sessions existed, it would prove difficult to capture, due to the infrequent use of the question/answer discussion format.

Class procedure in this classroom was typified by seatwork. The teacher would distribute texts, workbooks and/or other curricular materials, and would instruct the students as to what tasks had to be completed. The teacher would then circulate among the students, helping those individuals who requested assistance. When the teacher was not actively circulating, she remained at her desk in front of the room, correcting papers or completing other paperwork.

The pattern of social and linguistic behavior captured in this English classroom primarily involves that of nonverbal behavior. Students rarely talked during the seatwork sessions, uttering only in whispers when they did have verbal exchanges. Yet, even despite the limited verbal interchange, the students seemed to monitor each other's behavior all the same.

The sample of classroom behavior presented below focuses on three female students—two Black and one White—who

worked together in a group. Beyond these three, all of the students seemed to form groups of three, four, and five in the classroom setting, selecting group members according to the proximity to their table. The groups in this classroom were biracial, occasionally consisting of both males and females. However, the group's function did not extend beyond that of completing English classwork, as these students participated in different groupings during free time (e.g., lunch, hall passing) and during other classes.

The English lesson observed was primarily concerned with vocabulary building. More specifically, the classroom task required students to complete several pages of a workbook by writing responses on their own papers rather than in the workbook itself. The lesson was considered a literacy learning activity by both the teacher and the students, for the students were increasing their vocabulary, which would in turn assist them in their reading. In addition, the students were both reading the workbook exercises and applying the new vocabulary to sentences in the workbook throughout the entire learning activity.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF THE LESSON

The lesson began with the school bell ringing, and the teacher telling the students to which page to turn in their own workbooks. Three students, Carol, Beth, and Iris—who sit together—are flipping pages, standing/or searching pants pockets for pencils, and/or positioning their books. At this point their postural positioning and nonverbal behavior are not coordinated; however, they are monitoring each other.

Although the bell has rung, the teacher does not begin the lesson immediately. There are several false starts. Finally, about two minutes after the bell, the teacher says "Alright, I'll pronounce the words for you." Beth and Carol turn and look at each other and smile. By this time, their postural positioning is identical. It does not stay identical at this point, but rather fluctuates between being similar and nonsimilar. All three girls

continue to arrange and position their books and materials in front of them.

The teacher begins saying the vocabulary words: "Nasal, pass, outspoken, infuriate, serious, antics, interview, daily ..." As the words are being said, there seems to be little interaction between the teacher, the class, and the three girls. That is, on the surface level nobody seems to be paying much attention to the teacher. Near the end of the word list, Iris, Beth, and Carol are all hunched over their books. Iris asks for help in locating the place on the page where they are to work and Beth shows her. Carol looks on as this happens.

After finishing pronouncing the words, the teacher then tells the students that they are to complete the exercise "as they always do." By this time, the class is quiet, and nearly everyone is hunched over their books and paper. The three girls are also hunched over their materials. As they work they monitor each other with side glances and overt gazes. When one of the girls changes her postural position (e.g., sits upright or shifts to the side), the other girls will either simultaneously or closely thereafter also change their postural positioning. When one of the girls ceases doing her work or "gets stuck," one of the other girls will stop and assist her (the other girl also stops and monitors).

PATTERNS IN THE STUDENTS' BEHAVIOR

The nonverbal student behavior illustrated above contains a recurrent pattern in which the three students monitor each other's behavior, share resources, and finally coordinate their behaviors as a group. At the beginning of the lesson, the students were monitoring each other's behavior by looking at each other and by arranging the placement of materials on the table. Though the students monitored each other's behavior as the lesson progressed, they also tended to share similar postural configurations. They hunched over their workbooks together; they all looked up together. It appears that their monitoring allowed them to coordinate their behavior, e.g., to

engage in sharing and then to return to similar postural configurations. The pattern of monitoring, sharing, and maintaining similar postural configurations continued for most of the 45-minute lesson observed.

Most intriguing about the pattern beyond the nonverbal behavior itself is its implication concerning the nature of student-student and student-teacher interaction. The students were engaged in forming and maintaining groups—in forming and maintaining a context for participation in the lesson. The group formation and maintenance was an integral part of the context for participation in the lesson. The teacher rarely interfered in or interrupted the learning context that the students, themselves, had created. Interviews with the teacher support the notion that students were viewed as independent monitors of their own classwork. Interestingly, although aware of classroom friendships, the teacher was unaware of the student role in creating a context for participation in the lesson.

DISCUSSION OF THE TWO CLASSROOMS

The microanalytic approaches used in exploring the social studies and English classes have revealed significant differences in classroom processes and peer interaction. Some variability between classrooms may be due to the difference in opportunities for student-student interaction and verbal exchange. That is, while the social studies classroom primarily involved interaction between the teacher and student on a message-by-message basis, the English classroom primarily involved interaction between students working in groups, and interaction between the teacher and the class *as a group.*

Closer analysis reveals significant differences in the gatekeeping mechanisms embedded in the different classroom processes themselves. In the social studies classroom, the teacher controlled the oral teacher-student interaction pattern by determining which students got to answer questions, which

students were allowed to be "correct," and which students were not allowed to be "correct." Interfacing this interaction pattern with the issue of race, Charles, for example, a Black male student, made several attempts to get through the instructional "gate" established by the teacher, yet his correct responses were not viewed as adequate by the teacher. Rather, the task was restructured so that he received a negative evaluation. This interactional pattern was not isolated to Charles, but was a recurrent pattern with other Black male students, and in other analogous settings in both the social studies classroom and other classrooms.

Other recurrent patterns suggest that while both Black and White students frequently answered in incomplete sentences, Black students, and primarily Black male students, were asked to rephrase sentences. Further, Black students did not seem to be asked to model correct responses for White students as a result of teacher directives, and seemed to receive opportunity to model correct answers for White students only within student-student interactions.

The English classroom was structured in ways that fostered both teacher-group and peer interactions, with each type of interaction containing a different—although perhaps over-lapping—set of gate-keeping constraints.

Although the English teacher structured the classroom to produce a specific classroom climate, the teacher did not engage students in interaction at the level of face-to-face interaction on a message-by-message basis. Rather, the students themselves created a context for face-to-face inter-action—as indicated in their interaction pattern of monitoring behavior, sharing resources, and coordinating behavior as a group. In this setting, the students functioned both as inde-pendent monitors and as gate keepers for their peers. As gate keepers, the students maintained the norms of the context they had created and held each other accountable for acting in ways consistent with those norms. The context they had created allowed opportunities for both Black and White students to model correct answers for each other.

Our findings and our discussion need to be viewed within the context of their theoretical framework and methodology. The ethnographic approach used in the study to generate grounded theoretical constructs was based on the microanalysis of two classrooms, and on observation of recurrent patterns in analogous settings within the one school. However, beyond learning about these two classrooms, to paraphrase Bissex (1980), we are observing some patterns which hold true for other classrooms, though which patterns and the generalizability of which patterns can be known only from further studies. But, from observing literacy learning, classroom processes, and race in these two contexts, we have some leads as to which patterns for which to look in observations of other desegregated classrooms.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Studies that have focused on classroom and school processes in desegregated schools have tended to utilize ethnographic approaches (e.g. Rist, 1978; Clement and Harding, 1978; Collins, 1978). Detailed accounts of classroom processes provide insights into how gate-keeping mechanisms operate at the level of face-to-face interaction. Though not overlooking the salience of the research that has already been gathered, attention to the microanalytical level generates yet another set of research questions for exploring classroom processes in desegregated settings.

The microanalytic approach utilized in this study provides one means for generating detailed descriptions concerning how social and communicative contexts are established in classroom settings. Such studies have the potential for revealing the complexity of classroom processes and for extracting patterns of social and communicative behavior related to literacy learning, racial interaction, and gate keeping in the classroom. The detailed descriptions of social and communicative behavior described earlier are thus presented here as grounded theoretical constructs.

The implications arising from the patterns extracted suggest that literacy learning and classroom processes, viewed interactively and in relation to race, need to be examined at the level of face-to-face interaction, as well as at macrostructural levels. That is, illumination of the underlying educational processes involved in the education of poor and minority children requires research across the multiple levels of context.

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