Support Booklet

Volume II, Issue 3 April 2007

Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry

Work Plan Support Booklet – April 2007

Introduction/Overview

Late afternoon, February 28, our plane took off into the sunny blue Sudbury sky. We had come to the end of our "Together at Last" in-service sessions. It has been a pleasure and privilege over these past six weeks to meet so many of you from all corners of the province. Almost every Ontario school team was represented and some braved daunting winter driving conditions. Terrific spirit!

A great deal was shared and learned by all. Most importantly, we believe all participants left with a sense of accomplishment about their work to date and with the genesis of a plan for the remainder of the year and the rest of the project. To all school teams who shared their school stories we extend our deepest appreciation. Kudos to all the individuals who ferried student materials, teacher resources, samples of surveys, data boards, videos, and Power Points. You made each day so full and rich with these artifacts!

Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry has become a catalyst for extensive capacity building in our schools and we hope this project continues to connect you to the work of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and Student Success. In addition, the just released *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* will point the way for much needed work to support our Aboriginal children and youth.

Key directions emerging from the sessions:

1. Continue to **refine** your Essential Question in order to make data collection more precise and **manageable.**
2. Focus your Essential Question to include a specific aspect of boys' **reading and writing achievement** if your question presently includes only the ***interest, motivation, or engagement*** of boys.
3. If your team hasn't done so already, add some **qualitative** data which necessitates selecting a **purposeful sample.**
4. Use ***"triangulation"***, using at least two, if not three data collection methods to verify your findings.

What's next? Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry Ends Spring 2008

- A Progress Report, chronicling your work over 2006-2007, will be due in **June 2007**.
- A Final Report, which documents and summarizes your completed teacher inquiry work through the presentation of final data results, full elaboration of the strategy(ies) your team employed, a description of your overall learning, and the identification of next steps, will be due in **spring 2008**.
- A template will be provided for both of these reports.

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Inside This Issue

What You Said: The Highs and Lows

The first activity in the morning of our eight provincial in-service sessions was entitled "Highs and Lows". It provided an opportunity for you individually and in teams to reflect on the successes and the challenges of your Boys' Literacy Inquiry since its inception. What a resounding affirmation of positive themes!

Four strong themes emerged from the HIGHS:

a) Professional learning communities, teams, and collaboration
b) Student success - achievement, excitement, and engagement with literacy
c) Books, books, and more books!
d) Parent and community involvement

a) Professional learning communities, teams, and collaboration:

A recurring theme was the value of the professional growth and collaboration opportunities. For example:

- Reading a book, exploring a theory, and having the time to discuss and debate the merits;
- Attending professional workshops that integrated school and board goals related to the boys' literacy teacher inquiry project;
- Learning from each other – staff members with interest and expertise in an area provided support for other colleagues;
- Increased understanding of best practices with support for classroom implementation;
- Opportunities to dialogue and work with colleagues across panels, divisions, and other schools;
- Using a common language which resulted in clearer understanding; and
- Developing a collaborative culture that strengthened the school community.

b) Student success -- achievement, excitement, and engagement:

Student engagement, excitement, and an increase in achievement were other highlights that emerged from the collected "highs". Some of the comments revealed the beneficial effects of honouring boys' reading interests and their identity as learners. For example:

- Students appreciated their opportunities to help choose the material – "their opinions were valued."
- Boys' insights became visible via talk and engagement.
- Boys' were excited when trying new strategies with their new reading material.
- Interest and energy were generated!

c) Books, books, and more books!

Needless to say, the influx of all new resources geared to boys' interests and strengths increased boys' motivation. Some of the comments were:

- The large selection of non-fiction resources to support curriculum encouraged many boys to read beyond the curriculum.
- Book clubs generated collegiality and learning among students.
- Consumable magazines were "consumed" to tatters!
- Fantastic new and current resources were introduced into the classroom and library.

"Have the courage to allow boys to read what they want and the strength to guide boys to read what they need."

Larry Swartz, at ELAN, March 2, 2007

d) Parent and community involvement:

- Parent and community involvement emerged as another strong "High". Fathers came to schools to read on a regular basis. Community role models, sports celebrities, male authors, and local companies all contributed to improving boys' literacy skills.
- Local companies helped with furniture and hardware purchases and in one case, a dealership loaned a "Smart Car" that teachers loaded with books and decorated with balloons to provide a tangible motivator to read.
- Parents' responses on reading logs indicated their excitement as they saw their boys' reading increase in both volume and interest, "My son has become a bookworm!"
- Parents' enthusiasm, involvement, and support all rose to new levels.

The Challenges: The LOWS

You also expressed some of the constraints and challenges you experienced in early implementation. The transitional aspects – changes in staffing, student mobility, and data challenges are areas we have addressed in other parts of this Support Booklet and will continue to address in subsequent materials.

What You Said: Instructional Strategies

During the January/February provincial in-service sessions, school teams shared some of the key instructional strategies in use with the Boys' Literacy Inquiry. The exercise yielded a broad picture of pedagogical, individual, and school-based strategies. A few were wildly popular!

- The provision of the "right stuff" was overwhelmingly the strategy most frequently mentioned – books, books, and more new books, but magazines, newspapers, graphic texts, non-fiction, read-alouds, daily modeled, and shared reading, sustained silent reading, variety of texts, choice of texts, top-ten lists, and new reading environments were also popular.

- "Teach with purpose" was another strategy that surfaced frequently, with the focus on explicit teaching strategies, higher-order thinking skills, the characteristics of new genres, and reading through the writing were all reflected on the list.

- Male role models and peer mentoring ("Find positive role models") were employed frequently involving male teachers in the school, older students, recognized community members, and high-profile authors and sports figures coming to read with students.

- Technology ("Get the net") ranked relatively high in the frequency count as well, with electronic graphic organizers, gaming centres, the use of video, other media, and assistive technology extolled as strategies that engage, interest, and support boys.

- Next in terms of frequency were the use of the "Drive the point home" strategy and the "Let them talk" strategy.

- Teams also reported the efficacy of consensus marking, reading response logs, questioning, single-gender instructional settings, and differentiated instruction.

- It was interesting to note that some of the remaining strategies in the booklet, *Me Read? No Way!,* "Assess for success", "Make it a habit" and "Read between the lines" (critical literacy) did not receive as much attention, while "Embrace the arts" had strong programs in a few schools. This emphasis on the arts for boys, while not widely used, had a powerful impact.

Dealing with Transitions: Sustaining our Learning over the Bumps!

How can principals and vice-principals support their school teams to sustain momentum and project learning in the months ahead?

Sustainability will depend on the school team's collective ability, dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation, and resources to act together to bring about positive change in boys and their learning in a continuous manner, over time.

Adapted from *Facilitator's Guide to Leadership and Sustainability, Michael Fullan, 2006.*

In our January/February sessions, many teams identified changing personnel – colleagues and administrators – as a key challenge to continuity and the smooth functioning of inquiry teams.

We can be certain there will be more changes ahead. Change is a fact of life. Changes or not, our goal in Teacher Inquiry is expanding the knowledge base. Engaging more and more partners in serious conversations about boys and their learning is our aspiration.

In some cases, where our teacher contacts and administrators have changed schools, they have continued to network with the original project schools and introduce the project in their new schools. That's the stuff! In some other cases, district staff have connected schools of similar needs. Change has a very positive side!

School circumstances and contexts vary widely, however, here are two things to remember:

1. School principals and contact teachers should meet regularly to keep each other 'in the loop'. Meetings should provide progress updates and include the topic: how can we engage other staff beyond the school team?
2. Each school team should plan ahead for the transitions which will surely come about in June through September 2007.

"Trust plays a vital role in the smooth functioning of our schools. Leaders play a pivotal role in fostering high quality relationships among teachers, students, and parents and a balance of concern for relationships and a concern for tasks is essential."

Adapted from **Trust Matters: Leadership for Successful Schools**
Megan Tschannen-Moran, 2004

Some questions for thinking and planning for transitions:

1. How frequently do you touch base with your Teacher Inquiry Team contact person? What practices can make that occur more regularly?
2. What strategies could be used to extend and communicate the learning of your Boys' Literacy Inquiry Team to other staff, other schools, or to your board?
3. Is there an opportunity to communicate via staff meetings, department or divisional meetings, e-mail groups, chat rooms, or Monday morning memos?
4. How could you establish connections with other schools? Are there schools in your district that could adapt the action research process? Do you know of schools in your district with gender achievement gaps that would benefit from a conversation with you and your team? What could you learn from them?
5. Sustainability is enhanced when people in a system work together. How might you capitalize on this Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry initiative to make connections? Can you enhance some organizational structures presently in place in your school to encourage people to work together more closely?
6. How can you provide information to your successor to smooth the transition if you will not be at the school next year? How will you update a new teacher contact? New staff?

Adapted from *Facilitator's Guide to Leadership and Sustainability, Michael Fullan, 2006.*

NOTE: If your school is undergoing significant teacher or principal changes in '07, please let us know. We can offer special support to you!

Data Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative

As you look at the data you have collected up to this point, now is the opportune time to decide how you will organize it, augment it, and make sense of it all. Eventually, you will need to formulate conclusions about the improvement of your boys' literacy achievement and attitudes. As a team, discuss the big picture:

- What data do you have?
- What does the data tell you?
- How does it relate to your Essential Question?
- What is important to your Essential Question and what is extraneous?

Remember that you are also using your data to guide on-going instructional choices, changes in your teaching and learning environment, and improvements to your school literacy culture.

Now, revisit your Essential Question once again – post it prominently to keep it in mind as you sort through your data.

Sort the various types of **quantitative data** that you have collected into categories or themes and tackle each type separately. Organizing it this way will let you access relevant data efficiently and help you decide what to set aside as not relevant to your Essential Question. What do these results tell you about the improvements in your boys' literacy achievement? Do these quantitative results provide evidence of boys' growth as learners and changes in their attitudes or their engagement with literacy activities? Documenting these themes and patterns is a good start. You will no doubt continue to gather information as time passes.

Review the following **qualitative data** collection methods and ensure that you have some of these represented in your overall data plan.

Qualitative Data Types	Organizing/Analyzing
Journals/Logs (teacher narrative) ♦ note a quick phrase, a quote, or key points to remind you of an important incident ♦ use actual student comments to help you bring that moment back	♦ capture your "raw"* data and then add some reflective comments at the end of the day or week ♦ these reflections become your "cooked"* notes *Terms used by Hubbard and Power
Observational notes ♦ write quickly, don't judge what you have written ♦ record initial point forms and observations	♦ leave some white space in your recording notebook, skim through anecdotal notes and highlight patterns and connections ♦ index your notes according to categories and themes
Observational Notes (parent/student narrative) ♦ review logs with parents and students on a regular basis	♦ feedback from parents and student perceptions can give indications of progress ♦ note any inconsistencies with classroom/school observations
Conferencing/Interviews (student narrative) ♦ use open-ended questions, such as "What were you telling me the other day about…? ♦ listen actively ♦ be flexible in your questioning	♦ allow the student voice to emerge with recorded quotations ♦ highlight only key information
Student Work/Classroom Artifacts ♦ save and date everything!	♦ sorting artifacts into chronological order will no doubt give you some "aha" moments ♦ connect the student work with some of your written observations to reinforce your evidence
Surveys/Questionnaires ♦ use attitudinal or interest surveys/questionnaires administered at the beginning of the inquiry and at various points along the way to track changes	♦ consider your baseline survey and compare with more recent ones
Video and Audio Tapes ♦ use media records as a record of progress	♦ capture only key moments and observations

Data Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative...Continued

Consider the following key concepts as you work with your data:

Triangulation: Remember to focus on the 2 or 3 most significant separate sources of data and points of view that encompass both quantitative and qualitative data.

Compare: Comparing data at different points in time will definitely help you formulate your conclusions.

Depicting: In addition to the physical sorting of your notes, file cards, and artifacts, you need to set up charts and ways of tabulating your data. Visualize your data, map it out, and draw a visual representation to document what you have collected. Use colours, shapes, diagrams, or sketches to show different ideas and groupings. This may help you spot patterns or themes.

Sequencing and testing: You can order your data findings chronologically, by frequency, or by importance. Decide which makes the most sense for your question. Try a few different scenarios to explain what the findings might mean.

Talk (Accountable talk): Try to summarize your findings in a short paragraph. What have you left out? Were you able to synthesize the most important points?

Now try to explain your findings to a Critical Friend. Consider whether they see the same things that you do. Consider their interpretations and use this feedback to clarify and validate your own work.

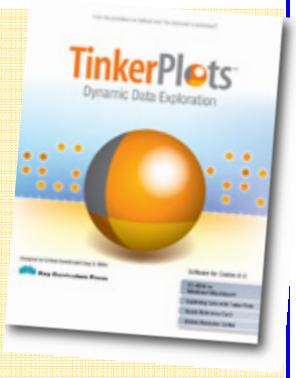
Now you are definitely on your way!

Analyzing, making comparisons, ordering, and depicting are not as overwhelming when dealing with quantitative data. Generally, you have test results at a point in time for a specific group of boys and you can compare them with the results at the next time point to formulate conclusions.

Interrogating (examining with a critical eye) your qualitative data according to the strategies above will help you deal with your findings in a systematic and organized fashion. Remember that you as the teacher have a significant impact on the learning of your students.

A tracking template such as the one illustrated on page 7 may be one way to help you make sense of your data.

TinkerPlots™ - Ministry of Education Licensed Software



Data users should seek out technological support to help record information so it can be summarized and analyzed.

TinkerPlots™ software is Ontario Ministry of Education licensed software available through OESS for all teachers and students in publicly-funded schools. While it is designed for students in grades 4-8, its ease of use and capacity make it an excellent tool for teachers to depict and interpret Boys' Literacy data at all grade levels. Using the software, you can input your data through an easy-to-use interface and create visual representations of your data that will help you make sense of it and recognize themes and patterns as they unfold.

The software will depict your data in the form of graphs through which you can easily explore the more sophisticated statistical measures such as mean, median, and mode without having specialized statistical knowledge.

1. The first step is to enter data such as: results of a survey, repeated occurrences of certain "literacy" activities, students' assessment results.
2. The software will then create a graph depicting this information in colour – it can be pie charts, scatter plots, bar graphs, or histograms. It also allows you to add lines and "play" with different aspects to test your findings related to your Essential Question.
3. Interpreting what the graphs depict is the next step. Note the percentages of each aspect and, as you look at the graph, compare various components to find patterns.
4. Any information that you change is immediately updated, making this software easy to use and flexible as you work with your data.

Locate your school's copy of TinkerPlots and get ready to make sense of your data!

Data Analysis: Tracking Template

Data Source # 1	Assessment Focus	Evidence
Type: Quantitative Source e.g., CASI, DRA, report card, EQAO *Time Period:* *Method of Collection:*	*What is this data supposed to measure?*	*What evidence does this data provide?*
Data Source # 2	**Assessment Focus**	**Evidence**
Type:Quantitative Source *Time Period:* *Method of Collection:*	*What is this data supposed to measure?*	*What evidence does this data provide?*
Data Source # 3	**Assessment Focus**	**Evidence**
Type: Qualitative Source e.g., Observations, notes, attitudinal surveys *Time Period:* *Method of Collection:*	*What is this data supposed to measure?*	*What evidence does this data provide?*

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: Working with Informational Texts

The latest issue of ***Reading TODAY*** (February/ March 2007) trumpeted in their headline, "What's Hot and What's Not Hot for 2007!" Listed among the eight **very hot topics** was "informational texts."

Now many **informational texts** are being introduced as part of the Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry. For those who may be implementing a literature circle approach already with your boys, you may wish to add a variation with some **non-fiction literature circles!** Or you may want to try **informational writing** with your students!

Non-fiction texts suitable for literature circles include: biographies, how-to books, adventure tales, eyewitness books, magazines, newspapers, and some historical books.

Because non-fiction texts are different in content, structure, style, and purpose from fiction texts, you may need to make some changes in the regular approach. Here are some steps for non-fiction literature circles taken from the classroom of Laura Candler at http://home.att.net/~teaching/litcirclemodels.htm.

Non-fiction text suitable for use with literature circles has "some kind of narrative structure, some conflict or danger, some opposition of values, some kind of ethical or political dimension, some debate or dispute, and some ideas that can be disagreed on".

Mini Lessons for Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke, 2004

Nonfiction Literature Circles

1. Choose three books for which you can find multiple copies. Remember to obtain one of each for yourself. You may wish to choose a challenging book, an average book, and an easy book to meet the needs of different students in your class.
2. Allow students to choose which book circle they would like to join. You can post a sign-up sheet or have the students write their choices on a slip of paper. For students who may choose a book that is too difficult for them, try getting them to read a full page for you. If they still want to read the book, let them give it a try.
3. You might try instituting "reading days" and then "meeting days." On reading days the students in a small group would read together and take notes on the book. They might want to discuss vocabulary or share experiences around their new learning. While they may engage in some brief discussion about the book, the time should be primarily for reading. When they finish the book, they can schedule a meeting day.
4. To support those students who need extra scaffolding, you might provide a response slip where students write a one or two sentence summary of the sections they have read.
5. Prior to meeting with you, they should prepare a response log which they read at the meeting and then discuss what they thought of the book. Having some discussion cards related to their book for each group helps support students and guide them through the more important points of the book.
6. Group meetings should be open, natural conversations, encouraging personal connections and open-ended questions.
7. To conclude, all students should complete a non-fiction reflection form for their book.
8. You may also have an evaluation form to use with this new type of **non-fiction information circle** to record notes on individual participation and preparation.

Here is a sample of the organizational patterns found in informational texts and a few sample questions that promote understanding.

Organizational Pattern	Questions that Promote Understanding
Chronological – presents events in time sequence.	What are the major incidents? What is the sequence of events?
Comparison and contrast – presents information about similarities and differences.	What items are being compared? What characteristics are being compared? In what ways are these items different? What are their common characteristics?
Concept/definition – presents general information about a class of persons, places, things, or events.	What concept is being defined? How does it work or what does it do? What examples are given for each of the characteristics?
Description – describes characteristics of specific persons, places, things, or events.	What is being described? What are the most important attributes or characteristics? Why is the description important?
Episodic – "chunks" a large body of information into separate units.	What event is being explained or described? What is the setting? What are the major figures or characters featured in this event? What are the specific incidents or events that occur?
Generalization/principle – organizes information into general statements with supporting examples.	What generalization is the author making or what principle is being explained? What facts, examples, statistics, or expert opinions are given that support the generalization or explain the principle?
Process/cause and effect – organizes information into a series of steps leading to a specific product or outcome.	What process or subject is being explained? What are the specific steps in the process? What is the product of the process or what is the outcome of the causal events?

Writing Informational Texts

Margriet Ruurs in her column, "Write Away!" **in *Reading TODAY*** heralds **informational writing** as a powerful tool to turn children into avid writers.

Writing informational text is ideally suited to teach students to research, form questions, examine data, and share their knowledge in a concise manner. Encourage students to select a topic for their own writing by asking questions such as, "What are you interested in?"; "What do you wonder about?"; "What do you know about?", or "What would you like to explore?"

Students may wish to try writing how-to texts, essays, reports, school newspapers, reviews, or surveys. Students may write a how-to piece about their own specific skill or hobby (e.g., building a scale model, folding paper airplanes, or preparing PowerPoint presentations) that can be shared within the class.

Other examples of informational writing projects are: produce an informational booklet about your community's parks and nature trails; prepare a welcome booklet about the school for new students; interview grandparents and record their childhood stories and memoirs.

This booklet has been developed with financial support from the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Qualitative Data: A Conversation with Dr. Lynne Hannay

The enclosed DVD elaborates upon key elements of collecting and analyzing qualitative data.

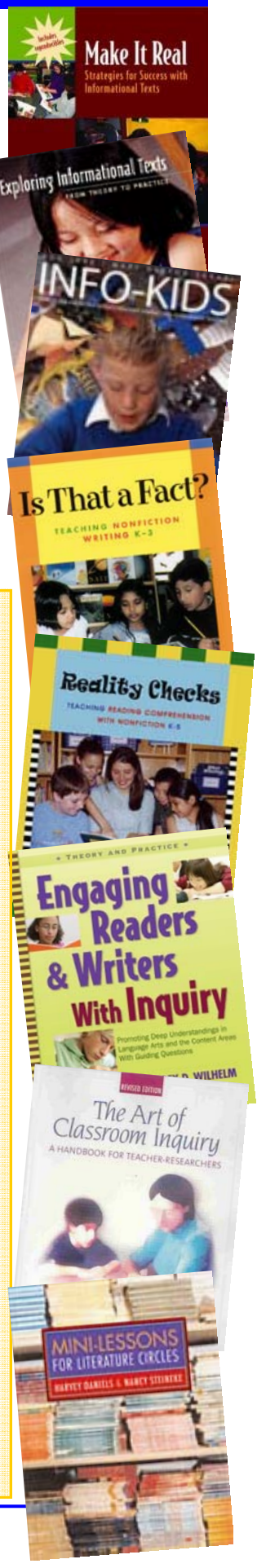
We encourage your team to watch **Part One** in which Dr. Lynne Hannay discusses the collection of **Qualitative** data.

Questions for your team to consider:

1. What kind of a smaller purposeful sample would work best for your Essential Question?
2. Does your Essential Question need refining for purposes of collecting qualitative data?
3. How will you match your Essential Question to the appropriate tool?

In **Part Two**, data analysis is discussed. Some questions for this part:

1. Planning ahead, how might you sift and sort the qualitative data you collect?
2. Can you develop a critical path of action in order to interview, take notes, and observe your students?
3. How could you organize yourselves into smaller groupings of 'Critical Friends' in order to sort and classify the data?



RESOURCES

Professional books for inquiry teams:

Daniels, Harvey and Nancy Steineke. (2004). *Mini Lessons for Literature Circles*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hoyt, Linda. (2002). *Make It Real: Strategies for Success with Informational Texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hoyt, L., M. Mooney, and B. Parkes, (eds.). (2003). *Exploring Informational Texts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hubbard, Ruth and Brenda Power. (2003). *The Art of Classroom Inquiry*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Jobe, Ron and Mary Dayton-Sakari. (2002). *Info-Kids: How to Use Nonfiction to Turn Reluctant Readers into Enthusiastic Learners*. Markham, ON: Pembroke.

Stead, Tony. (2002). *Is That a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Stead, Tony. (2006). *Reality Checks: Teaching Reading Comprehension with Nonfiction K-5*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. (2007). *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

Websites:

Award winning information books at http://www.ncte.org/elem/awards/orbispictus
Using newspapers in the classroom at http://nieonline.com/
Ministry of Education guides at http://www.eworkshop.on.ca/
Playaway digital audio books at www.playawaydigital.com

Other Sources:

Journal of Staff Development, www.nsdc.org
Educational Leadership, www.ascd.org
Web-casts Secretariat and Ministry of Education, www.curriculum.org
Think Literacy - MOE, www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/thinkliteracy/
Inspire: The Journal of Literacy and Numeracy of Ontario, www.inspirelearning.ca
University of Alberta, www.education.ualberta.ca/boysandliteracy/
Cambridge University Website, www-rba.educ.cam.ac.uk/
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