Changing notions of 'Partnership' and the improvement of initial teacher education:
A critical study of policies and practices in England, 1994-2006

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Abstract

Currently in England the nature of existing partnerships in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is unbalanced – Higher Education Institutions are required to involve schools in ITE, but schools do not have to have a reciprocal duty to be involved in ITE. In this paper I present an overview of some of the national initiatives for improving ITT in the period 1994-2006, explore the notions of ‘partnership’ therein and examine the consequences from these so-called ‘partnerships’ for my own HEI and ITT more generally. I present an important challenge to education researchers to provide that critical evidence base that is needed to indicate that centrally-provided support structures (with designated funding) are indeed developing ‘effective partnerships’.

Keywords: Partnership, Collaborative, Instrumental, Initial teacher education

1 Introduction

The starting point for this paper is the following definition of Partnership: ‘by this we mean the collaboration and co-operation undertaken between two or more institutions or agencies with the aim of providing a formalised alliance in support of initial training for teachers’ (Moyles and Stuart 2003, p.9). As for many settings internationally, teacher education programmes in England have shared the practical part of teacher education through a variety of so-called ‘partnership arrangements’ which have shared, devolved or delegated responsibilities and located them ‘in the field’ between schools and teacher education institutions (see Smedley 2001; Sandholtz 2001). Teacher educators have therefore had to demonstrate increasing competency in collaborating both inside and outside their institutions and in improving aspects of teacher education in general. Although there are no plans in place for ‘standards’ for teacher educators in England, increasing regimes of inspection and consequent allocation of resource (units of funding), together with increasing control over initial training programmes by central government through the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) have led to systemised and regulated controls. Many of these, I will argue in this paper, have influenced, if not determined, the nature of such ‘partnership arrangements’.

The use of the words ‘collaboration’ and ‘cooperation’ in the above definition of partnership deserve some further exploration, for it is in this play with words that there lie great tensions for all stakeholders: teachers/mentors; university tutors; student teachers; regional /Local Education Authority managers. A truly ‘collaborative model’ of Partnership (Furlong 2000) indicates a complementarity of strengths and areas of expertise between the teachers charged with Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in schools and the university tutors in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Therefore we might expect that share and well-defined roles and responsibilities to be clearly based on trust and collaboration. We might expect local interventions and experimentation to lie at the heart of the ITT ‘partnership arrangements’;
and we might expect a range of incentives for all stakeholders to be built into this partnership model to provide for stability and quality.

In contrast, more ‘instrumental practices of partnership’ emerge where roles and responsibilities are largely defined by the location of the balance of funding for ITT and its partnerships. In turn, roles and responsibilities are defined as a result of, and are therefore dependent on, the location of the overall responsibility for quality assurance of the training programme. As Brisard et al (2006) argue in their examination of the discourses of partnership in ITE in Scotland,

‘this sort of partnership, and associated tensions, can result in a “power over” mentality which can be detrimental to the implementation of stable and successful partnership practices’ (ibid, p.62; see also Chapman et al 2003).

In this paper I shall present a critical look at some of the national policy initiatives in England in the period 1994-2006, explore the notions of ‘partnership’ therein and consider some of the consequences of these ‘partnership practices’ for a secondary postgraduate training course within the HEI where I work as a university tutor on secondary Postgraduate Certificate training course (PGCE). The following questions provided me with the basis for my analysis and commentary:

- Where does the model of partnership lie on the continuum from ‘truly collaborative’ to ‘instrumental practice’?
- What is the extent of encouragement by the model for local interventions in the partnership arrangements? In others words, what are the opportunities for ‘experimentation’?
- What are the particular incentives for each partner /stakeholder?
- What is the degree of ‘trust’ invested in developing the partnership arrangements?
- What is the role played by ‘incentives’ in the partnership arrangements?

2 Background - developments in the years preceding 1994

In 1995, in a book entitled ‘Schools in Partnership’ edited by Griffiths and Owen, I contributed a chapter which looked at the processes of partnership within a continuing professional development model of ITE (Harrison 1995). The evolution of the (then) ‘new’ partnership arrangements at the University of Leicester was examined in detail, particularly its emphasis on joint planning, evaluation and collaborative project work in the work undertaken by student teachers in both school and HEI contexts.

In that writing I described partnership as ‘a linked activity’, to be viewed more widely than the immediate link between partner schools and the HEI. Central to this view were the student teachers themselves, bringing a ‘myriad of experiences and skills, many very relevant to teaching’ (ibid, p. 29). I also acknowledged the centrality of the pupils themselves in the partnership arrangements, indicating that improving the quality of teaching in schools alongside the training and education of the student teachers is crucial (see DfE Circular 9/92). One of the opportunities that this particular partnership model for ITT offered was to provide the student teachers with ‘experience of working collaboratively with teachers to improve the quality of pupils’ learning’ (Harrison 1995, p. 30).

It is worth noting here that there was at that juncture a long tradition in ITT of ‘school-based work’ in Leicestershire. Brian Simon described:
a fruitful relationship between the university and practising teachers from different schools. For those acting as teacher-tutors in a particular subject – say history, biology or physics – may meet regularly for discussions at the School of Education, discussions which have extended to cover new developments in teaching the subject, research underway, as well as the tutorial function itself.’ (Simon, 1980, p. 86)

Significant also was work in the late 1980s undertaken by Ashton and her colleagues at the University of Leicester under the title IT-INSET (Initial Training and In-service Training). This was supported by a substantial injection of money from the Local Education Authority. This initiative affected the development of a new Partnership scheme which was subject to a pilot (that is, an experimental phase) from 1989-1991. Indeed many of its teacher participants, of whom a number held senior positions in the local schools, were drawn willingly to participate in the pilot phase for the new Partnership scheme. The IT-INSET model exploited the motives of various participants in which the driving force was the collaborating team of professionals. Such a team was composed of a teacher from a particular school in which the task was carried out, a group of student teachers (post graduates) – usually about six – and a university tutor. The class teacher had responsibility for the choice of the classroom focus for the development /research work, but thereafter the tasks were shared and carried out by all the team members.

Thus all the team members participated in all aspects of the team’s work:

- they plan the work as a team;
- they share the teaching and observations in the classroom;
- they evaluate the relevance and value of what pupils have gained from each session;
- they reflect on what has been learned;
- they use this in the next planning stage.

(see Everton and Impey, 1989, p.6)

This team approach was a response to the national guidance offered by the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (C.A.T.E.) in helping HEIs to meet the requirements of DES Circular 3/84 (see DES 1984). It provided the opportunity for the ‘joint commitment’ of time, effort and resources to a venture designed to produce joint benefits. It was a voluntary partnership.

One of the three key principles of the ITT Partnership model of 1991-2 which emerged from the pilot phase was teacher involvement in ITE and university tutor involvement in partner schools. The pilot phase demonstrated ways in which improved arrangements for student teachers could go hand-in-hand with authentic professional development for teachers and could contribute to school curriculum review and classroom evaluation. For the university tutor there was close and sustained contact with a cluster of schools which provided the tutor with recent and relevant experience of whole school issues. Provision was there, also, for recent and relevant experience of current practice in a specific curriculum area. This led to the possibility of developing parts of the ITT programme in response to developments in schools. Thus, in a course evaluation at that time, ITT within a ‘collaborative partnership’ was seen as an active process and offered all participants opportunities to develop a broad range of skills.

Transfer of responsibilities from HEIs to partner schools

DfE Circulars 9/92 and 14/93 (DfE 1992, 1993) paved the way for an era of enforced compliance with the law. Contracts and agreements between schools and HEIs had to made formal; roles and responsibilities had to be clarified; job specifications for associated teachers
had to be drawn up in individual schools. The required shift to make two thirds of the postgraduate courses at Leicester ‘school-based’ was at a practical level unproblematic. However the key issues of ‘accountability’ within new frameworks of devolved responsibilities to school teachers, and ‘entitlement’ of the student teachers to minimum levels of support and opportunities in schools could no longer be left to the earlier *ad hoc* arrangements, which previously were dependent upon more informal channels of communication. Thus partnership arrangements became ‘formal alliances’ which in some ways gave a greater ‘sense of partnership’, with more realistic and well developed appreciation of each other’s positions.

In another way however, the base, upon which ‘trust’ and ‘co-operation’ in the earlier, more informal partnerships were dependent, was swept away. Almost all partnerships now involved some formal transfer of funding from the HEI to the partner institutions. However there was no national stipulation for what proportion of the training money might be transferred from HEI to school; nor was there stipulation for the particular local arrangements as to what constituted ‘school-based’ training. The roles and responsibilities that were attached to this varied from one HEI partnership arrangement to another. HEIs were set up to compete with each other for much needed partnership placements for their student teachers in schools. Consequently severe financial constraints were placed on many Education Departments in the HEIs with significant losses in numbers of academic staff.

It was immediately apparent that any reciprocal benefits of partnership in ITT were less obvious and, certainly, the possible benefits were not made explicit in any central government directives produced after the national promotion of ‘team approaches’ within the CATE document of 1984 (DES 1984). Even today, fourteen years later, the nature of existing partnerships in university-based Initial Teacher Training (ITT) remains imbalanced – the bottom line is: HEIs are required to involve schools in ITT, but schools do not have to have a reciprocal duty to be involved in ITT.

3  **1994 onwards – partnership becomes a more passive process**

A key question for those of us working at Leicester in 1995 was whether the three principles of Partnership which underpinned the arrangements could be maintained (Harrison, 1995, p.39). It is of interest therefore to look at these three principles once again. Briefly they were:

1) subject/curriculum specialism links with the wider dimensions of the teaching role;
2) continuity of professional development – through Individual Action Planning and target setting;
3) teacher involvement in ITE and university involvement in schools.

At Leicester, subject links with the wider teaching role have been maintained, through a range of formal inputs (with an integrated programme of lectures and workshops) at a series of ‘Directed Tasks’ for student teachers to conduct in their own time and in school-based work, and through a variety of seminar programmes conducted and managed by a senior teacher in the school. It is here that we can find the elements of confidence, trust, shared experiences and distinctive local features of an active collaborative model of partnership.

Continuity of professional development has been maintained through an active process of individual action planning which permeates all the tutoring within the university and school-based elements of the course. This regular review /target setting underpins all the classroom observations and feedback to student teachers, is supported by a series of six formal
review/plan tutorials with the teachers in school and provides a vehicle for the formative assessments in which the collaborating teachers assist. Our review/plan process at Leicester, thus, not only pre-dated, but also linked, extremely well with a new national initiative. In the summer of 2003, the first group of student teachers completed the Career Entry Development Profile (CEDP). The CEDP and the statutory induction arrangements for new teachers continued the standards-based approach to newly qualified teacher development. While there is no place in this paper for critical comment on whether the use of the CEDP does in fact build ‘on the effective practice that already existed in many schools’ (TTA, 2003, p.2), we can see that the national imposition of an instrumental practice of review/plan on entry to teaching has strengthened our case for the use of the action planning process by all partners within our own partnership arrangements. Therefore our much earlier ‘experimentation’ with individual action planning in collaboration with our partner schools, and its promotion both within and without our partnership arrangements, could be linked to a positive national outcome.

It is the third principle of our partnership which remains of most concern in terms of a model of collaborative partnership. Predictably, what has emerged is that ‘management of partnership’ has become the work of the HEIs. Accountability of the partnership arrangements together with the scrutiny and grading of courses have become all-consuming for the HEI, providing applicants with league tables of the successful HEIs (the Government ought also to acknowledge here, HEIs ‘and their partnerships’), and culminating in national allocations to categories which determine target quotas and contingent funding. In 1995 I speculated that this principle was in danger of being eroded (Harrison 1995, p.39), and it has been borne out particularly in terms of university tutors’ involvements in partner schools. The mutual benefits of active collaborations in the classrooms of our partner schools are greatly diminished. Our tutor roles in schools appear largely confined to monitoring standards and training the teachers to take on mentoring/tutoring/assessing roles with the student teachers. This represents an important shift from a genuine collaborative partnership based on confidence, trust, shared experiences and distinctive local features to a more instrumental practice of partnership. Thus the management of partnership arrangements has less to do with increasing the impact of student teachers and their mentors on the classroom, pupils’ learning or the curriculum. We should be reminded of Simon’s words in 1980:

‘It may be reasonably said then that in the matter of ensuring effective educational change, the education of teachers is a strategic point in the educational system – a point of either strength or weakness. To make it one of the strongest elements must be the aim.’ (Simon, 1980, p.87)

**De-professionalisation and the rise of central control**

Much has been written recently (see for example, Caul and McWilliams 2002; Christie et al 2004; Williams 2005) about the impacts of the rise of central control over schools and teacher education in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in particular and noting worldwide trends towards competence-based models in teacher education. Such is the concern to improve the status of teachers and the teaching profession, inherent in government policies since 1997, that there is currently a large-scale study in England, funded by central government, to establish a baseline and monitor changes in the perceptions of the status of teachers and their profession, among teachers, associated groups and the general public between 2003-6 (see Hargreaves et al 2006). All respondents in the baseline survey noted a steady and significant decline in status, and that the most acute fall occurred in the years 1979-1988 following the election of a new Conservative government. This was a period of major review of education policies leading to the Education Reform Act 1988, the introduction of a National Curriculum in schools and local financial management of schools.
Menter et al. (2002) and Woods (1997) suggest that continued policy change since this period has contributed to low morale among teachers and is reflected in teacher recruitment and retention problems in some regions.

The problems of status of teacher and teaching profession status are not confined to England (Cunningham 1992). Hoyle (2001) provides a detailed analysis of the contemporary situation. Internationally, current concerns about recruitment and retention have been linked to status of the profession in the Netherlands (Vermeulen 2003), USA (Ingersoll 2001), New Zealand (DeBotton 2004), USA (Webb 1985) and by the OECD (2005). In England the government has been seeking to change the public image and the prestige of teaching (DfES 2004):

‘Our goal must be to make working with children an attractive, high status career, and to develop a more skilled and flexible workforce’ (p.10).

Initiatives immediately after the Labour Government was elected in 1997 aimed to improve: ‘the image, morale and status of the profession’ through ‘better prospects, a rewarding career structure, less bureaucracy, more freedom to focus on teaching, a new professionalism, greater individual accountability, more flexibility and higher standards’ (DfEE 1998, p.13)

There appeared a raft of new government papers and circulars relating to new training and induction standards for Qualified Teacher Status; a new Fast Track Teaching Programme to develop future school leaders; and new tiers of school status including Beacon and Training Schools. The government white paper (DfES 2001a) introduced and provided for early career professional development programmes; professional bursaries for teachers to spend time in other schools, providing educational materials with a business or training in a specific area. Breslin (2002) has argued that these could be viewed as both professionalizing and de-professionalising. Nevertheless there appeared to be a new era of ‘trust’ between central government and teachers (DfES 2001b)

However the statutory imposition of standards for training, national assessments, and strong prescriptions for how to approach teaching, may have contributed to the teachers’ sense that the profession is not to be trusted or valued by Government. The central control of curriculum and assessment may have undermined teachers’ sense of professionalism (Mahoney and Hextall 2000, Johnson and Hallgarten 2002). It is the particular ‘types of collaboration’ and ‘levels of trust’ that are important not only in the debate about professionalisation but in the context of what we mean by partnerships in teacher education and their location on the continuum between ‘collaborative’ and ‘instrumental’ partnership practices.

As I refocus to consider the nature of partnerships in ITT we need to know more about why teachers become involve in the initial teacher training process. Is it largely one of professional duty; or one of external expectation; or one of commitment to the profession (an altruistic concern for the quality of teaching and learning)? If it is the latter then the apparent demise of local interventions (due to reduced local authority funding) together with a reduction in school experimentation within dynamic partnerships cannot be overlooked. Robinson (2005), as a participant in a Teaching 2012 advisory group in England, raises a crucial question:

‘How can we encourage risk-takers and innovators to consider teaching as a profession, and how can we help the more risk-adverse, compliant trainees now coming forward to adapt to a world of uncertainty and innovation?’ (ibid, p.264).

4 Concerns about recruitment and retention of teachers
Gilroy (2005) has raised the spectre of the three ‘Rs’ of teacher education in the 21st century: the need to recruit, retain and re-train teachers. The pragmatic view of involvement in ITT partnership arrangements, based on anecdotal evidence from a number of our partner schools at Leicester, is a need to have direct access to potential employees. This is particularly so for curriculum areas in which it is difficult to recruit well qualified new teachers. To have immediate exposure to the next cohort of new teachers who might display not only their skills and talents to school staff during their training period but also indicate their potential for further professional development, is well worth the investment of regular teachers’ time in a department finding it difficult to recruit and retain teachers in specialist areas. Having direct daily contact with a pair of student teachers on during the 12 weeks of school-based training provides an immediate direct access to such trainees; it also provides indirect contacts with the whole trainee peer group and feedback from university tutors and other teachers on the employability of other trainees in the cohort. Our course tracking data indicates that over 72 per cent of our own newly qualified teachers find jobs in the immediate region of our university. Partner schools therefore have access to a captive market place for new recruits across all eight areas of the curriculum in which our university provides initial training.

Since 1994 several Government-led initiatives have imposed central controls over not only the education/training process but also widened the access to training by funding alternative routes in entirely school-based training which can lead to Qualified Teacher Status. Within a single initiative these employment based routes attempt to address the regional problems of teacher shortages and by encouraging schools to take on the entire responsibility for teacher training.

**Summary of the main school-centred and employment-based routes of ITT in England since 1994**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SCITT (School Centred Initial Teacher Training):</strong></td>
<td>This training for graduates is entirely or almost entirely school-based and takes place in a lead school within a consortium of designated schools, with a further placement in another school in the cluster. The courses are subject to inspection and grading for quotas/funding allocation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GTP (Graduate Teacher Programme):</strong></td>
<td>Participants must have a degree – the TDA pays the training costs to the employing school and may pay a substantial grant towards the cost of employing the trainee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RTP (Registered Teacher Programme):</strong></td>
<td>Participants must have two years of higher education and they must complete a degree while they train – the TDA pays training costs and the school pays the salary costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTTP (Overseas Trained Teacher Programme):</strong></td>
<td>Participants must have a teaching qualification equivalent to a UK batchelor’s degree. If further training is needed, the TDA provides for training costs; the school pays the salary costs.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Thus there has been a narrowing of focus towards school-based activities within a national framework of standards for teacher training (student teachers are today referred to as trainees by the Government) away from a wider pedagogical and educative process which traditionally had included psychology, sociology, history and philosophy. Any partnership arrangements that now exist between HEIs and these alternative routes of training (for example to make provision for university certification of the training) appear to be entirely ‘instrumental’ and ‘separatist’ (see Furlong 1996). Formalized contractual obligations govern any partnership.
Thus, with these alternative employment-based routes into training, the school sector is now seen as having its own particular responsibilities. Thus, I would argue, there can be no possible dialogue about fruitful collaborations and experimentation with HEIs within these types of training.

Indeed there is now the emergence of a third party: outside consultants charged with increasing the uptake of ‘school placements’ for training of new recruits from all the various routes, including those that are HEI-led. Here the focus is on utilising evidence-informed practice and ‘best practice’ within schools (such as those with designated Training School status). More recent initiatives since 2005 include Partnership Development Schools (PDS). Citing the TDA web site (May 2006):

‘These schools will build on the excellent work carried out by partnership promotion schools, and through the regionally funded partnership projects. They will look to increase the quality and capacity of school-based placements for initial teacher training.’

In elaborating on their definition it is envisaged that a Regional Steering Committee will identify and select such schools. Further

‘ITT providers …’ {which will include the HEIs where applicable} ‘… will be key partners in the construction of school clusters and the content of the local training programmes …. PDS are deemed to be a contribution to the relationship that already exists between providers and schools, and not a replacement.’

The newest initiative (letter from TDA to providers of ITT, dated 25 January 2006) is a letter of information ‘of interest to providers of ITT’ for the introduction of ‘a new team of consultant colleagues, Provider Link Advisers (PLAs), who have been recently appointed by the TDA.

‘These colleagues … will provide consultative support for all aspects of recruitment and partnership within initial teacher training. The new team replaces previous recruitment adviser and regional partnership management teams … further appointments will be made in the future. … Each ITT provider has been assigned one PLA … We hope you will find these appointments useful and will work with the PLAs to recruit and prepare high-quality entrants to the teaching profession.’

Teacher educators in the HEIs might well ask whether creating this tier of consultants is utilising the public funding that was pulled away from HEIs in the early 1990s? The TDA’s expected pattern of working is that Partnership Development Schools work in local clusters of 4-6 schools. The lead school (which may or may not be a Training School) will take on the responsibility for the administration and financial management of the cluster. The local cluster arrangement exactly parallels the arrangements for the more collaborative model at Leicester in the early 1990s when the HEI received, held and distributed the available training money, conducted the administration and financial management of the whole partnership scheme and arranged for its partner schools (selected according to clear criteria) to operate in small clusters of up to 4 schools.

I speculate however that the big difference in the partnership arrangements of the 1990s in England compared with those today, are to be located in the more instrumental and institutionalised practices of partnerships today. Such speculation is not confined to England. A recent study on partnership practices on a Scottish PGCE (Christie et al 2004) noted that the school staff who were surveyed ranked assessment of the students’ teaching as the most
important aspect of the HEI tutor’s role during school visits. On the other hand, both student
teachers and university staff ranked formative assessment and discussion ahead of assessment.
We therefore need to collect more evidence in relation to the possible contradictory
expectations which different stakeholders appear to place on the role of the HEI tutor, and in
turn upon the roles of other players in different sorts of partnership arrangements.

5 What next?

This paper has attempted to draw in particular on the very limited research base within
academic publications that research into the school-based aspects of such partnerships. It
presents a challenge and a structure, not only to policy makers, but also to teacher educators
who work as education researchers, to provide the critical evidence base that is needed to
indicate that centrally-provided support structures (with designated funding) are indeed
developing ‘effective partnerships’. It shows that ‘partnership arrangements’ at one HEI in
England have become increasingly skewed towards ones that are largely instrumental in
practice, have deterred experimentation and local intervention to improve teaching and
learning as a truly collaborative activities, and have left HEI-local education authority-school
partnerships in ITT as relatively passive participants within centrally driven training activity,
largely focussed on maintaining the recruitment, training and retention of new teachers.

Murray and Male (2005) have discussed the evolving ‘pedagogy of guidance’ (see Guile and
Lucas 1999, p. 212) in which new teacher educators experience negative feelings of ‘waiting
and watching’ in partner school situations in which they have perceived their own apparent
lack of influence. Moyles and Stuart’s (2003) systematic review of the literature on school
based elements of partnership, has indicated the ‘plethora of studies concerning supervising
teachers/mentors’ (p.34) and highlight the need for a clearly formulated empirical study, with
the express aim of examining how schools within a partnership system support student
teachers, and which would identify not just perceptions of experiences but criteria for specific
- and effective - practices. They raised two questions in particular. One was whether there was
any in-depth research into what schools actually do in partnership. The second was whether in
reality schools do relatively little in the organisation and management of partnership, apart
from providing a classroom and a supervising teacher/mentor.

We now need to identify and collect the widest possible evidence from that ‘field’ between
schools and teacher education institutions in relation to all the participants’ roles and
responsibilities in different types of partnership arrangements. Evidence needs to be drawn
from a wide variety of national and international contexts including ones that operate as more
experimental /risk-taking collaborative modes as well as the instrumental ones that are
entirely focussed on initial teacher training and may include the completely ‘separatist’
models as well. This examination would need to collect and evaluate evidence in relation to
teacher educators’ involvement in helping the student teacher develop the skills of collegiality
(as a ‘good team member’ for example), perhaps by deliberately and overtly modelling this
among the three parties: student teachers, school tutor/mentors and HEI teacher educators.
Secondly it would involve examining the extent to which teacher educators are being involved
with different types of teamwork in the various contexts in which they work (HEI and
school), and the extent to which student teachers are also encouraged to participate in such
team-work. As I have shown too, the detailed examination of particular incentives and the
roles they play for the different stakeholders will be important in such studies.
6 References


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