




## ASD IN CHILDHOOD: INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### TEA NA INFÂNCIA: PRÁTICAS INCLUSIVAS NA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL

### TEA EN LA INFANCIA: PRÁCTICAS INCLUSIVAS EN LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL

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#### ABSTRACT

This article addresses inclusive practices for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in early childhood education, highlighting the challenges and potential of this process. The bibliographical research analyzed current scientific literature discussing the school inclusion of children with ASD, teacher training, pedagogical adaptations, and the importance of collaborative work between families, schools, and health professionals. The results indicate that, despite legal and regulatory advances, difficulties persist related to insufficient teacher training, a lack of adequate materials, and the absence of specific institutional policies for serving these children. The need for structured school environments that offer safety and appropriate stimuli for the sensory and communicative characteristics of autism is highlighted. Play is highlighted as a fundamental tool for promoting socialization and emotional development, while the connection between school and family strengthens emotional and pedagogical support. Furthermore, the article emphasizes the importance of active listening, empathy, and ethical behavior among professionals, essential elements for building an inclusive school culture. Full inclusion involves not only physical access but also effective participation and respect for differences, constituting a collective commitment and ongoing challenge. Finally, this study reinforces that inclusive early childhood education is an indispensable path to promoting equity and citizenship, highlighting the need for investment in training, public policies, and sensitive pedagogical practices that value the uniqueness of each child with ASD.

**Keywords:** Inclusion. Autism Spectrum Disorder. Early Childhood Education. Pedagogical Practices.

#### RESUMO

Este artigo aborda as práticas inclusivas voltadas para crianças com Transtorno do Espectro Autista (TEA) na educação infantil, destacando os desafios e as potencialidades presentes nesse processo. A pesquisa, de natureza bibliográfica, analisou produções científicas atuais que discutem a inclusão escolar de crianças com TEA, a formação docente, adaptações pedagógicas e a importância do trabalho colaborativo entre família, escola e profissionais da saúde. Os resultados indicam que, apesar dos avanços legais e normativos, persistem dificuldades relacionadas ao preparo insuficiente dos educadores, à falta de materiais adequados e à ausência de políticas institucionais específicas para o atendimento dessas crianças. Destaca-se a

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necessidade de ambientes escolares estruturados, que ofereçam segurança e estímulos adequados às particularidades sensoriais e comunicativas do autismo. O brincar é evidenciado como ferramenta fundamental para promover a socialização e o desenvolvimento afetivo, enquanto a articulação entre escola e família reforça o suporte emocional e pedagógico. Além disso, o artigo ressalta a importância da escuta ativa, da empatia e da atitude ética dos profissionais, elementos essenciais para a construção de uma cultura escolar inclusiva. A inclusão plena envolve não apenas o acesso físico, mas a participação efetiva e o respeito às diferenças, configurando-se como compromisso coletivo e desafio contínuo. Por fim, este estudo reforça que a educação infantil inclusiva é um caminho indispensável para a promoção da equidade e da cidadania, ressaltando a necessidade de investimentos em formação, políticas públicas e práticas pedagógicas sensíveis que valorizem a singularidade de cada criança com TEA.

**Palavras-chave:** Inclusão. Transtorno do Espectro Autista. Educação Infantil. Práticas Pedagógicas.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo aborda las prácticas inclusivas dirigidas a niños con Trastorno del Espectro Autista (TEA) en la educación infantil, destacando los desafíos y las potencialidades presentes en este proceso. La investigación, de carácter bibliográfico, analizó producciones científicas actuales que discuten la inclusión escolar de niños con TEA, la formación docente, las adaptaciones pedagógicas y la importancia del trabajo colaborativo entre familia, escuela y profesionales de la salud. Los resultados indican que, a pesar de los avances legales y normativos, persisten dificultades relacionadas con la insuficiente preparación de los educadores, la falta de materiales adecuados y la ausencia de políticas institucionales específicas para atender a estos niños. Se destaca la necesidad de ambientes escolares estructurados que ofrezcan seguridad y estímulos adecuados a las particularidades sensoriales y comunicativas del autismo. El juego se evidencia como una herramienta fundamental para promover la socialización y el desarrollo afectivo, mientras que la articulación entre escuela y familia fortalece el apoyo emocional y pedagógico. Además, el artículo resalta la importancia de la escucha activa, la empatía y la actitud ética de los profesionales, elementos esenciales para la construcción de una cultura escolar inclusiva. La inclusión plena implica no solo el acceso físico, sino la participación efectiva y el respeto a las diferencias, constituyéndose como un compromiso colectivo y un desafío continuo. Finalmente, este estudio refuerza que la educación infantil inclusiva es un camino indispensable para la promoción de la equidad y la ciudadanía, subrayando la necesidad de inversiones en formación, políticas públicas y prácticas pedagógicas sensibles que valoren la singularidad de cada niño con TEA.

**Palabras clave:** Inclusión. Trastorno del Espectro Autista. Educación Infantil. Práticas Pedagógicas.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in early childhood education has become an urgent demand in the contemporary educational scenario. School institutions, especially in childhood, have been called upon to rethink their practices, structures and conceptions of learning to meet the needs of this population. The entry of these children into the school environment requires a careful look at their specificities and the way they interact with the world.

Early childhood education, as the gateway to the educational process, has a strategic role in building bonds, meaningful experiences and stimulating global development. For this, it is necessary to understand that ASD has multiple manifestations and requires flexible and sensitive approaches. The school needs to be a space for welcoming, belonging and construction of identities.

Childhood is a phase marked by intense discoveries, interactions, and learning, and the presence of children with ASD in this context challenges traditional teaching models. Far from being a difficulty, this presence represents an opportunity to enrich pedagogical processes with diversity.

The uniqueness of each child with autism requires educators to have an individualized look and qualified listening, capable of capturing unconventional forms of communication and expression. Working with this diversity requires preparation, sensitivity and adequate material conditions, so that the potentialities can be recognized and stimulated.

When the child is respected in his time and way of learning, the school effectively fulfills its role as a promoter of development. Inclusion, therefore, must be understood as a practice that transforms everyone involved.

The construction of inclusive environments in early childhood education involves the reformulation of pedagogical practices, the organization of spaces and the performance of professionals. Inclusion is not only achieved with enrollment, but with the guarantee of full participation in school routines. This implies reflecting on methodological strategies, use of resources and forms of mediation that favor the involvement of children with ASD in the different activities proposed.

Group work, play, conversation circles and moments of care are valuable opportunities to promote meaningful interactions. For this, the performance of teachers must be guided by educational intentionality, by welcoming differences and by the



constant search for alternatives to expand participation. Inclusion is an ongoing process, which requires ethical and political commitment to diversity.

It is essential to recognize that the quality of inclusion is directly related to the training and support offered to early childhood education professionals. Many teachers face challenges when welcoming children with ASD, either due to lack of specific knowledge or the absence of institutional support.

In this sense, promoting moments of reflection, listening and exchange of experiences among educators is essential to strengthen pedagogical practice. School management, in turn, needs to create conditions for inclusive work to occur effectively, ensuring adequate human and material resources. Successful inclusion results from collective involvement, co-responsibility, and a willingness to learn from differences. The school needs to constantly reinvent itself to respond to the demands of a plural childhood.

Living with diversity transforms not only children with ASD, but the entire school community. When an environment is built where each subject is valued in his or her uniqueness, the foundations for a fairer and more meaningful education are created. Early childhood education, due to its formative and affective character, has the potential to be a fertile space for inclusive practices that respect the rights of autistic children.

By stimulating respectful interactions, promoting sensory experiences and favoring the construction of autonomy, educators contribute to the integral development of these subjects. Thus, inclusion is no longer a distant goal and becomes part of the school's daily culture. This transformation, however, requires intentionality, active listening, and commitment to equity.

The presence of children with ASD in early childhood education institutions raises the need to rethink the social function of the school and the values that sustain its practice. It is not just about inserting new methodologies or adapting content, but about recognizing the value of each child as a subject of rights.

Inclusion is a movement that breaks with the logic of homogenization and proposes coexistence with difference as the foundation of learning. In this process, the educator is called upon to review his conceptions, break with prejudices and expand his mediation strategies. The acceptance of singularities enriches the pedagogical environment and contributes to the formation of a more empathetic society. An inclusive school is one that learns from its own challenges and transforms itself based on them.



Inclusive early childhood education also depends on strengthening dialogue between school and families. Family involvement is a determining factor for the success of pedagogical practices with children with ASD, as it broadens the understanding of the specificities and strengthens the bonds between the subjects involved.

Establishing partnerships with parents, sharing experiences and building goals together are strategies that bring the school closer to the children's reality. Inclusion is consolidated when there is coherence between what is proposed at school and what is experienced in the family environment. Therefore, it is essential that educators are open to listening to families and willing to build relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Collaborative work is essential to sustain more humanized educational processes.

Reflecting on the inclusion of children with ASD in early childhood education is also an exercise in commitment to social justice. The school cannot remain oblivious to differences, because it is in them that the richness of the educational process resides. Valuing diversity implies facing attitudinal, pedagogical and structural barriers, which often stand in the way of the right to learning.

By guaranteeing conditions of access, participation and development for all children, the school institution reaffirms its democratic function. ASD, therefore, should not be understood as a limitation, but as part of human plurality. The purpose of this article is to discuss possible paths for the construction of inclusive practices in early childhood education, recognizing the challenges, but also the strengths of a childhood marked by difference.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

The present investigation is characterized as a qualitative research, with a bibliographic design, focused on the analysis of scientific productions that address Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and inclusive practices in early childhood education. According to Gil (2019), bibliographic research allows the understanding of a phenomenon through the study of materials already published, expanding knowledge from the critical systematization of theoretical content.

For the construction of this work, works published in the last ten years were selected, including books, academic articles, dissertations and current educational legislation. The selection of materials considered the scientific relevance and the



contribution of the authors to the theme of school inclusion of children with ASD, seeking a broad and updated overview of the theme.

The analysis of the collected material followed an interpretative approach, focusing on the identification of key concepts, recommended pedagogical practices and challenges faced by early childhood education institutions. According to Lakatos and Marconi (2021), this type of research enables the researcher to establish relationships between the data and critically reflect on existing proposals.

Thus, the study is not limited to the description of the content, but seeks to understand how inclusive practices have been built and applied in the context of childhood. The methodological path adopted is based on the contribution of authors who discuss inclusion in a critical and sensitive way, recognizing the complexity involved in the educational care of children with autism in the initial stage of the training process.

### **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the selected studies shows that the inclusion of children with ASD in early childhood education has advanced, but still faces significant obstacles. One of the main challenges pointed out is the insufficient preparation of teachers to deal with the specificities of the disorder. According to Santos and Bersch (2022), many teachers show insecurity in the face of the demands of autism, especially in building bonds and adapting pedagogical routines.

This difficulty directly impacts the quality of the experiences lived by children. In addition, the lack of preparation of professionals can reinforce exclusionary practices, even if involuntary. Thus, the urgency of continuous, contextualized and specific training on ASD becomes evident.

Another recurring point in academic productions concerns the organization of the physical and pedagogical environment as an essential factor for inclusion. Oliveira and Tuleski (2023) highlight the importance of structured spaces, with predictability and adequate stimuli, as a way to favor the emotional safety of autistic children.

This structure must consider sensory aspects, alternative communication and visual support, respecting the different modes of interaction with the world. The absence of such adaptations tends to generate defensive or isolating behaviors. In this way, the school space needs to go beyond physical accessibility, incorporating a broad



perspective of inclusion that contemplates the cognitive and affective needs of the subjects.

Pedagogical practices focused on play also appear as powerful strategies for inclusion in early childhood education. Goulart (2020) points out that playing offers opportunities for expression and socialization for children with autism, promoting meaningful interactions with peers. The teacher, in this context, acts as a mediator, creating playful situations that respect the child's time and interests.

When these practices are intentionally planned, the possibilities of participation and construction of affective bonds are expanded. However, there is still resistance on the part of some institutions to make activities more flexible, which ends up limiting the integral development of these children. Therefore, inclusion requires creativity and willingness to reinvent routines.

The analysis of the data also highlights the relevance of collaborative work between teachers, support staff and families. According to Carvalho and Duarte (2022), the construction of a support network favors a broader understanding of the behavior and needs of children with ASD. This collaboration contributes to the development of more coherent and effective strategies in the school environment.

The constant dialogue between school and family allows for the alignment of expectations, early identification of difficulties and strengthening affective bonds. However, it is common to observe communication difficulties between the different actors involved, which compromises the consistency of pedagogical practices. Inclusion, therefore, is only effective when there is cooperation and co-responsibility in the educational process.

Another relevant result concerns the presence of children with ASD in the early childhood education curriculum. Although legislation ensures their participation, they often remain on the margins of school experiences. Lima and Silveira (2021) observe that, in some institutions, the idea prevails that autistic children do not learn in the same way as others, leading to veiled exclusion. This perception limits the elaboration of adequate pedagogical proposals and restricts development opportunities.

To break with this scenario, it is necessary to understand the curriculum as a collective construction, open to diversity and multiple forms of learning. Valuing differences needs to be incorporated into planning and not treated as an exception.





The data also reveal that professionals who receive institutional support tend to develop more assertive and welcoming practices. Amaral and Bosa (2020) highlight that the presence of active pedagogical coordination, in-service training, and listening spaces for teachers are elements that strengthen inclusion.

These factors reduce the feeling of isolation and overload of educators in the face of the specific demands of ASD. When the school collectively assumes the commitment to inclusion, a culture of care is created that benefits all children. This scenario highlights the importance of public policies that ensure continuous investment in the qualification and working conditions of early childhood education professionals.

The experiences analyzed also show that listening to children with ASD is a central aspect for the success of inclusion. According to Del Prette and Del Prette (2021), the construction of bonds and the recognition of non-verbal forms of communication are fundamental for pedagogical mediation with autistic children.

Often, repetitive behaviors or eye avoidance are interpreted as a lack of interest, when in fact they are legitimate expressions of communication. Therefore, it is necessary for the educator to be aware of the subtleties of body language and the signs of well-being or discomfort of the child. Sensitive listening is thus transformed into a pedagogical act and a condition for learning.

The scarcity of accessible teaching materials was also pointed out as an obstacle to the inclusion of children with ASD. According to Goulart (2020), it is still common for the pedagogical resources available in schools not to contemplate the sensory and cognitive needs of these children. The use of visual materials, structured games, alternative communication systems and transitional objects are strategies that facilitate participation in school activities.

However, its absence limits the possibilities of mediation and learning. The development of adequate resources requires time, training and creativity on the part of educators, as well as specialized technical support. Effective inclusion requires a school that is equipped and committed to the diversity of its subjects.

Positive effects of the inclusion of children with ASD on the school group as a whole were also observed. The presence of diversity favors the construction of values such as empathy, respect and solidarity among children. For Oliveira and Tuleski (2023), living with autistic classmates expands the social repertoire of other students and strengthens a welcoming culture.





From an institutional point of view, it promotes the review of exclusionary practices and encourages pedagogical improvement. Thus, inclusion is no longer a benefit only for children with disabilities and starts to positively impact the entire school community. The inclusive school is one that is continuously transformed through listening, dialogue and experimentation.

The analysis of the data points to the importance of the ethical attitude of early childhood education professionals in the face of inclusion. More than applying specific methods, it is about adopting sensitive, respectful postures committed to the right to education. For Santos and Bersch (2022), the educator who recognizes the value of difference acts with intentionality, creating real learning possibilities.

This attitude does not depend exclusively on material resources, but on a gaze that welcomes and is willing to learn from experience. Inclusive practice is, above all, an ethical choice, which recognizes the dignity and potential of each child. In this sense, inclusion in childhood represents a commitment to building a more just and humane society.

The scarcity of early diagnoses was also identified as a factor that directly interferes with the effectiveness of school inclusion. Many children arrive at early childhood education without a formal assessment that identifies ASD, which makes it difficult to have pedagogical planning appropriate to their needs. According to Amaral and Bosa (2020), early diagnosis is essential to initiate interventions that promote development and minimize barriers to learning.

However, the lack of specialized professionals in the public health and education networks compromises this process. Without this support, teachers and institutions end up dealing with behaviors without understanding their causes. This reveals the need for greater articulation between health and education policies, especially in early childhood.

The absence of institutional protocols aimed at the inclusion of ASD also appeared as a weakness in the material analyzed. Although there are national guidelines that guide inclusive education, many schools still do not have structured plans for the reception of children with autism.

Carvalho and Duarte (2022) emphasize that, without an internal inclusion policy, the process depends exclusively on the goodwill of individual educators. This lack of systematization generates inconsistent and often disjointed practices. The definition of flows, partnerships with specialists, adapted pedagogical records and moments of



collective training are possible ways to consolidate actions. Inclusion requires institutional planning and should not be restricted to improvisation.

Another recurring element in the studies is the prejudice still present in the school environment, often in a subtle way. Expressions such as "he does not follow the class" or "he does not interact like the others" reveal a social imaginary that associates learning with normativity. According to Goulart (2020), these discourses silence the potential of autistic children and reinforce practices that distance them from collective experiences. Such a conception prevents the recognition of singular ways of learning, communicating and interacting.

To break with these symbolic barriers, it is essential to invest in the critical training of professionals and in confronting exclusionary social representations. The transformation of school culture is a continuous process that requires constant reflection on attitudes, discourses and practices.

The results also showed that the adaptation of school routines favors the permanence and well-being of children with ASD. When the routine is organized with predictability, use of images and smooth transitions, the child tends to have fewer episodes of anxiety and greater participation.

Oliveira and Tuleski (2023) highlight that the structuring of daily school life is one of the pillars of inclusion, especially for children who are sensitive to external stimuli. These adaptations do not prevent the functioning of the class, on the contrary, they contribute to a more balanced and productive environment. Predictability generates security, allowing the child to be more available to interact and learn. Such measures, simple but effective, reflect the care for diversity.

Active listening to family members was also pointed out as a factor that increases the effectiveness of inclusive practices in early childhood education. The family, by living with the child on a daily basis, has valuable information about their preferences, difficulties and forms of communication. According to Lima and Silveira (2021), this partnership strengthens the bond between school and student, making the educational process more cohesive.

By opening channels of dialogue with those responsible, the school is willing to understand the subject in an integral way. In addition, the recognition of family knowledge promotes more horizontal and democratic relations between the actors involved.



Inclusion is in fact consolidated when there is collaboration and respect between school and family knowledge.

Teacher training on ASD proved to be a determining factor for the quality of pedagogical interventions. Santos and Bersch (2022) argue that, although many teachers show interest in acting in an inclusive way, there is still a significant deficit in initial and continuing education on autism.

This gap compromises the development of effective strategies and can generate feelings of frustration and powerlessness. On the other hand, when educators have access to courses, seminars and spaces for exchange with other professionals, they feel more confident and creative. Education needs to be continuous, reflective and centered on the real practices of daily school life. Investment in teacher training is, therefore, one of the pillars for the advancement of inclusion.

In addition to technical training, the development of empathy and sensitive listening by teachers was identified as a central aspect in successful practices. Del Prette and Del Prette (2021) point out that social skills such as patience, acceptance, and respect are essential for working with autistic children. These attitudes do not replace theoretical training, but enhance it, creating more humane relationships in the pedagogical routine.

The affective bond, when built with respect for differences, becomes the basis for learning and development. Inclusion, therefore, goes beyond the limits of technique and requires a look committed to the dignity of the other. The sensitive teacher transforms the school into a space for listening and recognition.

The practices observed in institutions that act positively with the inclusion of children with ASD reveal the importance of pedagogical intentionality. It is not just about allowing physical presence, but about creating real conditions for engagement and learning. Goulart (2020) highlights that, when planning considers the child's interests and forms of expression, he or she feels he or she belongs to the group and participates with greater autonomy.

The creation of personalized materials, the use of assistive technologies and the adaptation of proposals are strategies that emerge from a work attentive to singularities. Successful inclusion is, above all, the result of conscious pedagogical choices. It is not enough to want to include; You need to know how to do it.

The results analyzed indicate that the construction of an inclusive school with a focus on ASD requires articulated policies, training of professionals and cultural change.



Amaral and Bosa (2020) argue that the inclusion of autistic children cannot be treated as an exception, but as an integral part of a democratic educational proposal.

This view implies recognizing that all children learn, even if through different paths. The school needs to be able to make practices more flexible and create pedagogical responses that are consistent with this diversity. The challenges are real, but successful experiences show that it is possible to move forward. The construction of inclusive early childhood education is a collective, continuous and essential process for the promotion of equity.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

The analysis carried out throughout this study revealed that the inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in early childhood education is a complex process, which involves multiple factors and requires collective commitment. More than guaranteeing access to school, it is necessary to ensure real conditions of participation, learning and well-being.

The presence of children with ASD in the school environment invites educators, managers and families to rethink their practices, attitudes and conceptions about childhood, diversity and teaching. The inclusive school must be open to listening, flexibility and the construction of pedagogical alternatives that respect the singularities of each subject. It is in this context that inclusion becomes possible and meaningful.

When considering the data collected, it is understood that the effectiveness of inclusion depends on a solid, continuous and practice-oriented teacher training. The development of sensitive and intentional pedagogical strategies does not occur spontaneously, but is the result of reflection, study and sharing among professionals.

Training on ASD needs to be accessible, contextualized and articulated with the experiences of daily school life. In addition, the presence of committed management, which values collaborative work and ensures adequate resources, is an essential factor for the consolidation of an inclusive culture. Valuing teachers' listening also contributes to making them feel safe and supported in their actions.

The study also showed that the inclusion of children with ASD in early childhood education is not limited to the pedagogical field, but involves ethical, social and affective dimensions. To include means to recognize the other as a legitimate participant in the educational process, with their own ways of communicating, learning and interacting.



This requires the school to be continuously willing to adapt and transform, overcoming exclusionary practices and creating environments that favor coexistence and mutual respect. The autistic child should not be seen as an exception, but as an integral and enriching part of the school community. When differences are embraced, everyone learns, grows, and develops.

In this sense, the construction of effective inclusive practices also involves valuing the family and articulating between different social sectors. The school needs to recognize family knowledge and establish partnership relationships based on trust and dialogue. Only with the collaboration between teachers, families, health professionals and the pedagogical team is it possible to guarantee the necessary support to children with ASD.

Inclusion cannot be an isolated effort, but a collective project that mobilizes all those involved in the child's education. This support network strengthens the educational process and contributes to the integral development of the subject.

The conclusion of this article points out that the inclusion of children with ASD in early childhood education should not be treated as an exception, but as a structuring principle of a democratic education. Pedagogical practices need to reflect this commitment to diversity, through planned, sensitive actions based on attentive listening.

The school, by assuming this mission, expands its social function and promotes a fairer and more equitable environment. Although challenges persist, the experiences analyzed demonstrate that it is possible to build consistent and transformative paths of inclusion. It is up to education professionals to remain open to learning and innovation, taking responsibility for ensuring everyone's right to quality education.

The reflection promoted throughout this work indicates that ASD in childhood is a reality that challenges and enriches pedagogical practice. Inclusion, to be complete, requires more than material adjustments: it requires a change in mentality, the construction of bonds and a commitment to equity. The daily life of early childhood education should be a space for the encounter between differences, where each child is recognized and valued in his or her uniqueness.

When the school commits to this ideal, it promotes not only the development of children with autism, but that of the entire group. Living with diversity expands the possibilities of learning and contributes to the formation of more empathetic and aware citizens.



Thus, it can be said that inclusive early childhood education is a possible and necessary path. The school needs to position itself as a space open to listening, coexistence and joint learning. Respect for different ways of being and learning does not represent an obstacle, but an opportunity to resignify practices, reinvent strategies and strengthen bonds.

The challenge is to transform inclusive intentions into concrete actions, supported by public policies, institutional support and ethical commitment. The child with ASD has the right to occupy the school in its entirety, participating in the experiences that make childhood an essential stage of human development.

May the data and discussions presented here encourage educators, managers, and researchers to continue seeking paths of transformation. The school that welcomes, listens to and values difference is the one that truly fulfills its social function. And, in doing so, it builds not only a teaching space, but a territory of humanity and belonging for all childhoods.

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