

Chapter #4

PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER'S BELIEFS AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: DEPICTING CONVERGENCES, DIVERGENCES AND INCONSISTENCIES

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practices changed significantly in the wake of the 2001 school reform in Québec. In the past decade, teachers have struggled to adapt to new orientations, particularly as regards the educational approach promoting student responsibility and its effects on classroom management practice. In physical education and health (PE), a complex discipline with varied environments, few studies examine the appropriate practices to adopt. This project aims to better portrait current practice and compare with program expectations. The research objective is to describe PE teachers' beliefs and practices. The methodology was based on the Q-PEPS questionnaire, comprised of three sections: sociodemographic characteristics (8 items); beliefs (8 items); and instructional practices (43 items). A sample of 328 respondents (205 men, 123 women, age = 41.3 ± 9.4 years) enabled a descriptive analysis per item. The findings describe 1) convergent and divergent beliefs among teachers, and 2) convergent and divergent practices regarding classroom management. These findings highlight an inconsistency in the responses to similar items, which could be owed to social desirability bias or a gap between the ideal, desired and actual practices perceived by teachers. Also, findings demonstrate a current gap between actual practice and program expectations.

Keywords: classroom management, physical education, teachers, beliefs, practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers prepare students for the future and therefore play a vital role in society. For physical education (PE) teachers in particular, responsibility towards health education is increasing at a time when public health is critical and drawing the concern of public health institutions worldwide (World Health Organization, 2014). Surprisingly, studies on teachers' health show it has declined over the past ten years. As a result, many leave the profession at the start of their career (Sauvé, 2012), while others suffer the effects of burnout (Stamate, Brunet, & Savoie, 2015).

One reason for this malaise apparently lies in the lack of recognition perceived by teachers, more so for PE teachers. Although they are key actors in our society, teachers believe the public presently views them less favourably, and the profession is no longer as attractive as it once was (Bizet, Laurencelle, Lemoyne, Larouche, & Trudeau, 2010, Karsenti, Collin, & Dumouchel, 2013, Stamate et al., 2015). Another reason for this malaise, lies in teachers' difficult relationships with their students (Auclair Tousigny, 2017; Gaudreau, Royer, Beaumont, & Frenette, 2012; Mukamurera & Balleux, 2013). These

problematic relationships have a major impact on classroom management, which seems to be a key factor in teachers' growing difficulties (Karsenti et al., 2013). Hence, students' inappropriate, disruptive and sometimes violent behaviours are an important factor influencing teachers' classroom management (Auclair Tousigny, 2017; Massé, Desbiens, & Lanaris, 2014) and, therefore, their job satisfaction and well-being.

This fact is emphasized for PE teachers who constantly evolve in a complex context affecting classroom management, combining 1) demanding physical workload, 2) student diversity (teach approximately 450 students a week) and 3) open environments. Firstly, PE requires heavy and various equipment manoeuvres, physical assistance to students in need of feedback, and multiple and active demonstrations (running, jumping, rolling...), resulting in a demanding physical workload (Chaibi, 2009). Secondly, they deal with many different student groups within a week, with various needs, motivations and abilities, affecting the significance of attachment to each student, although seen as a major factor in pedagogical climate (Stoloff, 2016). A teacher's capacity for attachment and attachment behaviours must be nuanced, particularly with respect to students' characteristics. In particular, research suggests that the barriers to relationship are greater regarding students with behavioural difficulties versus those with cognitive, emotional or physical difficulties (Wilhelmsen & Sørensen, 2017). Furthermore, numerous authors have reported relational difficulties between teachers and students (Auclair Tousigny, 2017; Gaudreau et al., 2012; Mukamurera & Balleux, 2013), and this issue directly affects classroom management. Thirdly, PE teachers need to adapt their intervention to changing environments according to activity (indoor, outdoor, and aquatic). In fact, PE pedagogical content requires various equipment, diverse spaces and divided work groups within a session, which lead to critical moments during sessions, such as managing space and transitions in an effective manner to least disrupt class rhythm and learning (Gendron, 2007, Sanderson, Heckaman, Ernest, Johnson, & Raab, 2013). Also, PE pedagogical content should be original and varied in order to support student motivation which helps maintain a positive learning climate (Gao, Lee, Solmon, & Zhang, 2009). Considering the importance of classroom management on teacher's well-being, it seems important to take a closer look at today's practice, in order to categories different existing practices.

2. BACKGROUND

In Québec, the education reform implemented in 2001 changed classroom management significantly by placing students at the center of the learning process, where student's take part in the decision making process, as opposed to a directive approach, where teachers impose their organizational system, their values, their goals (Archambault & Chouinard, 2009). Indeed, in contrast with a grading scale type of evaluation, the new educational orientations put the emphasis on "*success for all students*", where an individualized approach will enable each student to learn and evolve based on his or her individual path (Ministère de l'éducation du Québec [MEQ], 2001). This shift required teachers to adapt their practices, which were henceforth focused on empowering students through personal and social responsibility to help them determine this path. Concretely, students are expected to be responsible in different areas, such as organizational tasks (choosing equipment or having appropriate PE outfit), learning tasks (choosing personal goals or level of difficulty to reach), or functional tasks (helping teacher distribute documents to classmates). Such ministerial shift adds to difficulties perceived by teachers, who are expected to adapt their practice, including classroom management, no matter their preferred practice or belief system. It is to be mentioned that no matter the type of practice, teaching effectiveness is triggered by one's system of value, then coherently applied to practice (Archambault & Chouinard, 2009; Willmore, 2007).

2.1. Personal and social responsibility

In keeping with the education reform (MEQ, 2001), responsibility is a framework that emphasizes on students' ability to reflect on their choices, make decisions and adopt appropriate behaviours based on the decisions made (Gordon, 2010; Hellison, 2011). It is therefore expected that teachers offer opportunities during sessions, where students have choices, take decisions and be accountable for the outcome (Fortin-Suzuki, 2015). Archambault and Chouinard (2009) underline that in an accountability approach, students' motivation and engagement in the classroom are increased. As a result, giving them the opportunity to make more choices will enable them to gradually acquire greater decision-making power, leading progressively to autonomous decision making and action (Hellison, 2011). To insure proper teaching conditions, rules, routines and expected behaviour should be clear to all students at all times, along with logical and accountable consequences for any inappropriate behaviour (Gaudreau, 2017, Hellison, 2011, Lavay, French, & Henderson, 2015, MEQ, 2001). Consequently, responsibility as a framework is no longer one that favors punitive practices for managing disruptive behaviours (Archambault & Chouinard, 2009), even though such practices still occur frequently (Stoloff, 2016).

2.2. CLASSE model

The CLASSE teaching intervention model offers a comprehensive-interpretative framework of teaching practices, used for research as for practice. This model is divided into six categories (Archambault & Chouinard, 2009). The word "CLASSE" is the French acronym for belief (C), latitude (L), atmosphere (A), learning situations (S), support (S) and evaluation (E). This model offers a broad understanding of classroom management and has proved effective for research in a physical education context (Stoloff, 2016). In this research, each category describes different practices and determines whether or not teachers use accountability practices during PE sessions. A clear portrait will determine if teachers have adapted their practices since the reform in 2001.

Our research question is the following: "What classroom management practices are used by PE teachers?" Accordingly, the objective of the present study is to describe PE teachers' beliefs and practices in relation with classroom management. The relevance of such study will help clarify the different beliefs and the impact on classroom management practices, hence a better understanding of practice and applications in education.

3. METHODS

3.1. Participants

328 Quebec PE teachers participated in the study. The sample consisted of 37.5% women (N = 123) and 62.5% men (N = 205). Of the respondents, 73.2% were primary school teachers (N = 240), and 26.8% were secondary school teachers. The average age was 41.3 ± 9.4 years.

3.2. Instrument

The Q-PEPS questionnaire (Couturier Cormier, 2017) was administered electronically by "Survey Monkey", facilitating the recruitment process. Email addresses were used to send out the information and the link to participants. They were obtained thanks to regional lists of PE teachers. Before undertaking the research, this project was approved by the ethical committee of Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. The questionnaire itself

includes three sections: sociodemographic characteristics (8 items), beliefs related to the teaching profession (8 items), and teaching practices (27 items). Sociodemographic characteristics were measured using a descriptive scale and include 8 items: age, number of years as a teacher, type of employment, teaching levels experienced, teaching level, gender, experience and socioeconomic context. The sociodemographic variables affect practice (Stoloff, Verret, Couturier Cormier, & Lemoyne, 2018) but will not be addressed in this article.

Teaching beliefs and practices were measured on the basis of 43 items, all developed on a 7-point Likert type scale. As mentioned earlier, 6 categories related to teaching beliefs and practices were assessed: 1) beliefs (8 items), 2) latitude (7 items), 3) atmosphere (3 items), 4) learning situations (8 items), 5) support (0 items), and 6) evaluation (9 items). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement for each item in the belief section (from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*)). Next, they were asked to indicate their level of frequency for each item in the practice section (from 1 (*rarely*) to 7 (*always*)). Each category was treated individually by assessing each item separately. We used each participant's response to categorize three levels of agreement: 1) low (scores = 1-2-3), 2) neutral (score = 4), and 3) high (scores = 5-6-7).

Descriptive analyses were conducted to fulfil the aims of the study. Only participants who completed the questionnaire were used. The final sample consists of 281 (of the initial 328) participants. A first part of the analyses was descriptive in order to provide a comprehensive picture of PE teaching practices among Quebec's PE teachers, and attain the objective presented in this chapter. Further analyses will provide the statistical procedures and correlations, yet they are not addressed since they do not fit the aim of the present chapter.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Beliefs

Findings reveal that teachers tend to have the same beliefs regarding PE but differ on matters related to fundamentals. In Table 1, the first column presents the different statements with the corresponding number of appearances in the questionnaire. Statements are presented with scores from highest to lowest, depending on level of agreement. The second, third and fourth columns indicate the percentage of respondents, respectively, for high, neutral and low levels of agreement.

Table 1.
PE teachers' beliefs regarding teaching practices.

| ITEMS | LEVEL OF AGREEMENT (% of respondents) | | |
|--|--|-----|----|
| | + | +/- | - |
| <i>STATEMENT (item #)</i> | | | |
| <i>I must adapt my practices to the needs of my students. (3)</i> | 98 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>All students have the capacity to improve their skills. (4)</i> | 98 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Teachers should change their practices over time. (5)</i> | 97 | 1 | 2 |
| <i>Students need an environment that promotes autonomy. (7)</i> | 96 | 2 | 2 |
| <i>Physical and health education serves mainly to develop the competency to "act, interact and adopt." (6)</i> | 72 | 10 | 18 |
| <i>In PE, students with the best motor skills have the highest grades. (8)</i> | 62 | 10 | 28 |
| <i>It's more important to promote physical activity than sedentary learning. (1)</i> | 59 | 7 | 34 |
| <i>Students' development is promoted when I take care of all organizational and learning tasks. (2)</i> | 30 | 10 | 60 |

Four beliefs converge because they are shared by 95% of the respondents (items 3, 4, 5 and 7). The beliefs common to teachers include the importance of adapting practices to students' needs (98%), the capacity of all students to improve their competencies (98%), the importance of adapting one's professional practices over time (97%) and students' need for an environment that promotes autonomy (96%). These findings show that virtually all the teachers believe in the importance of flexibility and the updating of teaching practices. They also denote the importance, in the teachers' view, of students' developing autonomy and all students' capacity for improvement.

Four beliefs vary for 30% or more of the respondents (items 6, 8, 1 and 2). In fact, teachers appear to hold distinct beliefs about the priorities to be established in PE, with 72% of respondents favouring disciplinary competencies, 62% focused on performance and 59% emphasizing the importance of physical movement over sedentary learning. Teachers' beliefs also diverge with regard to performing tasks alone (30%) versus sharing them with students (60%). These beliefs therefore reflect differing views regarding the objects of learning to prioritize in PE and the degree of student involvement in organizational and learning tasks.

4.2. Practices

The CLASSE model used for the Q-PEPS questionnaire presents four descriptive categories detailing classroom management practice during PE lessons: latitude, ambiance, learning situations and assessment. Because the fifth category regarding support lacks statistical correlation and significance, it is not discussed in the present article. In presenting the findings, combination of items was deemed more useful than order of appearance. The first column of Tables 2 to 5 presents the different statements with the corresponding number of appearances in the questionnaire. Statements are presented with scores from highest to lowest, depending on level of frequency. The second, third and fourth columns present the percentage of respondents, respectively, for high, neutral and low levels of practice.

4.2.1. Latitude

Latitude concerns “the level of controllability of the students, that is, teaching practices that offer students the opportunity to make choices, pursue personal objectives and become involved” in all organizational or learning tasks (Stoloff, 2016, p.5).

Table 2.
PE teachers’ practice regarding latitude.

| <i>ITEMS</i> | <i>FREQUENCY</i> | | |
|---|------------------|------------|----------|
| | <i>+</i> | <i>+/-</i> | <i>-</i> |
| <i>STATEMENT (item #)</i> | | | |
| <i>I plan to give students the opportunity for autonomous learning during parts of the course. (25)</i> | 78 | 20 | 2 |
| <i>I offer students the opportunity to choose personal objectives. (13)</i> | 70 | 22 | 8 |
| <i>The students are responsible for the majority of organizational tasks. (33)</i> | 22 | 23 | 55 |
| <i>The students participate in creating classroom rules. (29)</i> | 16 | 26 | 58 |
| <i>I involve my students in choice of activities. (9)</i> | 15 | 50 | 35 |
| <i>I choose my courses of action without discussing them with the students. (17)</i> | 15 | 28 | 57 |
| <i>I perform the majority of organizational tasks during the session (e.g., matériel, presences, teams, etc.). (21)</i> | 11 | 21 | 68 |

These findings show that 78% of the teachers state they often reserve parts of the course for autonomous learning. This finding represents a majority of teachers but is less than the 96% of teachers who believe that autonomy should be encouraged in the classroom environment as shown in Table 1.

As for the latitude given to students, teachers favor choices regarding personal objectives (70%), rather than courses of action (57%) or learning activities (15%). Regarding the tasks to assume during a session, there seems to be a dichotomy. In fact, 69% of the teachers indicate they provide little or no help with most of the organizational tasks; at the same time, however, a mere 22% maintain that the students are responsible for the majority of tasks. These results suggest that a large portion of tasks are not accomplished.

4.2.2. Ambiance

The ambiance category relates to classroom dynamics, particularly the quality of the teacher-student relationship.

Physical Education Teacher's Beliefs and Classroom Management Practices: Depicting Convergences, Divergences and Inconsistencies

Table 3.
PE teachers' practice regarding classroom climate.

| ITEMS STATEMENT (item #) | FREQUENCY | | |
|--|-----------|-----|---|
| | + | +/- | - |
| <i>I use my students' first name during interventions. (14)</i> | 98 | 1 | 1 |
| <i>I maintain an emotional connection with the students, while respecting boundaries. (37)</i> | 92 | 6 | 2 |
| <i>I take the time to learn more about the students' interests. (26)</i> | 81 | 14 | 5 |

On the whole, the statements regarding ambiance show that teaching practices converge and that those privileging the quality of interpersonal relationships are frequent and common. The most frequent practices are first, using students' first name during an intervention (98%); second, establishing a significant emotional connection (92%); and third, taking the time to discover students' interests (81%).

4.2.3. Learning situations

The learning situations category refers to functioning modalities privileged in PE courses, learning objects and discipline management.

Table 4.
PE teachers' practice regarding learning situations.

| ITEMS STATEMENT (item #) | FREQUENCY | | |
|---|-----------|-----|----|
| | + | +/- | - |
| <i>Consequences are known before the disruptive behaviour occurs. (11)</i> | 92 | 4 | 4 |
| <i>My courses of action vary from one school grade level (cycle, year) to the other. (35)</i> | 92 | 6 | 2 |
| <i>During planned play time in my courses, I stress learning objectives. (38)</i> | 92 | 6 | 2 |
| <i>I use original courses of action. (15)</i> | 86 | 12 | 2 |
| <i>I vary consequences based on the student, the context and the nature of the disruptive behaviour. (27)</i> | 73 | 18 | 9 |
| <i>I establish some routines that place the student in a situation of responsibility. (31)</i> | 63 | 23 | 14 |
| <i>I use removal (to a bench, corridor, etc.) as a consequence for all disruptive behaviours. (19)</i> | 9 | 27 | 64 |
| <i>During planned play time in my courses, I stress active time and enjoyment. (23)</i> | 8 | 16 | 76 |

This category deals with two areas of practice: learning situations and discipline management. In terms of learning situations, teachers say they focus more on learning (92%) than on active time and enjoyment (8%). As well, their practice appears to be flexible because they often teach content that is varied (92%) and original (86%).

In terms of discipline management, teachers say they have a system of established consequences in place before the disruptive behaviour occurs (92%). At the same time, they maintain they vary consequences based on the student, the context and the nature of the behaviour (73%). Similarly, only 9% of the teachers state they frequently resort to removal as a consequence for all disruptive behaviours, versus 27% who use it occasionally and 64% who almost never use it.

4.2.4. Assessment

Finally, the assessment category demonstrates the biggest differences in terms of practice. It relates to all the assessment modalities implemented by the teacher.

Table 5.
PE teachers' practice regarding assessment.

| <i>ITEMS</i> | <i>FREQUENCY</i> | | |
|--|------------------|------------|----------|
| | <i>+</i> | <i>+/-</i> | <i>-</i> |
| <i>STATEMENT (item #)</i> | | | |
| <i>At the start of LAS*, I inform my students about my assessment criteria. (36)</i> | 89 | 8 | 3 |
| <i>I assess students orally to compare their results. (16)</i> | 84 | 10 | 6 |
| <i>The students don't know my assessment criteria. (20)</i> | 74 | 5 | 21 |
| <i>I vary my assessment formats (e.g., by games, self-assessment, etc.). (28)</i> | 69 | 18 | 13 |
| <i>I give students the opportunity to improve their assessment results. (12)</i> | 63 | 24 | 13 |
| <i>I use formative assessment. (24)</i> | 56 | 27 | 17 |
| <i>I offer students the opportunity to self-assess their performance. (32)</i> | 56 | 29 | 15 |
| <i>I ask students to note down their achievements in order to self-assess their progress. (39)</i> | 51 | 23 | 26 |
| <i>The students choose the time for self-assessment, within a pre-established timetable. (41)</i> | 43 | 23 | 34 |

* LAS: Learning assessment situation

Assessment modalities fall into two categories: one on teaching actions and the other on the empowering actions given to students. In the practices most frequently used, teachers inform students of the assessment criteria at the start of the learning assessment situation (LAS) (89%), compare students orally in terms of their results (84%), do not inform students of the assessment criteria (74%) and, finally, vary assessment formats (69%).

As regards assessment practices dealing with the latitude and choice allowed to students, results show that only half the teachers tend to opt for assessment modalities with strong empowerment potential. In fact, teachers frequently offer students the opportunity to improve their results (63%), self-assess (56%), make notes on their progress (51%) and, finally, choose when to self-assess (43%), based on a pre-established timetable.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Beliefs

Interestingly, the findings show that certain beliefs converge and are shared by virtually all the teachers questioned. Indeed, all respondents believe in students' capacity to improve their competencies. As well, teachers share a belief in the importance of autonomy and accountability. This belief aligns with the expectations of the Québec program, which advocates the implementation of conditions that promote students' autonomy and accountability (MEQ, 2001). It appears, however, these findings contradict previous research conclusions, where teachers were somewhat resistant to the approach recommended by the current program (Stoloff, 2016), as can be noticed when teaching practices are characterized by an autocratic and traditional style (Gaudreau, 2008).

5.2. Practices

5.2.1. Latitude

Findings on teachers' practices regarding latitude suppose rather autocratic teaching practices. Nevertheless, these stated practices allow students to assume responsibility in some learning situations or at certain times during the session. This aligns with the work of Gendron (2007) and Sanderson et al. (2013) on the existence of critical moments during class when allowing students to choose may be difficult. Conversely, there are times that favour the promotion of student choice and autonomy, notably during warm-up. For example, in Québec, warm-up time often provides the opportunity to develop disciplinary competence in line with the *adoption of a healthy and active lifestyle*. In a context such as this, the student is encouraged to identify his/her personal objectives, develop an action plan and implement this plan autonomously (MEQ, 2001). Teachers, however, should favour such an approach for all three competencies developed in PE sessions (act, interact and adopt), not only one.

5.2.2. Ambiance

The findings concerning class ambiance demonstrate the importance teachers' accord to the quality of the relationship. They agree with research conclusions on both classroom management (Stoloff, 2016) and the conditions conducive to learning (Siedentop, 1994). Although most teachers say they use practices favouring the quality of the relationship, however, the fact remains that a teacher's capacity for attachment and attachment behaviours must be nuanced, depending on student's behaviour or student's difficulties (Auclair Tousigny, 2017; Gaudreau et al., 2012; Mukamurera & Balleux, 2013, Wilhelmsen & Sørensen, 2017).

5.2.3. Learning situations

As for learning situations, the portrait of teaching practices indicates that most respondents focus on learning with an emphasis on original and varied content. These practices are aligned with actions supporting student motivation, which helps to maintain a positive learning climate (Gao et al., 2009). Discipline management practices, on the other hand, show that teachers are in line with the concept of preventive organization, which recommends clarity of expectations and students' knowledge of consequences (Gaudreau, 2017). At the same time, however, they vary consequences according to the student, the context and the nature of the behaviour, a custom more in keeping with an individualized approach (Stoloff, 2018). The results in this research seem to contradict each other or point,

rather, to two different strategies: the first targets the gymnasium code of conduct, where rules and consequences are known in advance; the second targets the day-to-day behaviours that occur during a session and for which consequences vary based on different factors. Furthermore, it's obvious that only 9% of the teachers say they make frequent use of removal as a consequence for all disruptive behaviours. The non-use of punishment is in keeping with an approach intended to be educational (Lavay, French, & Henderson, 2015) and empowering (Hellison, 2011). The stated practices in this research, however, do not reflect previous research conclusions, which point to the use of punitive practices for managing disruptive behaviours (Stoloff, 2016).

5.2.4. Assessment

In terms of the findings on teaching actions, responses are inconsistent regarding teachers' presentation of assessment criteria given that two contradictory practices are said to be common occurrences. Indeed, teachers claim that assessment criteria are presented to students at the start of LAS, but are at the same time unknown to them. It should therefore be noted that oral comparisons of students and withholding information on assessment criteria are not recommended teaching practices (Tapin, Verret, Caplette-Charette, Grenier, & Chaubet, 2018). In terms of assessment modalities involving the student, findings denote that having students self-assess and having them track their progress are not common teaching practices (respectively 44% and 49%). Now, this implies that close to half the teachers do not fulfil the requirements of their program with respect to the student assessment process, which should promote self-assessment, tracking modalities and tools, all based on the student's knowledge and understanding of the assessment criteria (MEQ, 2001).

6. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Four sociodemographic variables affect practice: teaching level, gender, experience and socioeconomic context (Stoloff et al., 2018). These variables have a significant impact on the beliefs and practice of PE teachers. Further research is needed, however, for a more in-depth understanding. In addition, the findings in this article are based on a descriptive approach to each item. The next potential step is to analyze results using a quantitative approach, enabling each item, category and sociodemographic variable to be statistically fit and correlated.

7. CONCLUSION

Subsequent to the shift required by Québec's latest educational reform, where the focus is on student empowerment through responsibility, it appears that teachers' beliefs are aligned with the new educational orientations. A solid majority believes in the importance of responsibility and autonomy as a core framework. However, teachers' practices fail to consistently offer the kind of empowering conditions reflected in the latitude, learning situations and assessment categories of the CLASSE model. Students do not appear to have many opportunities to make choices, and this prevents them from acquiring greater decision-making power (Hellison, 2011).

This research has been useful for depicting teachers' beliefs and practices, yet different limits must be addressed. Firstly, findings present a major inconsistency, possibly due to the use of an ecological model (Archambault & Chouinard, 2009) as the foundation of the Q-PEPS questionnaire. Secondly, when questioning teachers about their beliefs and

practices, results highlighted an inconsistency in their responses, perhaps because of social desirability bias (Boutin, 1997) or a gap between the ideal, desired and actual practices perceived by participants (Schön, 1994). This suggests the use of diverse tools to collect data, instead of questionnaires.

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