

Teacher Protagonism in the Continuing Education of School Managers: Democracy, Dialogicity and Ethics in the Pioneer North of Paraná, Brazil 2025

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Abstract

This is a training experience developed within the scope of a technical cooperation agreement between UTFPR and the Municipal Government of Cornélio Procópio (PMCP), a city in the northern pioneer region of Paraná, Brazil, regarding the training of managers for basic education from the professionals of this education network themselves linked to a research group from a federal public university. The dialogic process began before the actual offering of the training meetings based on democratic, dialogic and ethical training, in addition to being centered on the care of oneself as care for others. This notion was revived in the last three Michel Foucault' Courses at the Collège de France in Paris (between 1982 and 1984) and inspires a welcoming approach, empathy and deep respect for professionals in activity and in continuing education. As a result, the appreciation of education professionals, through attentive listening and analysis of everyday situations in school units. The principles of human dignity, citizenship and the appreciation of teaching work underpinned the training practice, which was organized into five fronts or modules, each with eight hours distributed across four face-to-face meetings and another equal amount of time for readings, activities and prior preparation for all: fundamentals of educational policies and legislation, strategic management, pedagogical aspects, organizational leadership and development of the Action Plan, the latter module being taught by the SEMED-CP pedagogical team. The authors-trainers would like to thank UTFPR and PMCP, through their authorities.

Keywords: protagonism, continuing education, democratic management, public school, ethics

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Introduction

This is a training experience developed within the scope of a technical cooperation agreement between UTFPR and the Municipal Government of Cornélio Procópio (PMCP), a municipality in the northern pioneer region of Paraná, regarding the training of administrators for basic education, based on the professionals of this education network themselves, linked to a research group at a federal public university. The dialogic process began before the current offering of training sessions, based on democratic, dialogic, and ethical training, in addition to being centered on self-care as care for others.

In 2024, there were general municipal elections in Brazil. The 5,570 established municipalities, through their voters, elected their leaders for the 2025-2028 term. Thus, in Cornélio Procópio, a municipality in the northern pioneer region of Paraná, the situation was no different, with a new leader taking office after eight years of the previous one (through reelection). The selection of municipal secretaries is an important step for the new administration; as agents of the elected mayor, they develop, implement, and evaluate public policies at the municipal level.

Among these professionals is a graduate of the Postgraduate Program in Teaching (PPGEN) in Human, Social and Natural Sciences at the Federal Technological University of Paraná (UTFPR), a Professional Master's degree, based in Cornélio Procópio and Londrina (two of the fourteen Paraná Campuses of this Brazilian Higher Education Institution), created in 2012 and which offered the first set of vacancies for active teachers, as a process of professional improvement through continuing education or in-service training for educators in the Northern Pioneer region of Paraná, this colleague joined the activities of the Public Policy Observatory Research Group (GPOPP) at UTFPR.

Thus, this experience enabled a dialogue with the leadership of the GPOPP, in Cornélio Procópio. A municipality with 45,206 inhabitants (IBGE, 2022), Cornélio Procópio does not have its own education system, by choice, and operates as part of the Paraná State Education System, a reality for approximately 374 of the 399 municipalities in this Brazilian state, located in the south of the country, south of São Paulo and southeast of Mato Grosso do Sul. This restricts the autonomy of the local system, which is subordinate to the operations, platforms, and commands of the Regional Education Center, a regional body headquartered in Cornélio Procópio, but which encompasses 18 other municipalities in its activities.

Initially, a relevant fact emerged from these dialogues, initially with the Advisory Board supervisor, but soon with the SEMED-PMCP management team, at which time the GPOPP-UTFPR leadership was extremely well received. To cooperate in this process, this research group received a request: to develop a training course so that active teachers could improve their skills, understand the challenges of Democratic Education Management, and be certified for the selection process by the school community in each of the 26 school units: 11 Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers (CEMEI) with children aged 0 to 3 (daycare, *Federal Law N. 9,394, 1996*) and 15 schools for the initial years of Elementary Education (ages 6 to 10) and also welcoming preschool students (ages 4 and 5). Note that, in Brazil, since 2013, mandatory enrollment by parents and guardians of children has occurred, necessarily, from the age of four. However, it is the right of children to participate in the socialization process from birth, that is, from 0 to 5 years old, in Early Childhood Education.

Faced with this challenge and having received five subtopics to work on regarding Democratic School Management, the GPOPP team, led by the Municipal Secretary of Education, agreed to

collaborate with the SEMED team of educators, to offer this training to the municipality's teachers. A central issue was the training of these professionals by their own peers—that is, professionals working at CEMEIs and local schools. This is because there are no solutions to local issues that cannot be sought by the educators themselves, in daily contact with children and families, as well as their peers.

Thus, three of the four trainers on the GPOPP team hold positions in the municipality as teachers. The first, working at the CEMEI (Early Childhood Education Center), has held the position since 2014 and is currently performing educational supervision as part of the management team of this Early Childhood Education unit (daycare). The second, a teacher working under contract in the municipality, was appointed at the beginning of 2023 as a teacher in another CEMEI in this municipality. The third, also approved in the 2020 public competition for the position of teacher, was also appointed at the beginning of 2023 to work in a school for the Early Years of Elementary Education. The last trainer is the leader of the GPOPP since July 2013, trainer and advisor of the PPGEN in the area of Teaching since May 2014, as well as a trainer of the Undergraduate Course in Mathematics since February 2013, at UTFPR-CP.

Therefore, this team of four trainers, responsible for four of the five preparatory themes for the fifth, developed by the SEMED team through two civil servants (one of whom is a member of the GPOPP) and the Municipal Secretary of Education herself, comprise the group of seven professionals responsible for the Educational Management Training for Education Professionals of the Municipality of Cornélio Procópio (FGPEMCP), offered between July 31 and October 7, 2025, at the UTFPR headquarters in the municipality.

While still in the preparatory phase, the maturing discussion about who could participate in this training with a view to performing management roles led SEMED-PMCP to extend the invitation, originally only to professionals with three years of effective teaching experience, to those appointed in early 2023. Also in this process, the subtopics of each of the four Initial Modules were submitted to the SEMED for their consideration to function as theoretical preparation with a view to the development of Module V, developed by this team.

Thus, the Technical Cooperation Agreement and its first Amendment, relating to the negotiated specifications for this training, were signed for the offer, at no financial cost to the municipality, other than the salaries of its employees, as well as the exemption of the trainers (on days when the Training is held - sixteen dates) as well as the teachers registered to participate as course participants, but for the afternoon shift, always on Mondays and Fridays in August, September, and October (first week), over ten weeks, preceded by an initial meeting, later set for July 31, 2025.

However, the number of registrants for this training reached 162. Thus, the initial decision that such training would consist of two hours in person, followed by another two hours for reading and activities before the next meeting, transferred the shift from afternoons to evenings, that is, outside of the working hours of these educators, as well as resulting in the transfer of the meeting days, previously Mondays and Fridays, to Mondays and Tuesdays, that is, two days in a row, which certainly intensifies the effort of those enrolled, after an eight-hour workday (in the case of acting managers and teachers with two positions or extended working hours).

This decision took place in early July 2025 and required the training team (GPOPP and SEMED) to double the course hours and consequently divide the 164 into two groups: one from 6 pm to 8 pm; the other from 8 pm to 10 pm, every Monday and Tuesday, between August

4th and October 7th, through 20 face-to-face meetings lasting fifty minutes, followed by a ten-minute break and another fifty minutes, with attendance/frequency control lists at the beginning and end of each group.

Below, we describe the training methodology employed, its theoretical and epistemological assumptions articulated with teaching practice, some analytical elements of the process initiated on July 31st and continuing from August 4th to September 23rd, 2025, as well as the emerging repercussions regarding the self-formed consciousness of each of the course participants in this process of self-formation.

Methodology

The principle of horizontal training and self-training guided all dialogues with the SEMED team and all seventeen meetings with participating teachers (initial meeting and sixteen meetings of Modules I to IV, four per Module) between August 4 and September 23, 2025. Furthermore, the idea of self-care associated with adulthood, both revived by Michel Foucault (2001 and 2014; 2008 and 2018, respectively) from Classical Antiquity and Modern Philosophy, are fundamental in the conception of a training process through which education professionals emancipate themselves, form meaning, and, fundamentally, experience effectively democratic management practices.

It is crucial to have a growing awareness that serving the public means being willing to engage in dialogue with all people, from the most varied social backgrounds and socio-political positions, and that, above all, the exercise of democratic management presupposes commitment, empathy, and a willingness to listen to others.

With these concerns in mind, Module I began on August 4th, addressing the norms and policies that underpin the idea of democratic management of public schools (Paro, 2000). On the other hand, Foucault's path (Defert, 2011) was always marked by profound uneasiness and, in the Socratic style, a continuous act of questioning oneself and others regarding how we are governed and why, exactly, we allow ourselves to be governed.

In this formative journey, awareness of the role played by teachers and school administrators was evident in each meeting through generous participation in the daily lives of these educational institutions, where teachers and administrators of Early Childhood Education (recently recognized as part of national Basic Education - *Amendment N.º 59*) and Elementary Education (mandatory basic education since 1988), considered a social and subjective right of children and adolescents, but also of all those who did not have access to it during their careers) fight for recognition, now extended from eight to nine years (Federal Law N.º 11,274), and preceded by the preschool phase, the last stage of Early Childhood Education, in the locality, incorporated into the daily lives of schools and not of CEMEI in recent years. This was possibly due to the advancement of mandatory enrollment from six to four years, but also due to the gradual recognition of CEMEI education professionals as teachers, deserving of appreciation as such, through activity hours corresponding to one-third of the workday, a career and salary plan, and ongoing training at school or outside of school through authorization to pursue specializations and other postgraduate programs at institutions of recognized reputation and training capacity.

The training process at the meetings began with the welcome, signing of the entry list, and seating of the participants of each class in a specially designated room in a newly built block

on the UTFPR CP Campus. An entire team then reorganized the seating and equipment for the meetings. The approach to the items and subitems of each Module emphasized the advance availability of 96 hours of the base text, a fragment of this base text, challenges (evaluation activities), and topics (forums on issues). All of these activities promoted reading, note-taking and prior preparation between one meeting and another, since the same workload as the in-person workload was planned for these activities at a location and time freely chosen by the participants, included in the final certification of this Training.

In the classroom, the instructors of Modules I through IV sought to engage, provoke, and engage participants through questions, attentive listening, and activities in pairs or trios, always aiming to bring elements of everyday life into the theoretical context and consummated in *praxis*. Meeting by meeting, participants and instructors interacted, heavily influenced by local political events that impacted the very conditions of the training being conducted, the potential benefits and opportunities for students, and how the relationships between teachers and SEMED, through an employment relationship, and enrolled participants and GPOPP, through a university extension relationship—that is, a course—produced various effects on this training process.

It should be explained that the invitation extended by SEMED to the teachers emphasized the importance of this training as a means of certification, followed by future professional evaluation and an elective process in each school unit. However, elements of local culture intersected the daily life of the extra-curricular training of these workers and their trainers. The written rules for the course were continuously challenged by justifications for absences and the failure to submit activities, as well as external occurrences in the municipal political sphere, such as the discussion of a bill that would alter the Teaching Statute, the late publication of the regulations for the electoral process for choosing managers, and, finally, the definitive impediment of candidacy for current managers who had been in a management position for more than four years.

On the one hand, the incidence of such external events significantly altered the participants' morale. On the other hand, they reiterated the need for training, updating, and understanding of regulatory instruments, policies, and the exercise of powers within the local education system and its units regarding how professional governance was exercised. This was a very interesting discussion that leads to the next section, which focuses on analyzing the process and results. These reflections have a remembrance character, approaching what Ludke & André (2013) call a case study, of an exploratory nature and with ethnographic investigative traits.

Analysis of the Process and Results

Caring for others is no simple task. Professionals working daily in local schools are challenged to form a team that meets the educational demands of children ages zero to ten, as well as the needs expressed by their parents, guardians, family members, and the community. In times of constant political polarization, educational issues are permeated by behaviors that make school staff sometimes fundamental supporters of families, sometimes undervalued professionals, whose work hours and other professional regulations are not known or respected by the school community.

Regarding the power relations in the daily life of school units, they were also evident in the meetings held in Modules I to IV, given the presence of teachers and teacher-managers from the same units present side by side, and, on the other hand, sole representatives from some

other units. In some cases, the current administrators were the only ones registered to participate in the training, which is why the subsequent ban, published on August 11th, generated concerns for the teams at these units. On the other hand, there were CEMEIs and schools with five, six, and seven staff members present at the training. This, on the one hand, projected excellent expectations regarding the transformation of the daily routines of these units, but on the other, it reproduced a certain inhibition among teachers in the training sessions themselves regarding the incumbent administrators in both groups of students. Despite the heterogeneity of these two groups, at the end of Module IV, with 44 and 39 respectively, the presence of incumbent administrators was more pronounced in the first group.

In any case, exceptions to this perception occurred in both instances, resulting in intense participation in the final evaluation, which contributed to the discussion of the themes, exemplified the theory and legislation, and allowed for important updates regarding, for example, home care for students, the establishment of the forum of school councils, limits of the school day for students in Basic Education, contemporary theoretical approaches linked to democratic and strategic management, inclusion of other school educators (non-teaching and non-management staff) in discussions, deliberations, consensus building, and in the Political Pedagogical Plan (PPP), as well as the need to overcome individualism in favor of strengthening strong teams for the collective work essential to face the struggles for professional recognition and appreciation, as well as to ensure the material conditions for an education that guarantees the learning of the student, the workers, and the community.

An important aspect was reiterated in several Modules regarding the need for self-education and community education for democratic participation. This is because people from other generations, such as parents and grandparents, did not necessarily receive such training, but they have the right to actively participate in school life with a view to democratic and participatory practices that contribute to learning—a fundamental objective of the school (Paro, 2000). This also reflects the growing awareness among workers of the need for emancipation, the need to pay the price of adulthood, and the need to assume the responsibilities inherent in the roles of teachers and administrators.

The results of the training process were reflected in the classroom, but they will continue, as was the case with the recent call for school principals to serve on the council forum, established in a recent amendment to the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN) of 2023 (Brazil, 1996), art. 14. Dissatisfaction also emerged during these two months of training, through various positions regarding the political and administrative decisions that accompanied the teachers' management and educational initiatives in the municipality. This included the uprising of a group of active principals regarding the limitation of tenure in their positions, and, on the other hand, the struggle of new employees to remain in the training program, complete the probationary period and the evaluations inherent to this process, and create the conditions for presenting their own names in the future to the school communities of each of these 26 school units.

Elements of Local Culture

Among the elements of local culture, a strong attachment to leadership stands out. Perhaps, therefore, the desire to be in charge, to exercise power over others. This is understandable in times of individualism, competition, and loneliness, as opposed to collectivism, mutual support, and solidarity. Contemporary Brazil is marked by machismo, patriarchy, and asymmetry in relationships, including, unfortunately, in the public service. This distances

people from spontaneous participation, places “each person in their place,” and subjects the majority to the rule of a few.

On the other hand, Paro (2000) has already emphasized that school administration is of little use to the school's daily life and purpose. Preferring collective forms of management, this author even proposes, in the seventh chapter of this work, a management committee—that is, a plurality of coordination exercises rather than a single leader. On the other hand, to achieve the necessary conditions for such construction, it is necessary to move forward in the direction of democratic management, in understanding the role of each person and the importance of verbal expression and listening to each agent in this process.

The school is a place for professional, collective work focused on learning. Any imposition of other objectives, such as those of each employee/manager, defocuses the team, disrupts coexistence, and creates difficult situations for both leaders and those governed. Indeed, the exercise of self-governance must be continually encouraged by school team leaders, aiming to acquire successive degrees of autonomy, trust, and effective performance of duties in each position. The school is a place of care. Before children, educators act as guardians, humanized beings who contribute to the development and humanization of new generations.

Therefore, clear objectives must be agreed upon by teams, aiming to build a strong collective identity, a culture of belonging, and integration for all. Feeling part of the team is the first step to effective participation. The fight for quality education presupposes commitment, effective working conditions, and respect for the working day. Without these, discourses about love, self-giving, and dedication, typical of non-professionals, tend to dominate minds and hearts.

The Search for Emancipation and the Challenge of Adulthood in Kant According to Foucault

This notion of emancipation is an individual process, a choice made by each person. When reviving this idea from Kant, Foucault (2008; 2018), in the first class of the 1983 Course, mentions the relationship to an emblematic text, *What is enlightenment?* This, as a cultural process with manifestations about philosophizing. Kant, according to Foucault (2008, p. 25; 2018, p. 25), defines Enlightenment as “man's emergence from minority, for which he himself is responsible” and, further, minority, as “the inability to use his understanding without the guidance of others,” as a lack of decision, of courage to use his own understanding. Foucault (2017, p. 1384) stated that Kant defines the essential conditions for the home to know its mentoring – spirituality and institutions, ethics.

In the end, Foucault summarizes that adulthood, that is, governing oneself, has a price, and not everyone is willing to pay it. This provokes reflections on the behavior of the participants in the meetings: a posture of caution, care, distrust, and even passivity toward a set of concepts, ideas, and theories “that would be dumped” on them, but which, on the other hand, were gradually shared and developed through listening, dialogue, acceptance, and empathy. Perceiving oneself as part of one's own formative process is extremely important for professionals who play an important role in society, as intellectuals capable of driving the transformation of an unequal, unjust, violent, and extremely conservative society, driven by the desire to maintain privileges, positions, and positions of power.

Ever dissatisfied, this contemporary philosopher draws attention to the fact that it is up to the institution, not the worker, to provide the means of production—that is, the tools and working

conditions appropriate for caring for others. In this sense, teachers and administrators must see themselves as workers, as a class that needs to be united to see its struggles prosper. In another direction, the way they choose to manage the school, as a democratic community or not, matters in the educational process for themselves and for others (teacher, member of the school management team, students, parents, guardians of students and members of the community).

Foucault (2008, p. 27; 2018, pp. 27-8) summarizes that Kant had made a different philosophical discourse, a kind of prescription regarding adulthood: “have the courage to use your own understanding,” which implies “guiding yourself.” On the contrary, many choose to remain in minority, because, according to Kant apud Foucault (2008, p. 32; 2018, p. 31), “they would be afraid of falling, they would not be able to walk and cross even the easiest ditches, they would fall”. In short, Kant resumes according to Foucault's interpretation (2008, p. 32; 2018, p. 32), “laziness and cowardice are what prevent us from giving ourselves the decision, the strength and the courage to have with ourselves the relationship of autonomy that allows us to use our reason and our morality,” thus remaining guided, governed, submissive. This observation is important because it is a choice and not a natural incapacity.

Self-Care as the Pinnacle of Teacher Training for Educators/Childcare Providers

This notion of self-care was revisited in the last three Michel Foucault Courses at the Collège de France in Paris (between 1982 and 1984) and inspires acceptance, empathy, and profound respect for professionals both in practice and in continuing education.

Michel Foucault takes Socrates as an example of a philosopher, a master of self-care. He encouraged his fellow Athenians to care for themselves through continuous inquiry, which, among other effects, resulted in his own condemnation, as seen in the dialogue “Apology” (1997). Socrates is the master of self-care because he exercises self-control over his passions. In other words, he makes reason prevail over the temptation of the beauty of young men, including Alcibiades. Alcibiades, the future ruler, grew old after being seduced by older men and neglected to take care of himself. Seeking to fully govern the city, he discovers that it is impossible to care for the city without first taking care of himself.

Socrates is the one who leads this discovery, but as a temperate being, he remains immune to Alcibiades' charms. In this process, Alcibiades fails in his promise to return to himself and remains dispersed among the loves of youth. Building on the Socratic case, Foucault takes his students to another moment—the golden age of self-care—in the first and second centuries of the Christian era, a period in which self-care will expand throughout life and become recognized as a true privilege of old age, through Seneca, for example. For young people, self-care becomes a way of life, that is, it accompanies the human being throughout their existence and constitutes, for them, a kind of life armor capable of protecting them from the pitfalls and disappointments of life, changing not the events themselves, but the way in which the subject receives them, gives them new meaning and uses them in their life. Thirdly, Foucault (2001, 2014) addresses self-care as appropriated by the Christianity of the early Church fathers, giving rise to other relationships that founded practices such as confession, among others practiced by a monastic asceticism typical of the Middle Ages. This will converge the entire philosophical mode of existence toward another life, based on the continuous renunciation of self in this one.

Self-care, reinterpreted in the present for work and teaching practices, highlights the need for educators to pay attention to themselves amid contemporary syndromes that affect people's morale, especially burnout, also known as neglected caregiver syndrome. Amid a sickening

society, schools are constantly challenged to offer responses, through their professional teams, to contemporary suffering and ills. In this context, it is vital not to confuse the role of educators with that of a receiver of issues transferred by families, parents, and other agents. It is essential to be clear about the role of the school team, fulfilling it collectively and pertinently to provide conditions of emancipation for each worker, for students and for their families.

Procedural and Reflective Elements or When “The Penny Drops”

The timing of how the dialogue mode of Modules I through IV will result in participants' awareness is somewhat unclear. In any case, simply comparing this with other training courses (parallel, previous, and subsequent) may indicate that form matters as much as content. This lesson is also presented by Foucault in his courses, given his constant concern for the well-being of his listeners and the effective conditions for carrying out their work.

In several challenges, questions were created during the Training to encourage the reading of the texts made available, as well as of the fragments or excerpts of these texts in a version with fewer pages due to the weekly routine and the lack of time of these participating educators, there were many signs of awareness and effects of this Training that intended to function as a self-training of ourselves, based on acceptance, listening, empathy and deep appreciation of local basic education teaching professionals.

It is, truly, a coronelistic resentment that is reflected in school management, through groups of allies “against” other workers. Unfortunately, these conflicts also manifested themselves in the training, with extremely conservative positions that sometimes relied on the talent, profile, and anointing of certain individuals for management, when in reality, everyone can learn, including students and teachers, to participate and shape truly democratic management, not just in words, but in and through example and practice. One of the challenges for the trainers in this process was precisely to act in accordance with this democratic ideal. Enabling listening, speaking, expressing, and even expressing present dissatisfactions, so that participants could perceive, through demonstration rather than through speech, democratic action.

With the limitations of a lean team, with long workdays to meet the two training periods on Mondays and Tuesdays, it is hoped that such sharing was practiced through questions, concerns, and proposals that may or may not be appropriated, adopted, and adopted by participants today and in the future. In this sense, the effects of such School Management Training propagate over time, for each educator, in each school setting, and in interactions with peers, students, and community members.

As educators, sharing knowledge and insights is a fundamental practice in the teaching profession, always with extreme respect for the less fortunate and for the lamentable social legacies of a profoundly unequal and intolerant country that promotes constant competition. Current educational administrations focus solely on formal compliance with legal standards, without effectively committing to actions that promote broad and unrestricted democracy. This is evident in how principals were invited, but not encouraged, to nominate two members per school to serve on the school council forum within each school council.

Once again, the possible outcome does not reflect a democratic process, as the principals convened by SEMED will likely nominate themselves and another manager from the already established team, which has been in place for years, to form this forum, which would be a space

for struggle and reflection on effective representation of school boards. Despite this, at some point, “the penny will drop for each of us educators.”

Conclusion

The main result of this research is the valuing of education professionals through attentive listening and the analysis of everyday situations in school units. The principles of human dignity, citizenship, and the valuing of teaching work underpinned the training, which was organized into five modules, each lasting eight hours, in four in-person meetings and with equal time for readings, activities, and prior preparation for all: fundamentals of educational policies and legislation, strategic management, pedagogical aspects, organizational leadership, and development of the Action Plan, the last module being taught by the SEMED pedagogical team.

Through various challenges and questions created during the training to encourage the reading of the provided texts, as well as fragments of these texts, there were many manifestations of awareness and the impact of this training, which sought to function as a form of self-development based on welcoming, listening, empathy, and the profound valuing of local basic education teaching professionals.

In this context, the professional perceiving themselves as part of their formative process is extremely important for professionals who have an important role in society, as intellectuals capable of driving the transformation of an unequal, unjust, violent, and extremely conservative society in the sense of maintaining privileges, positions, and positions of power. It is hoped that the sting of democratic management has bitten the educators participating in this training, as well as ourselves, and transforms us in our daily practices.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The authors declare that they did not use Degenerative AI resources in the preparation of this text.

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