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Using Reality Therapy in Schools: Its Potential Impact on the Effectiveness of the ASCA National Model

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this manuscript is to examine the application of Reality Therapy in schools. The basic components of the American School Counseling Association's National Model and also the core tenets of Reality Therapy are reviewed in terms of pertinent literature. This is followed by a focus on the delivery system of the national model. Lastly, specific emphasis will be placed on the potential impact Reality Therapy can have on student academic achievement, personal/social development, and career decision-making skills when applied to each program component.

In 2003, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) published the ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs (Wittmer & Clark, 2007). Using the best practices over the last fifty years, the national model was developed during a summit in 2001 by the leadership of ASCA, national school counseling leaders, school counselor educators, practicing school counselors, state guidance coordinators, school district guidance coordinators, and representatives from the Education Trust. Much of the work incorporated in the framework was previously done by Drs. Norm Gysbers, C. D. Johnson, Sharon Johnson, and Robert Myrick (Wittmer & Clark, 2007).

This model provides a foundation, a delivery system, a management system, and an accountability system for professional school counselors (Wittmer & Clark, 2007). The ASCA National Model's framework includes the three domains of academic achievement, career decision-making, and personal/social development. Perhaps the most significant change for school counselors in the 21st Century has been the expectation for them to spend a larger percentage of their time in the classroom using developmental guidance lessons to support and enhance academic achievement. In fact, because of the need for counselors to impact academic achievement, university training programs have changed from a theory based preparation to an education based preparation (House & Martin, 1998).

Effective school counseling programs have structural components and program components (Wittmer & Clark, 2007). The structural components provide the ideological underpinnings for the entire program, and should be writ-

ten by an advisory committee composed of administrators, counselors, teachers, parents and community leaders. The Mission Statement and the Rationale Statement are in this element. The Mission Statement outlines the purpose of the program. This narrative includes a set of principles which guides the development, implementation, and evaluation of the entire program. Following the writing of the Mission Statement, the advisory committee develops the Rationale Statement. This document clearly presents the reasons for having a comprehensive, developmental counseling program in place. It also explains how the program will benefit the students, the faculty, the parents, and the specific community being served. The Program Components of the ASCA National Model will be reviewed in the paragraphs that follow.

All activities that counselors perform to deliver the ASCA National Model are framed within four program components (guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, and system support). Each component makes specific contributions to enhance academic achievement, career decision-making, and personal/social development for students (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). For instance, the Guidance Curriculum complements the academic curriculum. Its purpose is to provide preventive, proactive lessons to promote positive mental health and enhanced academic achievement for all students. Guidance lessons and activities that focus on relationships, integrity, self-esteem, self-discipline, goal-setting, study skills, time management, anger management, careers, decision-making, and the importance of acquiring a quality education support and enhance the school instruction program.

The Individual Planning component consists of activities that help students to plan, monitor, and manage their own learning and personal career development. Within this element, students explore and evaluate their education, career options, and personal goals. School counselors work closely with students on an individual basis and update their files after each intervention.

The Responsive Services component provides individual counseling, small group counseling, consultations, and referrals to meet the immediate needs and concerns of students. This element of the counseling program is available to all students and is often initiated by students.

Services provided in this component help students to resolve personal concerns that could possibly impede their academic concentration and achievement if left unattended.

The System Support component provides management activities that support the total school counseling program. These elements include professional development, staff and community relations, consultations with teachers and parents, program management, advisory council activities, and research and development.

Effective school counseling programs are 100% programs with all counselor activities fitting into one of the four program components. Counselors at each level must consider the specifics of their particular school setting and decide the percentage of time to devote to each program component (Wittmer & Clark, 2007). The focus of ASCA National Model school counseling programs is clearly on the academic achievement, personal well-being, and equity of opportunity for all students. Now that the basic components of the ASCA National Model have been reviewed, the following paragraphs will address the core tenets of Reality Therapy.

Reality Therapy is a method of counseling and psychotherapy that was developed by William Glasser (1965). Validated by research studies, this theoretical approach has been successfully taught and practiced in the United States, Canada, Korea, Japan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Norway, Israel, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Slovenia, Croatia, Italy, Colombia, Kuwait, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and Hong Kong (Wubbolding, 2000). In addition to other areas, Reality Therapy has been effectively applied to schools (Glasser, 1990, 1993), parenting (Glasser, 2002), and counseling and therapy (Wubbolding, 2000, 2004; Wubbolding & Brickell, 1999).

Choice Theory is the underlying theoretical basis for Reality Therapy. According to Choice Theory, all human beings are motivated by five genetically encoded needs – survival, love and belonging, power or achievement, freedom or independence, and fun – that drive us all our lives (Glasser, 1998). Glasser believes the need to love and belong is the primary need and also the most difficult need to satisfy because the involvement of another individual is required to meet this desire.

Choice Theory emphasizes that beginning shortly after birth and continuing all through life, individuals store information inside their minds and build a file of wants called the Quality World. The Quality World consists of people, activities, events, beliefs, possessions, and situations that fill personal needs (Wubbolding, 2000). People are the most important component of each Quality World and these are the individuals clients care about and want most to connect with. For therapy to be successful, a therapist must be the kind of person the client would consider putting in his/her quality world (Glasser, 2001). Choice

theory explains that everything we do is chosen and every behavior is our best attempt to get what we want to satisfy our needs (Glasser).

A basic goal of Reality Therapy is to help clients learn better ways of fulfilling their needs. The procedures that lead to change are based on two specific assumptions (Glasser, 1992). The first assumption is that their present behavior is not getting them what they want; the second assumption is that humans are motivated to change when they believe they can choose other behaviors that will get them closer to what they want.

Reality Therapy emphasizes the importance of the therapeutic relationship which is the foundation for effective counseling outcomes (Wubbolding & Brickell, 1999). Counselors are able to develop positive relationships with clients when they possess the personal qualities of warmth, sincerity, congruence, understanding, acceptance, concern, openness, respect for the client and the willingness to be challenged by others (Corey, 2009). These characteristics allow school counselors to function as advocates who are able to instill a sense of hope in students. Once the therapeutic relationship has been established, the counselor assists students in gaining a deeper understanding of the consequences of their current behavior. At this point, students are helped to understand that they are not at the mercy of others, are not victims, and that they have a range of options to choose from.

Reality Therapy provides the delivery system for helping individuals take more effective control of their lives. The acronym WDEP is used to describe the basic procedures of Reality Therapy. Each letter refers to a cluster of strategies that are designed to promote change: W=wants and needs; D=direction and doing; E=self-evaluation; and P=planning (Wubbolding, 2000). The following paragraphs will focus on the delivery system of the ASCA national model which includes the activities, interactions, and areas in which counselors work to enhance the lives of boys and girls. Within the delivery system there are four program components: school counseling curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). Specific emphasis will be placed on the potential impact Reality Therapy can have on student academic achievement, personal/social development, and career decision-making skills when applied to each program component.

School Counseling Curriculum

The School Counseling Curriculum program component is used to impart guidance and counseling content to students in a systematic way. Activities in this component focus on student's study and test-taking skills, post-secondary planning, understanding of self and others, peer relationships, substance abuse education, diversity awareness, coping strategies and career planning (ASCA, 2006). Guidance lessons are usually presented to students in

regular classroom settings. School counselors work with the Steering Committee and the School Community Advisory Committee to decide on the competencies (knowledge and skills) students should acquire at each grade level (Gysbers & Henderson, 2006). This curriculum allows counselors to be proactive rather than reactive in their attempt to meet student needs.

School counselors are actually responsible for the development and organization of the school counseling curriculum (Wittmer & Clark, 2007); however, the cooperation and support of the faculty, staff, parents and guardians are necessary for its successful implementation. This is one of the reasons why Reality Therapy practitioners can be most effective in schools. Reality Therapy emphasizes the importance of the personal qualities of warmth, sincerity, congruence, understanding, acceptance, concern, openness and respect for each individual that therapists must possess. These characteristics that pave the way for school counselors to develop positive therapeutic relationships with students also help them to gain respect, cooperation, and support from parents, guardians and those who work within the schools.

When deciding on specific lessons and activities for the school counseling curriculum at each grade level, Reality Therapy practitioners consider the five basic needs that all humans possess (survival, love and belonging, power or achievement, freedom or independence, and fun). Special attention is always given to love and belonging which Glasser (1998) believes is the primary need. These basic needs make up the Quality World for each individual. This personal world consists of specific images of people, activities, events, beliefs, possessions and situations that fulfill individual needs (Wubbolding, 2000). People are the most important component of the Quality World. For a successful therapeutic outcome, the counselor must be the kind of person a client would consider putting in his/her Quality World. As Reality Therapy practitioners interact with students, their personal characteristics enable them to appeal to one or more of each student's basic needs.

Before focusing on the importance of academic achievement, personal/social development and career information; Reality Therapy practitioners work at involving, encouraging and supporting all students to help them feel that they are cared for and actually belong to this specific group and this particular school. This interaction helps to build trust. It is through this relationship with the therapist that clients begin to focus and learn from them.

As guidance lessons are presented from the structured curriculum, school counselors at each grade level focus on the underlying characteristics of reality therapy (Corey, 2009). They begin by emphasizing choice and responsibility. Students are taught that they choose all that they do and are responsible for what they choose. Reality therapists challenge students to examine and evaluate their own behavior. Students are encouraged to consider how effective

their choices are with regard to their personal goals for academic achievement, personal/social adjustment and career development. After class discussions, students are taught to make better choices—choices that will help them to meet their needs in more effective ways as they strive to develop better relationships, increased happiness and a sense of inner control of their lives (Wubbolding, 1988).

Individual Student Planning

When this program component is properly implemented, P-12 school students will graduate from their respective secondary schools with more realistic plans for the future. This is a service whereby counselors focus on goal setting, academic planning, career planning, problem solving and an understanding of self (ASCA, 2006). Each school year, counselors at all levels should schedule at least one individual planning session with each student in their assigned group. It is important for parents to be invited to attend these sessions as their involvement and support are vital for student motivation. This cycle of counseling begins with the counselor's efforts to create a positive working relationship with each student. The personal characteristics of each counselor are assets as he/she works to develop a meaningful therapeutic relationship with each counselee. When this relationship is an understanding and supportive one, it provides a foundation for effective outcomes. Client involvement is important. Reality therapy practitioners use attending behaviors, listening skills, suspension of client judgment, facilitative self-disclosure, summarizing and focusing to create the type of climate that leads to client participation. Once the involvement has been established, counselors focus on the specific procedures that lead to change in behavior.

The cycle of counseling proceeds with the employment of the WDEP system. Students are encouraged to explore their wants, needs and perceptions in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social adjustment and career development. This is followed by an exploration of their total behavior in each of these areas and their personal evaluations of how effective they are in moving toward what they actually want. Students are asked if their present behavior has a reasonable chance of getting them what they want now, and if they believe it is taking them in the direction they want to go (Wubbolding, 2000).

Standardized test scores, semester grades, and personal preferences are considered as student goals are reviewed. According to Glasser (1992), individuals are motivated to change when they are convinced that their present behavior is not getting them what they want and also when they believe they can choose other behaviors that will get them closer to what they want. When students decide to change, this is their choice. When they determine what they want to change, Reality Therapy practitioners are able to help them formulate structured plans for change. Wubbolding (2000) uses the acronym SAMIC to capture the essence of an effective plan: simple,

attainable, measureable, immediate, committed to and controlled by the planner.

Individual student planning sessions usually end with a summary of what has been agreed upon during the interview. Two copies are made of student plans when they are revised; one copy is placed in the student's folder and the other copy is given to the student. Unless a definite date has been scheduled for the next meeting, counselees are encouraged to consult with counselors as needed during the remainder of the school year.

Responsive Services

School counselors are called to respond to the immediate needs and concerns of their students. Such responses may include the provision of information, peer mediation, referrals, counseling, or consultation. Further, the ASCA National Model provides specific criteria or objectives of Responsive Services. Such objectives can be met through the use of basic Choice Theory concepts.

Prevention Education to Address Life Choices

The first criterion of Responsive Services states, "Every student K-12 receives prevention education to address life choices in academic, career, and personal/social development" (ASCA, 2003, p. 114). How can a school counselor provide prevention education through a Choice Theory lens? Dr. Glasser writes, "Education is not acquiring knowledge; it is best defined as using knowledge" (1998, p. 238). Further, the value lies in applying what has been learned, rather than collecting a mental cabinet of knowledge and data. So perhaps the initial step is re-thinking about what is important to teach. From a Choice Theory perspective, there are two essential elements or questions. First, how can school counselors *provide opportunities* for students to address life choices in various areas in real time? Second, how will the counselor provide *good experiences* for students as they learn how to address life choices?

The opportunities are endless depending on how creative one is. However, for the purpose of brevity, ideas for Choice Theory based opportunities are outlined below specifically as they relate to a school counselor's call to provide responsive services to all students in the areas of academic achievement, career development, and personal/social adjustment. In addition, these opportunities are meant to set the context for enjoyable experiences for all involved, teachers and students alike.

Academic development. The opportunities suggested are based upon the assumption that if one of the five basic needs is not being satisfied, misery will follow (Glasser, 1998). In a school system, misery is typically related to academic difficulties, a lack of interest and motivation, and failure. Consequently, school counselors are urged to consider the uniqueness of each student, while providing opportunities that serve to meet all five of the Basic Needs.

- a. Survival and Health (physiological needs). Mental and emotional stressors are directly linked to organic responses within the body.
 - i. Teach students stress and relaxation coping mechanisms as a part of the health education curriculum
 - ii. Lead students through brief relaxation techniques prior to all examinations
 - iii. Teach appropriate thought reframing and cognitive restructuring, and its relation to pulse rate and the body's stress response
- b. Love and Belonging
 - i. Hold multiple small and large group parties, celebrations, and groups in order to solidify relationships; goal of groups can be learning the 14 habits (See Rapport, 2007)
 - ii. Use basic counseling skills so that they are better able to relate to students on an intimate and friendly level
 - iii. Teach students basic counseling skills so they are better able to relate to others
 - iv. Develop partnerships among students (accountability, studying)
- c. Self-Worth/Power
 - i. Set up activities so that all students can achieve. Encourage the use of open book tests
 - ii. Provide flexible learning activities so that all students can be empowered
 - iii. Encourage leadership positions among all students (see Fox & Delgado, 2008, Secret Agents' Club). Students who appear introverted and withdrawn should be sought to serve in such positions.
- d. Freedom
 - i. Teach the students the WDEP system. Help them use it.
 - ii. Curriculum, Reading: Students can select from a list of books as required reading
 - iii. Curriculum, Math: Set up role-play scenarios that would encourage students to use math abilities (i.e., paying at a restaurant, figuring the tip for any given service, developing a budget based on career choice)
- e. Fun: All of the exercises above could include elements of fun depending on the attitudes of all participating.

Career development. All students should be tutored and encouraged to complete the *Choice Theory Career Rating Scale*, Figure 1 (based off of Glasser's Choice

Theory Needs Rating Scale). Group discussions and individual sessions should be available for students to talk about how their career choices meet their Basic Needs. Another option is holding an annual career fair. Employees from the community can serve as representatives of any given career. While there are plenty of opportunities for students to learn from these representations, students also are put in a place where they can practice relationship skills as they inquire about their careers of interest.

After such a fair, students can be encouraged to choose one particular career. The following outline serves as a method of encouraging awareness about how one's career choice will impact flexibility in choices and options on a day to day schedule.

1. Students are asked to review career choice in terms of potential salary, schedule, and training.
2. Various cases will be distributed related to potential circumstances that could arise in adulthood such as a need for a new car, personal or family illness, marriage, family obligations, etc. Students will need to consider how their chosen line of work and job either poses challenges when such personal issues arise or allows for flexibility.
3. Students take the Choice Theory Career Rating Scale for Children and Adolescents to evaluate if such a career choice fits their needs.

This is only one example of how creativity can be applied within a Choice Theory framework. Counselors and teachers are encouraged to consider others.

Personal/Social Development. The authors suggest the use of the *Choice Theory Needs Rating Scale*. School counselors can use this as a back-drop for discussing personal and social matters. For example, if a student is struggling with making friends, one would investigate where the student's need strength falls within the Love and Belonging scale. Next, the student would be asked to rate his or her present need satisfaction within this scale. (Given the presenting problem, we could assume that one's need satisfaction rating is going to be less than the rating given for the need strength on this given scale.) The counselor could inquire about what steps would be important and essential in moving the client's need satisfaction rating up closer to the need strength rating. For example, let's say the student's need strength rating for Love and Belonging was a 10, however the student's need satisfaction rating on the same scale was a 4. The counselor might respond, "No wonder you are not feeling so good about making friends. You really want to have more friends; however, that is not working out so well for you. You are not very satisfied with the situation right now. Let's say that next week, instead of being satisfied at a number 4, you moved up to a 5. So you were a bit more satisfied. What would you have done that week in order to feel

more satisfied with making friends and being a friend?" This is one way in which the Choice Theory Needs Rating Scale can provide a context for conversation with students about their desired personal and social development, as well as what they are currently doing to meet related goals.

System Support

School counselors are called to manage activities within the school that serve to establish, enhance, and maintain the total counseling program. This involves collaborating with colleagues, as well as providing professional development opportunities to staff. From a Choice Theory perspective, the heart of successful collaboration includes good, healthy, and effective relationships among those collaborating. Healthy relationships are possible because there are healthy and happy people in them.

Glasser (1998) asserts that there are particular characteristics of people who can maintain healthy relationships. First, people in such relationships are healthy and happy individuals. That is, they understand that the only behavior they can control is their own (so they are not using what Glasser refers to as External Control Psychology). They do not experience misery because they are not involved in blaming others for their feelings or in the business of trying to control or manipulate others to think or act in certain ways (Glasser, 1998, p. 19). Further, they take responsibility for their feelings. Healthy people do not blame others when they are feeling upset, dismissed, or misunderstood. More specifically, positive behaviors are used that include choosing to care, support, listen, negotiate, befriend, love, encourage, trust, accept, esteem, and welcome while refraining from destructive ones such as choosing to coerce, compel, force, reward, punish, boss, manipulate, criticize, motivate, blame, complain, badger, nag, rate, rank or withdraw (Glasser, 1998, p. 21). In order to maintain and encourage such healthy relationships, school counselors might consider conducting a brief presentation to staff related to the harms of External Control Psychology in relationships, as well as what behaviors contribute to healthy collegial relationships.

In addition to upholding the above mentioned healthy behaviors, school counselors who are required to establish and maintain system support within the school are encouraged to do so within a Lead Management framework. By following the four essential principles of Lead Management, school counselors can provide an enjoyable system of collaboration that only serves to enhance relationships among everyone in the school system.

1. The school counselor engages all colleagues in an ongoing honest discussion of both the cost of the work and the quality that is needed for the system support to be successful. In other words, all stakeholders (members of the system support team) are invited to contribute their ideas without pressure to conform. All members of the team are educated on

the elements of healthy relationships and the above mentioned positive, as well as destructive behaviors.

2. The school counselor models the job so that all stakeholders can see what she/he expects. One way of assuring this is by involving oneself in an introspective process. For example, this might include asking oneself the following questions: (a) is my counseling with students based within a Choice Theory framework; (b) are my one-on-one relationships with colleagues consistent with what I am expecting within this system; (c) am I open to feedback about how I am leading the group, as well as feedback regarding the struggles of the stakeholders.
3. The school counselor does not micro-manage but believes that all stakeholders are responsible for evaluating how they are contributing to the system support. Stakeholders feel welcome to voice their concerns and struggles to the school counselor.
4. The school counselor accepts every opportunity to teach that the quality of the school system support is based on continual improvement. That is, the road towards quality is a journey rather than a destination. Consequently, the school counselor remains focused and hopeful at all times.

Please see Glasser, 1998, chapter 11 for an exhausted explanation of this concept.

DISCUSSION

The United States spends more money on education than other major countries, but failed in 2000 to rank among the top ten countries for student performance in mathematics, science, and reading (Feller, 2003). Also, current trends in youth related issues include increased dishonesty; a growing disrespect for parents, teachers, and other authority figures; increased cruelty; a rise in prejudice and hate crimes; a decline in the work ethic; increased self-destructive behaviors which involve premature sexual activity, substance abuse, and suicidal tendencies; and a decline in the perception of importance of personal and civic responsibility (Wittmer & Clark, 2007). These data are indicative of a need for a transformed perspective.

The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs was developed by state and national school counseling leaders. It includes the three domains of academic achievement, career decision-making, and personal/social development. All activities that counselors perform to deliver the ASCA National Model are framed within four program components (guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive services, and system support). This model is both comprehensive and developmental.

The school counseling program is important and so are the counselors who will implement it. We believe that

Reality Therapy practitioners have the potential to impact student academic achievement, career decision-making, and personal/social development most effectively for two specific reasons. First, Reality Therapy training emphasizes the importance of the personal qualities of warmth, sincerity, congruence, understanding, acceptance, concern, openness, and respect for the individual. These characteristics help school counselors to build trust and develop positive therapeutic relationships with students. This is vital. Second, Reality Therapy practitioners understand and are able to teach students the basic principles of Choice Theory, Basic Needs, and the Quality World. This knowledge will provide an added sense of self-esteem, self-worth, inner peace, and self confidence.

We have outlined a number of activities Reality Therapy practitioners could use in all four program components to enhance academic achievement, career decision-making, and personal/social development. Also, we developed a Choice Theory Career Rating Scale for Children and Adolescents. Counselors can use this scale as a guide for discussing career interest as well as personal and social matters.

Effective school counselors and school counseling programs are vital to our society. We recommend that school districts purchase copies of *The Quality School* (Glasser, 1990) and *The Quality School Teacher* (1993) for all administrators and members of the faculty. We also recommend that school districts incorporate Reality Therapy training as a part of the required professional development for all school personnel. These efforts could move school counseling from the periphery of school programs to a position of leadership in all areas that impact student growth and development (Education Trust, 2003).

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Needs and their Definitions	STRENGTH AND SATISFACTION RATING SCALE
<p>Love and Belonging:</p> <p>The need for interpersonal contact, working together with others, and the potential for developing long term relationships and friendships. To feel wanted and approved of by classmates, as well as by authorities.</p>	<p>Need Strength</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>Need Satisfaction</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p>
<p>Self Worth/Power:</p> <p>The need for a sense of empowerment, competence, and opportunities for personal effectiveness in the school environment. A connection between one's personal sense of achievement and worthiness with similar experiences in the home, school, and community. Opportunities for leadership and management roles.</p>	<p>Need Strength</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>Need Satisfaction</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p>
<p>Freedom:</p> <p>The need for autonomy, independence, and limited restrictions in the school environment and in the home. Opportunities for spontaneity and change in all areas of one's life.</p>	<p>Need Strength</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>Need Satisfaction</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p>
<p>Fun and Enjoyment:</p> <p>The need for balance between work and pleasure. Sufficient opportunities for enjoyable and fun experiences within the context of school, home, and community.</p>	<p>Need Strength</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>Need Satisfaction</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p>
<p>Survival & Health:</p> <p>Safe physical environment at home and school. An environment that is a supportive context for one's mental and emotional health. Family income that adequately provides for enhanced educational opportunities, personal self-care, leisure activities, and vacations.</p>	<p>Need Strength</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>Need Satisfaction</p> <hr/> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p>

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