Broad-based Learning Method (BBLM): A Framework for Adopting Holistic Approach to Teaching and Practice-Based Learning in the Higher Education

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Abstract

One of the challenges that has engaged in the academic world over the last two decades, and more so in recent times, is how to develop a practical and comprehensive learning system, educational curriculum and teaching practice that will help provide the student(s) with relevant knowledge and all-round skills, to become 'real employable graduate(s)' after their studies in the increasingly competitive and globalised work environment. The paper proffers that the broad-based learning method – a framework for adopting holistic approach to teaching along with practice-based learning is the antidote or panacea for these worries and challenges. The paper employed brief illustrations in various disciplines but emphasised on legal and professional legal clinic.

1. Introduction

Faculties globally are faced with determining how to develop academic curriculum and present course materials so that students not only gain knowledge of the discipline, but also become self-directed learners who develop relevant skills they can apply in their future careers. The broad-based method as educational practice takes a holistic and comprehensive approach to teaching and learning. Broad based methods do not agree with the assumption that various important aspects of benefits that could be acquired from the pursuit of graduate studies, such as academic knowledge, civility, transferable skills, and others cannot be possible because there is no single available teaching and learning method or technique to achieve this. The paper proffers that the broad-based learning method – a framework for adopting a holistic approach to teaching and practice-based learning is a keyway that has strived to achieve this. The paper employed brief illustrations in various disciplines but emphasised on legal and professional legal clinic.

1.1 What Broad Based Methods Involves or Does Not Involve

While broad-based method could be framed within the context of orthodox learning pedagogy; it does not involve splitting the curriculum into different segments of learning and teaching practice. It is basically an approach which is more about learning to learn, which emphasises on learning through experiment, practical exercise, and experience. Thus, by employing the method, the students are encouraged to try things to prove to themselves what works, rather than be told. The students are also encouraged to engage in group work learning activities. (Note 1)

2. Benefits of Broad-Based Methods

Contrary to educational techniques that adopt teaching and learning pedagogical practice which lays emphasis on the students gaining the theoretical knowledge and principles in the various fields of their studies; the broad-based method emphasises on the students not only gaining this, but also to acquire transferable skills that are extremely vital for the students' employability after graduation. In this respect, broad based educational curriculum integrates work-based learning (WBL) into the teaching and learning curriculum.

It accepts the approach of combining different teaching and learning pedagogies, as a technique for achieving positive or successful learning outcomes. For example, broad-based method allows the Teacher a combination of teaching pedagogies such as, student/learner-centred, (note 2) problem-based, (note 3) teacher-centred (note 4), research-led (note 5) etc, with the aim of delivering an outstanding teaching and learning. The use of broad-based method gives room for inspirational and innovative teaching and learning, including stimulating and promoting effective teaching and learning among diverse and challenging learners; as well as challenging ideas, fostering debate, inspiring, and encouraging students to develop skills in critical discourse and rational thinking to improve their academic standards. It involves teaching in a range of contexts: individual, small/large groups, lab classes and auditorium, and through combination of methods: lectures, tutorials, coursework, seminars,

workshops, and interactive (research-led) teaching presentations. It also encourages teaching within the framework of student-centred pedagogy, including employing both formative and summative assessment methods (e.g., take homework, time-constrained, traditional exam methods, quiz, presentations etc) to encourage students' active involvement and develop critical and independent skills to learning. This includes emphasis on innovative curriculum development incorporating relevant work-based learning and employability to engage and enthuse students. (note 6)

The Dutch make use of this type of method in their educational system, particularly in higher education – they argue that the advantage of broad-based method seems to be that it involves real education; not rote learning or teaching to the test and, that the classes seem to be small, but effective because group project are encouraged. In the UK, the Department of Anthropology in the University College London (UCL) is well known for offering broad-based learning method in anthropological teaching in Social Anthropology, Material Culture and Biology. They have continued to receive very high ratings in the Teaching and Excellence Framework (TEF) and scholarships submitted to the Research and Assessment Exercise (RAE). The continuous goal of the Department has been to strengthen the broad-based approach by promoting the highest standard of research-informed teaching and research in each subfield.

3. Broad Based Method, Generic Skills, and Employability

There has been emphasis about higher education, particularly in the UK contributing to economic well-being (note 7). This builds on higher education developing academic programmes that will promote relevant practical and transferable skills relevant to employers. To appreciate the potential for higher education to contribute to a flourishing economy, it is imperative to distinguish between developing of subject specific theoretical understandings and the promotion of relevant and valued skills, qualities, and dispositions. The labour market and employers had previously been comfortable or happy with disciplinary understanding obtained by graduates. However, recently (in the past 5 to 10 years) there has been in addition to disciplinary understanding, the need for acquisition of what have been termed 'generic skills', such as communication, self-awareness, team-working, presentation ability, time-management, and others. (note 8)

It appears there is less preparedness of graduates concerning their satisfaction in acquiring the so-called generic skills regarding their readiness for the labour market or world of work. Accordingly, the initial survey findings of new graduates funded by the Higher Education Council for England (HEFCE) suggest that graduates experience manifest challenges with time management, multi-tasking, and verbal communication. Obviously, broad based learning method emphasises the incorporation of these generic skills (now commonly referred to as employability skills) (note 9) into the academic curriculum. In this sense, whereas the students will gain a good practical knowledge and expertise within their respective subject areas, they are expected to develop more generic skills for graduates that are valued widely in the workplace, and which will contribute greatly to their successes in

their future careers and lives generally.

3.1 Broad-Based Learning Method and Determinants of Graduate's Employability

Table 1. Generic Skills

- **Communication/Presentation**
- **IT**
- **Organising and planning**
- **Teamwork/ Interpersonal**
- **Leadership and Management**
- **Technical/ Laboratory**
- **Customer Service**
- **Financial / Budgeting**
- **Personal**

The list provided is not intended to be exhaustive.

Skill/ Competency	Example Activities	Example Evidence
Communication/ Presentation Skills	Oral, written and graphic presentations, , Writing/editing, Listening, Explaining and reasoning, Interpreting ideas, Communicating precise information, Working with committees, Public speaking, Proof reading, Negotiating, Persuading, Motivating, Teaching/Training	• Conference/ Poster presentations • Publications/ Monograph • Letters/leaflets/Reports • Providing feedback or resolving conflicts • Giving Lecture/Tutorial/training • Patent
IT Skills	Microsoft Word, Power Point, Access, Excel, Internet, Email, Rhythmic, Front Page, Photo Draw, Print Shop, Hyper Studio, Java Script, HTML, DHTML, Cold Fusion, C++, Macintosh, PC, Microsoft Outlook, Publisher, Adobe Acrobat, SPSS, Other specialist packages	• Set up budget using excel • Created an access database of customers • Created webpages • Statistical analysis
Organising and Planning Skills	Planning, Organizing, Scheduling, Assigning/Delegating work, Directing ,Setting standards and monitoring progress, working with others, analyzing & evaluating, activities, Problem solving, Decision making, Program planning, negotiating strategies	• Manage research and teaching workload, • Ensuring project deadlines are met. • Responsible for organising events eg
Leadership/Teamwork/ Interpersonal Skills	Team leader, member of a team, Project leader, Head of a work area/ service	• Supervising PhD students • Leading on project • Supervisor • Part of work/sports team • Leadership
Technical Skills	Preparation nucleic acids, protein isolation and separation by gel filtration, molecular modelling, microscopic investigation, aseptic technique and bacterial isolation and cultivation. Cell breakage, ELISA, immunoassays, spectroscopy, enzyme assays, protein purification, gene cloning. Sterile microbiological techniques, cell cultures, UV mutagenesis, western blot analysis, agarose gel electrophoresis, DNA and RNA extraction and spectrophotometry	• Use of a particular technique as part of a research project • Supervising PhD students using skills
Customer Service Skills	Understanding and responding to customer needs, Analysing service usage and customer feedback	• Review and adapt service in line with customer feedback • Implemented standards • Customer feedback provided on you/service
Financial/Budgeting skills	Analyzing, Calculating, Projecting, Budgeting, understanding of accounting procedure, , Record keeping, Financial concepts, Investment principles, Fund raising, Bookkeeping	• Establishing and maintaining budget • Financial forecasting • Developing a Business Case
Personal Skills	Assertive, Adaptable, Confident, Cooperative, Dependable, Relate well with others ,develop rapport, Listening, Trustworthy, Motivated, Tactful, Reflective	

Source: Resource Unit, Generic Skills Heading [online]: University of Cardiff, available at www.cardiff.ac.uk/jobs/resource/5504.18234.file.eng.pdf

Table 2. Employability Skills

Planning and organisational	Problem solving and analytical
• Time management • Prioritising • Setting goals and achieving them • Planning : breaking things down into tasks • Decision making • Meeting deadlines • Managing your resources : notes, online sources, journals and books, research data, references **Activities which build these skills** Juggling multiple commitments: planning all assignments, projects and dissertation, attending lectures, preparing for exams, taking exams, maintaining student study/life balance	• Understanding the question • Planning methodically • Researching : gathering, analysing and using information • Making conjectures • Drawing conclusions • Anticipating / troubleshooting problems • Being flexible / able to adjust plans **Activities which build these skills** Practical / project work, reports, dissertation, essay writing, exam questions , finding information and journal articles, group work
Written Communication	**Verbal Communication**

• Understanding and following written instructions
• Clearly communicating facts / ideas
• Summarising
• Showing awareness of intended audience
• Writing academically
• Producing reports and documents to specific formats and styles
• Attention to detail
• Using vocabulary / terminology specific to subject area
 	
Activities which build these skills
Reflective writing, report writing, essay writing, dissertation writing, literature reviews, exam questions, proposal writing, article writing
	• Articulate and able to communicate viewpoint
	• Good listening skills
	   • Awareness of others values / beliefs
	   • Summarising skills
	   • Questioning skills
	• Good body language
	• Awareness of audience
	• One to one communication skills
	• Presentation skills
	
	Activities which build these skills
	• Group work
	• Presentations
	• Lectures / group work in class

Teamwork	**Leadership**
• Excellent verbal communication • Persuading and negotiating- ability to put across own ideas and accept/dispute other peoples • Respect for alternative points of view • Self awareness and Assertiveness • Ability to accept constructive criticism • Time management **Activities which build these skills** • Group work	• Excellent interpersonal skills • Motivate and inspire others • Planning and decision making • Coordinate team work • Value team members and promote their development • Initiative **Activities which build these skills** • Group work
Intellectual / creative ability	**Self-awareness / self-reliance**
• Critically analyse and evaluate information • Develop a line of reasoned argument • Use appropriate academic language • Lateral thinking • Open to new concepts / ideas • Able to keep abreast of subject • Applying knowledge in new ways • Forming new ideas from current practice/knowledge **All academic activities build upon these attributes**	• Self-motivated / confident • Integrity and assertiveness • Networking skills • Aware of strengths and weaknesses • Able to action-plan and self-manage • Open to new opportunities • Able to handle and manage change • willing to learn **Reflection, action planning and personal development planning all help build these skills**

Source: Learning and Information Services (2013). Guide to Employability Skills [online]. Wolverhampton: University of Wolverhampton. (Accessed 14/02/2016), available at http://www.wlv.ac.uk/skills

Though some definitions of employability centre the abilities of graduates to synthesise individual development, personal and academic skills, almost two-thirds of graduate advertised positions for graduates are open to those from any disciplinary field who possess the kind of requisite skills dependent upon the role to be completed within an establishment. Performance measure developed, utilised, and applied by some scholars suggests that at a person's level, the probability of unemployment/inactivity six months after graduation is

strongly influenced by the person's degree classification, social class background, prior qualifications, and subject studies. It is likely that, besides the level of transferable skills the quality or standard of degree the graduates hold, other factors are relevant when determining employability. Such key competences and transferable skills, which have featured in the academic literature, may be summarised as follows: Reliability, Professionalism; Ability to plan and think strategically; Ability to work under pressure; Ability to cope with uncertainty; Ability to communicate and interact strategically with others, through either networking or in teams; Creativity and self-confidence; Good written and verbal communication skills; Information and communication technology skills; Willingness to learn and accept responsibility, and Good self-management and time-management skills

4. Broad-based Learning Method and Disciplinary Examples

The broad-based learning method could be applied in different disciplinary academic curriculum; some exemplary illustrations reflecting few disciplines (medicine, business, and IT programming) and particularly law is provided below.

4.1 Broad-based Learning Method and General Practice Medicine, Psychiatric, and Paediatrics

The broad-based programme under medicine, psychiatric, and paediatrics is a structured programme for doctors who have successfully completed the Foundation Programme, providing six-month placements in four specialities to allow broader experience before applying for speciality training.

The broad-based programme curriculum is likely to deliver a practitioner who is likely to be able to bring a wider perspective to healthcare provision both at the present and for the future NHS. It develops practitioners who are adept at managing complexity within patient presentations and the associated risk assessment and management. It will promote greater integration and understanding within the specialist involved in the programme for both trainers and trainees. It develops trainees who are well equipped to progress successfully into any of the specialties concerned. Broad-based programme allows trainees to be convinced in the career pathway they choose. It provides an opportunity for the service to recruit trainees into potentially expanding and under subscribed specialities. It is likely to ensure that trainees have a strong foothold in rendering patient focused care. The broad-based training programme in medicine, psychiatric, and paediatrics is designed to give trainees wide experience of specialties that have complementary sides and if such programme is implemented correctly, there will be a synergism in the training that will encourage the learning procedures across the specialties. (note 10)

4.2 Broad Based Learning Method, Generic Skills, and Law

Broad-based learning brings generic skills in the law discipline and, this feature as work-based learning activities, (note 11) which supports the personal and professional development of the law students, to put their law studies and knowledge into practice in real life cases. The

broad-based learning approach therefore provides a platform that integrates work-based learning (WBL) activities into the legal studies curriculum, such as:

(a) Law clinic:

The ever-increasing cuts on legal aid mean that a large population struggle to obtain legal advice. Several institutions have set up "law clinics" which provide free legal advice to members of the public which aids to bridge the gap.

Different institutions adopt different models of how their law clinic runs. One way in which majority of the law clinics are set up at various universities is that the members of the public see students who then provide advice under the supervision of a qualified practitioner.

In the law clinic, students are involved on a pro bono basis. It gives opportunity as an initial standpoint to provide practical professional advice, work with real-life clients and a unique way to put legal skills and knowledge into practice. The approach is to give students the responsibility and confidence to manage their own project and equip them with real-world experience and skills to demonstrate to employers. Law clinics provide advice on a range of business and legal matters covering a whole spectrum of areas of law (civil disputes, immigration, criminal, JR, ADR, HR, international law, employment, family law, debt, welfare benefits and other legal practice areas).

In addition to law clinics run within universities, there are a number of third sector organisations which provide free legal advice where students can work and gain experience providing legal advice. These include Legal Advice Centres; The Innocence project; Citizens Advice Bureau, Domestic Abuse Advocacy Unit to name a few. Through law clinics, students develop a range of skills such as: Professionalism, Interviewing, Researching, Group work, Letter writing, Understanding the importance of confidentiality and Confidence building.

(b) Extra-curricular legal practice:

There are several extra-curricular activities which seek to enhance critical thinking and public speaking. The main ones within a law school are mooting, debating clubs and mock-trial competitions. These activities help the student master important legal skills, such as research and analysis, whist also gaining experience of public speaking, advocacy, ability to put forward a logical and convincing argument and debates.

(c) Work placement / internships:

Placement is (legal related) work experience and may mean informal work experience of shadowing at law firm, charity, or company. Legal work experience is the essential part of the staple diet of any future lawyer; it is the protein to the fruit and veg. of legal qualifications. Practically connecting students to potential employers is providing them with distinct advantage in their early stage of law career. The work experience could be undertaken on a short-term (one week to three months) or long-term (9 months to a year) basis.

Unlike business and science-based degrees, law degrees did not traditionally include a year in

the industry. However, more and more universities in the UK are introducing a 4-year sandwich degree programme where a student spends a year on work-placement at the end of their 2nd year and before the final year of their studies.

Ideally, the long-term and short-term placements are undertaken within a law firm or a legal department of an organisation. However, these can also be in a quasi-legal role such as Human Resources or a non-legal role such as an administrative assistant in an insurance company. All these undoubtedly provide a student with an opportunity to develop transferable employability skills as well as assisting students to apply the legal knowledge they have acquired during their early years of study. For some students, the placements also assist them in making decisions regarding their future career be it what area of law they wish to specialise in or perhaps an alternative non-legal career.

d) Apprenticeship:

An apprentice is an individual who will join a law firm straight from school, rather than going to university, to work in a role like that of a paralegal. Most apprentices will also receive on-the-job training that takes them towards a formal qualification, for example as a legal executive through the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives (CILEx). Other apprentices will qualify as solicitors through the new SQE route. Clearly, the emphasis here is on helping young people get into work, in combination with training them to continue their way up the career ladder. There is no denying it – apprenticeships in the legal sector are gaining momentum. The traditional route to being a lawyer has been challenged by among other things - the rise of legal executives, increasing paralegal numbers, and alternative business structures (ABS). Combine this with university tuition fee hikes, which further increase the appeal of starting a career in law without the need for an expensive degree, and it is plain to see that the legal landscape is in the grip of a massive shake-up.

Qualifying as a solicitor by way of a solicitor apprenticeship remains a new concept. However, there are several firms offering solicitor apprenticeships. These include Duncan Lewis, Eversheds, ELAS, DacBeachcroft, Clifford Chance, Hogan Hovells, Allen & Overy, Jones Day etc, or within the legal team in ITV, local council, and private organisations etc. In the years to come, it is anticipated that the firms and organisations taking on solicitor apprentices will increase significantly.

e) Skill based modules within the curriculum

Acknowledging the need to build in employability skills into the curriculum as earlier argued in the paper, law schools have recognised the importance of ensuring students are equipped with legal knowledge but equally important are the legal skills required to apply this knowledge. Several universities have therefore introduced skill-based modules within their curriculum as compulsory modules such as Legal Skills, Legal Research Skills, and Clinical Employability Skills. Through various activities within these modules, students have an opportunity to develop and enhance a range of skills including advocacy, written and oral communication, team-work as well as introduction to ADR such as negotiation skills.

f) Overview of broad-based learning method, generic skills, and law:

There are several ways in which law schools can enhance student experience in relation to developing generic skills. On such way is by strengthening of the student law society to feature more prominently in Mooting Society and International Society competitions; inviting various legal practitioners including prominent judges, barristers from reputable chambers, solicitors from well-established firms and others to Guest lecturers; students' visit to Court proceedings; developing links with local law firms as well as firms in major UK cities.

The practical experience gained in legal work-based learning are of immense benefit for students' future careers within the legal field whether they are looking to qualify as a barrister, solicitor, legal executive or indeed any other legal or quasi-legal profession.

4.3 Broad-based Learning and Technology Courses

Broad-based learning is mostly used in the higher education for technology courses. In technology related courses, the easiest way to learn something like programming is to be given a 'project'. The students themselves would learn by trial and error which programming languages to use. In this practical learning setting, the students are encouraged to work in small groups or teams. This is a great way to learn, but it is hard to manage and relatively expensive because of the equipment and facilities required. A lot of curricula for gifted and talented students have been developed along these lines.

4.4 Broad-based Learning and Business Courses

As a result of the recent quest in the higher education for academic programmes that match a globalising and increasingly labour-force and work-environment. Therefore, the graduates are required to possess transferable 'employability' skills that of high quality is becoming more and more important. Similarly, the desire for vocational and higher education to offer high quality management and business programmes which create highly innovative, qualified, and competent graduates is equally important if education is to carry on meeting or satisfying the demands of the present-day society. By focusing on the relationship between education and employment, and by considering the standard and characteristics attributes of management and business education, most Business Schools have adopted a distinctive approach to employability.

5. Conclusion

Broad-based learning method is identified and framed in this paper as an educational technique that develop the most practical and comprehensive learning system, educational curriculum and teaching practice that will help provide the student(s) with relevant knowledge and all-round skills, to become 'real employable graduate(s). One of the unique outcomes of employability project is the creation of a list of key employability skills that are relevant and pertinent to the students. It is usually developed and designed based on the working knowledge of the students and individual institutions. For example, ' emotional intelligence' is not a personal quality that is possible to teach; also written communication and numeracy as a core skill set cannot necessarily be develop independent of one another.

The employability skills set - a more succinct and targeted set of competencies that are more effective tool for use in curriculum development or design than the exhaustive approach taken in the QAA.

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Notes

Note 1. Group work helps develop learning communities in which students feel comfortable developing new ideas and raising questions about the material (Allen, Duch, & Groh, 1996). In addition, group work enhances communication skills and students' ability to manage group dynamics. Group work is interesting and motivating for students because they become actively involved in the work and are held accountable for their actions by group members (Cohen, 1994). For these reasons, group work can enhance student achievement – cited in CTL (2001). Speaking of Teaching; *Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching Winter Vol. 11, No.1*.

Note 2. Student-centered learning is all about a mind-set and culture within higher education establishments/institutions, which is an approach to teaching and learning that involves students directly in the production of knowledge, and transforms students' perceptions and understandings by empowering them to apply knowledge in their own contexts and grow or develop to becoming independent learners – QS Top Universities, *Student-Centred Learning: What is it and What Next*? Available at http://www.topuniversities.com/blog/student-centered-learning-what-it-what-next (11/02/2016).

Note 3. Problem-based learning (PBL) courses, students work with classmates to solve complex and authentic problems that help develop content knowledge as well as problem-solving, reasoning, communication, and self-assessment skills. These problems also help to

maintain students' interest in course materials because students realize that they are learning the skills needed to be successful in the field – See CTL (2001). Speaking of Teaching; *Stanford University Newsletter on Teaching Winter Vol. 11, No.1.*

Note 4. Generally, teacher-centred approach, basically is, a type of pedagogy in which most of the meaningful teaching instruction and course information come from the instructor. This pedagogy significantly puts a great amount of responsibility on the instructor to give the 'right' information, in the 'right' way, regardless of the styles of learning/teaching adopted. However, teacher-centred pedagogy should not be seen to imply a one-size-fits-all approach; or one that emphasizes low levels of student empowerment; or one that revolves around experts lecturing on topics they know well. Rather these are three different ways to should determine the right definition of the term *teacher-centred*, in different context and, more so, the definition one uses will colour how one perceives any attempts to appreciate or disapprove teacher-centred instruction – See C.F.T (2010), *the Perils of Terminology: Teacher-Centred & Student-Centred Pedagogy*: Centre for Teaching, Vanderbilt University available at https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/2010/07/the-perils-of-terminology-teacher-centered-and-student-centered-pedagogy/ (09/02/2016).

Note 5. 'Research-led teaching reflects and makes use of the teacher's disciplinary research to benefit student learning and outcomes.' (Trowler, P. & Wareham, T. 2008). The research mirrors the teaching; it will involve how we present our disciplinary methods, concepts, norms, theories/principles, and theories for student learning, including emphasis on engaging and developing the students as active researchers of repute. However, research led teaching should not be reduced to making research fit our teaching and learning; research led teaching should also affect development of researchers – See Cook, P., and Sweeney, D., (2010). *Research-Led Teaching: Theory, Practice and Policy*: Academic Unit, University of Leicester.

Note 6. In their teaching practice the authors have adopted all or most of this as techniques or teaching practices in broad based method.

Note 7. UKU The economic impact of UK higher education institution: UK Universities, University of Strathclyde available at Microsoft Word - Econ_Impact3_word.doc (strath.ac.uk). Also see Both the White Paper on The Future of Higher Education (2003) and the Lambert Review on University Business Collaboration (2003) envisaged the sector as playing a pivotal role in ensuring the UK's economic competitiveness.

Note 8. Higher Education and Employability http://www.mheducation.co.uk/openup/chapters/033521228X.pdf (28/02/2016).

Note 9. See **Table 1** and **Table 2** below provides most of the relevant generic skills and employability skills that are helpful to the students in their future careers and employment. Generic skills sometimes may be seen as employability skills and vice-versa.

Note 10. Broad based core training curriculum. Retrieved 21/02.2021 from http://www.gmc-uk.org/Broad_Based_Framework_with_Assessment_Grid_November_2012.pdf_50889369

Note 11. 'Work-based learning has increasingly become an area of interest for the higher

education (HE) sector. It is seen as a means by which to support the personal and professional development of students who are already in work and the focus of the learning and development tends to be on the student's workplace activities' (Brennan and Little, 2006). Also, the driving force of WBL agenda could be seen in Brown (2008) view that 'Our economy needs more people in the workforce with higher level skills.

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