

# Anton Makarenko: Contribution to Soviet Educational Theory

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In the USSR, Anton Makarenko is regarded as one of the founders of post revolutionary education. This article examines the relationship of Makarenko's educational theories to Russian history, tradition and culture. It also analyses the influence of Russian and foreign pre-revolutionary thinking on the major concepts of Makarenko's educational theories. The article examines Makarenko's major educational concepts, i.e., discipline, education through work, collectives, the teacher's role in education, etc. The author analyses Makarenko's views on various aspects of the child's upbringing.

En U.R.S.S., on considère Anton Makarenko comme l'un des fondateurs de l'éducation post-révolutionnaire. Cet article examine le rapport des théories de l'éducation de Makarenko à l'histoire, la tradition et la culture russes. Il analyse aussi l'influence des penseurs russes et étrangers de la période pré-révolutionnaire sur les grands concepts des théories de l'éducation de Makarenko. L'article examine aussi les grands concepts éducatifs de Makarenko comme la discipline, l'éducation par les travail, le collectivisme, le rôle de l'enseignant en l'éducation, etc. L'auteur analyse les vues de Makarenko sur divers aspects de la façon d'élever les enfants.

Apart from internationally-known educators whose theories have been recognized and used for many years by various countries with different political systems, each nation has its own outstanding thinkers and educators who contributed significantly to the establishment and development of a particular educational system.

Anton Makarenko, along with Krupskaya and Lunacharsky, is regarded in the USSR as one of the founders of post revolutionary education. Makarenko's educational and pedagogical views are predominantly applied in the countries with socialist political systems. His educational novels, *The Road to Life* (1933) and *Learning to Live* (1938) have been translated into many languages and read around the world. *Problems of Soviet School Education* (Makarenko, 1965) is a generalization of his vast pedagogical experience; along with his other pedagogical publications, it has been used as a textbook for Soviet teachers.

Anton Makarenko arrived on the scene during one of the most trying times in Soviet history, the early years after the Revolution when, among the most important problems to solve were those relating to defense, and to the development of industry and economy, and education. Three days after the Communist Revolution, a state directorate for education was founded.

The new Soviet government quickly began to introduce a series of fundamental educational reforms . . . making education compulsory, constructing a new educational system, literature and pedagogics. The whole system of schools from kindergarten to university was declared to constitute one school, one unbroken ladder . . . the basic link was to be a universal, free, secular and undifferentiated school.

(Tomiak, 1972, p. 11-12)

In the early years of the new political regime, there was a great need for newly educated people from working class families, committed and suited to the ideological fundamentals of the Soviet state. Even though loyalties of the new Soviet intelligentsia were to the Communist system and the country, their ideological outlook was largely influenced by Russian history and culture.

Soviet education, as well as its most prominent educators, are not only closely related to Russian history, tradition and culture but are to some extent, its product and continuation. Foreign progressive thinkers also had a significant influence on pre-revolutionary theories of Russian educators. The roots of their major educational concepts can be traced to the thinking of Robert Owen, Jean Jacques Rousseau, C. Marx, F. Engels, as well as to Pirogov, Chernishevsky and others. Anton Makarenko was no exception. His belief in socially useful labor can be found in Pisarev's *The Thinking Proletariat*, and Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel, *What is to be done?* (Zajda, 1980, pp. 1-3). Makarenko's promotion of socially useful labor as an educational tool which he used in his schools for homeless children (colonies) was an important topic of the writings of a number of pre-revolutionary educators. Belinsky, in the 1830s and 40s, believed that education should include physical, academic and moral aspects, thereby developing patriotism and love for labor (Zajda, 1980, pp. 1-3). Another strong supporter of productive work in a child's upbringing was Ushinsky (1824-1870), who considered work as an essential factor in the physical, mental and moral perfection of man (Zajda, 1980, p. 1-3). The proponents of labor colonies in the 1920's in their acceptance of children's collectives as autonomous, self-governing institutions, bear remarkable similarity to Tolstoy's ideas on progressive education between 1859 and 1869. Following Radischev, Belinsky accepted the maxim that man is a social animal and that nature creates man, but society develops and educates him. Belinsky, being influenced by Robert Owen and his socialist utopia, stated that environment rather than heredity affected man's upbringing and education (Zajda, 1980, pp. 1-3). A similar opinion was shared by Chernichevsky (1860) and Hertsen (1840) who also recognized the environment as a major determining factor in shaping man's moral, psychological and social qualities. The prominent influence of environment in the development and upbringing of a child remains one of the major concepts of the present Soviet educational theory. Makarenko strongly believed that the major influence on the child's development and upbringing comes from his family, his school, the collective and the people that he interacts with. The importance of discipline in Makarenko's theory is based on Russian tradition and belief in discipline which can be traced far back in Russian history to the time of Peter the Great (1662-1725). Among a few outstanding Russian educators propagating the importance of discipline was Hertsen who insisted that

the child had to be taught responsibility, obligation and self discipline, and that discipline is the key factor which determines success or failure of moral education. Makarenko as well as Dobrolyubov (1836-61) was strongly opposed to punishment as a means of enforcing discipline.

Another significant feature of Makarenko's educational theory was patriotic education, which he incorporated into the school curricula of every institution in which he taught. Patriotism is a distinctive characteristic of the Russian culture which could be traced throughout Russian history as well as in the works of Russian progressive thinkers and educators. Chernichevsky wrote "the historical role of every man may be measured by his service to his country, his human dignity, by the intensity of his patriotism" (Zajda, 1980, p. 6).

Analyzing Makarenko's major educational concepts one could unmistakably detect strong influence on Makarenko's theories of Russian progressive pre-revolutionary thinkers and educators, Russian culture and history.

#### *Makarenko's Educational and Professional Developments*

Anton Semyonovich Makarenko was born into a working class family on March 13, 1888, in Byelopolye, Kharkov Gubernia (Ukraine). His father, a painter in the railway workshops, paid for Anton's six years of public school education and one year teacher's training course at the same school.

He began teaching in 1905 in a suburb of Kremenchug (Ukraine) and in his early years established a close contact between school and family, and tried to carry school work beyond the conventional bounds of the teaching routine, the concepts that he promoted later as an educator and writer (Makarenko, 1965, p. 6). At his next teaching job in Dolinskaya Station School, in 1911, Makarenko displayed his organizational ability. He introduced various after-school activities for the pupils, took the students on trips to various Russian cities, guided and encouraged them in their spare time reading, arranged shows, quizzes and so on.

In 1914, after nine years of teaching practice Makarenko went back to school entering the Poltava Pedagogical Institute. After graduating in 1917, he went back to teach at the same school where he had begun his teaching career.

The new political system established after the 1917 revolution recognized Makarenko's pedagogical abilities and he was promoted to be in charge of the school he taught at. At that time he began to further develop his methods, new to the educational system. He attempted to organize pupils into a collective, initiating various after-school activities, and started evening classes to eliminate illiteracy among workers (Makarenko, 1965, p. 7).

In the first years of the Soviet regime, education was at a very low level, i.e. wide-spread mass illiteracy, with a great need for teachers and a shortage of schools. Professionals with Makarenko's abilities and commitment to the new political system were in demand and had a good opportunity to excel in their careers. From 1919 for almost two years, Makarenko was engaged in developing and setting up a new school in Poltava.

In those early years of the Soviet state, the country was engaged in wars and foreign intervention. In addition to the poor economic situation, the USSR was

experiencing famine. The war and famine left thousands of children homeless, a problem the Soviet state took serious measures to resolve by opening special schools.

### *Makarenko's Childrens' Communes and Productive Labor*

In 1920 Makarenko was appointed to organize one of the first such schools for homeless children and juvenile delinquents. It was in this school, called the Gorky Colony, that Makarenko further developed the methods and theories that later brought him wide-spread recognition in pedagogical circles. At the Gorky Colony, which had a boarding school set-up to accommodate 120 children, Makarenko came to a firm conviction that one of the most powerful educative forces was socially-useful productive labor. The productive labor of the Colony inmates, limited at that time to farming and manual training, was combined with a balanced general development, political, physical and aesthetic education. Labor, which was originally introduced for a utilitarian purpose, soon became the basis of the whole educative process and the Colony's center of action (Makarenko, 1965, p. 8).

If the upbringing in a collective is the main distinguishing feature of Makarenko's educational theory, then the next in importance is his education-through-work principle. According to Makarenko, work trains a youngster for productive endeavors and cultivates in him a correct attitude towards other people. In work, a person gains confidence in his own abilities, and from work he receives great satisfaction and joy. Apart from its social significance, work plays a role of enormous importance in a child's personal life, being the principal form of individual expression.

Makarenko pointed out that labor as a part of the educational process should be viewed in conjunction with other means of education, since "labor that does not go hand in hand with political and social education, remains a neutral process of no educational value" (Makarenko, 1965, p. 19).

One of the main reasons behind Makarenko's success with the Gorky Colony, and specifically with the students of the Colony, was his love and understanding of children. When Gorky (a prominent Soviet writer after whom the colony named) visited the Colony in 1928, he was particularly impressed with Makarenko's insight into the child's identity: "He sees everything and he knows every child. He is able to describe him in five words and in such a way as if he has taken an instant photograph of his nature" (Zajda, 1980, p. 27).

In 1927 Anton Makarenko was transferred to another commune for homeless children and adolescents near Kharkov. In this school Makarenko used his methods based on organizing a positive collective and involving the pupils in productive labor. The so-called Dzerzhinsky Commune was completely self-supporting. Money saved by the commune from labor was used to build two factories which manufactured electric drills and photo cameras. Direct involvement of the commune members in the administration of the school and collective, and participation in all levels of factory production and education developed discipline, will power, perseverance, sense of collectivism and responsibility, ability to guide and obey,

and a respectful regard for manual labor into the young people. Commune members worked five hours a day in production and had four hours of school. The Dzerzhinsky Commune also had about twenty art and hobby activities including drama, painting, dancing, gymnastics and others (Makarenko, 1965, p. 10).

Among the different forms of non-scholastic educational activities, one of the most effective was participation of the students on trips within the Soviet Union. It gave the commune members first-hand knowledge of the country's geography and economy. During these trips, the pupils were taken to see leading enterprises, to talk with the best workers — a form of education which is still widely used in the USSR today. These experiences were a part of the extensive patriotic education of which Makarenko was a strong believer.

Largely due to Makarenko and his educational methods, the Dzerzhinsky Commune was a great success. The main achievement of the school was in using education, productive labor, discipline, building a good collective and various forms of non-scholastic activities that, in the end, produced worthy citizens, many of whom went on to advance, and succeed in different professions. The Dzerzhinsky Commune was one of the country's successes in the early years of the Soviet state. In the first five years of its existence the Commune was visited by 127 delegations from thirty countries (Makarenko, 1965, p. 11).

In 1935 Makarenko was appointed to work in the Ukrainian Provincial Government (Department of Internal Affairs), with partial involvement in the Dzerzhinsky Commune.

#### *Involvement in Literature*

In 1937 Makarenko moved to Moscow where he devoted himself to writing, which he had wanted to do for many years. As a writer, he was greatly influenced by the known Soviet writer Maxim Gorky with whom he corresponded for a number of years and who encouraged him to write and share his experience and knowledge. Makarenko's first work as a writer was *The Road to Life (Doroga Jizni)* in which he compiled his educational experience working in the Gorky Colony. The book, published in 1933, was a great success and is still read today. Another was his *Kniga dlya roditeley* (Book for Parents) published in 1937 and *Flagi Na Bashnyah* (Flags on the Towers), 1938, which were widely read in the Soviet Union and abroad. In addition to books, Makarenko wrote a great number of articles on the problems of education, book reviews, screenplays and stories.

Makarenko's last major work was the novel *Learning to Live (Ucheba Jizni)* (1938) which describes different aspects of the Dzerzhinsky Commune. Makarenko's contribution to Soviet education and pedagogy was also expressed in numerous appearances and lectures before teachers, parents and students, with talks on different aspects of education. To this day Makarenko is regarded as one of the greatest influences, and a cornerstone of the Soviet educational system. Not long before his death, he was awarded the Order the Red Banner of Labor for outstanding literary achievement; the following year a directive of the Party Central Committee (March 29, 1940) commemorated his services to Soviet education. Nearly all the textbooks used in teachers' colleges contain references to his work, and many

Soviet teachers have been influenced by his theory. Some of his work forms part of the Soviet cultural export to those countries of eastern and central Europe whose educational systems have become replicas of the Soviet system.

### *Contribution to Soviet Education and Upbringing*

Makarenko's appearance and work in education coincided with the birth, reorganization and restructuring of the new Soviet education system which had to feed into the new political system.

Makarenko contributed to building Soviet educational theory by developing many concepts which are widely used in the USSR and other countries to the present time. His educational views were closely related to the Soviet values and perception of the model of the Soviet citizen with an all-round developed personality. He wrote

... we want to raise a cultured Soviet working man. It follows, therefore, that we must give him an education, we must teach him a trade, we must discipline him and make him a politically developed and loyal member of the working class, the Komsomol and Bolshevik (Communist) Party. He must learn how to obey a comrade and how to give orders to a comrade. He must know how to be chivalrous, harsh, kind, or ruthless, depending on circumstances. He must be an active organizer. He must have staying power, self-control and an ability to influence others. If he is punished by the collective he must defer to the collective, respect its decision and take his punishment. He must be cheerful, bright, smart in appearance, and able to fight and to build, capable of living and loving life, and he must be happy. And that is the sort of person he must be not just in the future but right now, every day of his life.

(Makarenko, 1965, p. 13)

The directness of some of Makarenko's concepts and expressions is not only influenced by time but by the nature of the Russian language which is more direct and categorical than many other languages. Above all, one should bear in mind that Makarenko was a typical representative of the new Soviet administration, with strong communist beliefs. Makarenko's main task was to infuse his pupils with moral judgement and values. In his article "Lectures on the Upbringing of Children," he wrote: "We demand, from our citizen, that he should fulfill his obligations throughout his entire life, without waiting for directions or orders. He should possess the will of initiative and creativity" (Zajda, 1980, p.29). Makarenko's preoccupation with Communist ethics is illustrated by such articles as "Volya, musjestvo i tseleustremlyonnost," "o kommunisticheskoy etike," and "kommunisticheskoe povedenie i vospitanie." He defined a Communist ethic as that kind of ethic which would "absolutely leave far behind all moral codes that had ever existed in history." "Our ethic," wrote Makarenko, "should be a prosaic business-like ethic of our today's and tomorrow's normal behavior." Makarenko was one of the first Soviet educators to introduce the principle of perspectives lines (sistema perspektivnih liniy) which was based on man's insatiable desire for ideals and perfection. Happiness of tomorrow, beauty of future society, became the main source of man's desire, which compelled and inspired him to live, create, and love (Zajda, 1980, pp. 28-29).

Makarenko believed that education should not be restricted to the classroom, it should influence the pupil's entire life, governing his behavior both in a family

environment and in the company of friends. In other words, education is not restricted only to school; it is a combined effort of school and parents, and the educational and upbringing objectives can be achieved in every aspect of the child's life.

Makarenko's books reveal a lifetime of studying and working with children, writing books and articles about children, educating and upbringing. Based on his talent and ability as an educator, using different methods in working with children and having very good results in upbringing his students, Makarenko believed and insisted that difficult children, as such, did not exist (Makarenko, 1965, p. 6). He felt the upbringing and teaching of children should begin at an early age and that a child can be taught up to five years of age, but after that can only be re-taught. According to Makarenko's theory, there must be demands and expectations of a person but the person should be treated with the utmost respect. This type of fair approach to his students earned him their respect which was so essential in his work with juvenile delinquents.

### *Collective*

One of Makarenko's greatest contributions to Soviet education was his concept of the "collective." In his pedagogical theory, Makarenko ascribed the greatest importance to productive labor, to the collective, to personality and discipline. The concept of the collective is related to most of Makarenko's educational views, primarily because he perceived the collective as the environment that helps develop the individual and that has the greatest influence on him. According to Makarenko's definition, a collective is a group of people constantly associating with each other and united in business, friendship, communal interests and ideology. In its ideal form it is an organization of mutual responsibility, self-governing and self-determining, within which the individual first learns the meaning of moral principles. In Makarenko's view, the collective provides the individual with nothing less than a character and a role to play in life. This assumption implies another important concept: education in the collective provides and encourages moral growth. It is achieved by making the individual member increasingly aware of the moral claims of the community in such a way that he feels his capacities enlarged and his own life raised to a higher power (Lilge, 1958, pp. 2-3).

Makarenko's concept of a collective included mutual influence of the collective and the individual, i.e., penetration and influence on the individual has to correspond with the influence on the collective and vice-versa; each action towards the collective will affect the education of each individual (Staff, N. 11, p. 839).

In order for the collective to attract the children, to stimulate their involvement in school, community, as well as their own growth, a children's collective must aspire towards new ideals and not be satisfied with its immediate gains. Gains and successes, according to Makarenko, were to consolidate new tasks and new, long range objectives. This well known concept was based on Makarenko's law of dynamics of the collective (*zakon dvizheniya kollectiva*) (Zajda, 1980, p. 28).

Makarenko believed that children are most easily influenced and disciplined through peer pressure. A friendly, purposeful collective is thought to provide a positive environment where the best qualities of an individual should develop. The collective is a mini-society, a model of adult society; it is an environment where the individual learns and experiences relations between himself and society. Makarenko used sports terminology in describing the functioning of collectives. He pointed out that Communist resoluteness, spirit, and purposefulness cannot be fostered without "exercise" in appropriate behavior. And the collective, he added, is "the gymnasium for this type of gymnastics" (Zilberman, 1982, p. 67). Only by instilling the rudiments of a collective regime in his students in the juvenile delinquent school was Makarenko able to reclaim them as human beings and to rehabilitate them as contributing members of Soviet society.

According to Makarenko, directives and instructions coming only from the teacher gradually diminish the teacher's influence, role and effectiveness. With well structured collectives the standards and expectations are maintained by the individuals of this group. Makarenko disapproved of pedagogical methods which reduced education to the direct influence of the teacher on the pupils. He perceived the collective as a powerful ally to the teacher in his efforts to teach and raise the individual. In schools where Makarenko taught, the demands and standards were outlined and made available to the collective that was held responsible for each of its members. This type of collective has produced a strong pedagogical effect. It was on this principle of "parallel action" that Makarenko based his educational work. It was in Makarenko's era and in his perception of a collective that one of the most important concepts of Soviet theory of collective was developed, "one for all and all for one" (*odin za vseh i vse za odnogo*). This slogan, still used today, means that all the collective members stand behind the individual of that particular group. As well, the individual has to be ready to contribute to the collective. Makarenko strongly believed that the collective members have to coordinate their private interests and aspirations with the interests and aims of the collective: Private aims must stem from common aims. He often said that if the private aims of a children's collective are not determined by common aims, that particular collective is wrongly organized (Makarenko, 1965, p. 16).

Related to the view of coordination of the private and collective aims is Makarenko's perception of the role of the individual in the collective. Makarenko perceived an individual approach as an integral part of collective education. With that in mind, he did not wish to sacrifice "the grace, originality, and beauty of the individual personality." He stressed that every individual in a collective had to be worked on with tact and subtlety to encourage the full unfolding of all his endowments and abilities. "Only the creation of a method which would at the same time give every person a chance to develop his individual traits and preserve his individuality — would be an organizational task worthy of our epoch" (Makarenko, 1965, p. 20).

Makarenko's concept of collective is applied in different levels of Soviet society beginning with kindergarten, school, military organization, sports, political

organizations, industries, etc. With regard to the children's collective, in Makarenko's view a role of major importance must be attributed to children's emotional outlets, especially games and play. He used to say that, "A childrens' collective that does not play will never be a real children's collective. It helps to put the collective in a cheerful, vigorous mood, and makes the children ever ready to take up some useful activity, to do something interesting and intelligent" (Makarenko, 1965, p. 20). Even though the purpose of the educational collective was to induct the members into the larger collective of the Soviet state, Makarenko did not regard youth collectives as merely preparatory but as social institutions in their own right, whose members learn, through the discipline of common labor and self government, how to conduct themselves in a manner acceptable to society. Such an education was found to develop loyalty and the sense of belonging (Lilge, 1958, pp. 21-22).

### *Discipline*

Another important part of Makarenko's educational theory focused on discipline. Makarenko's definition of the concept of discipline did not limit it to a means of inculcating humility and obedience. Makarenko stated that "discipline is the product of the aggregate of educational influences, which comprise the school education process, the political education process, the process of character building, the encountering and settling clashes and conflicts within the collective, the forming of friendships and establishing relations of mutual trust. "Soviet discipline," he said, "is a blend of full awareness of duty and a perfectly clear understanding, shared by everyone, of how to act, while preserving a clear cut, precise outward form which brooks no argument, disagreement, objective, procrastination or talk" (1965, p. 21). Discipline is a fundamental cornerstone of Soviet ideology that was recognized and stressed by Russian people since the formation of the Soviet state. Discipline is part of everyday life at any Soviet institution, industry, school, army, sport, etc., beginning at a young age. In relation to children, Makarenko believed that they should be neither the recipients of blind affection nor the objects of harsh aggression, but should learn to feel the firmness of reasonable authority. Discipline is preferable to mere obedience because it is capable of becoming self-discipline, conscious of its own utility and meaning (Lilge, 1958, p. 3). Working with children and applying discipline as a principle form of a collective functioning, Makarenko was often criticized for being too strict and for imposing adult discipline. Considering a child's individuality and development, Makarenko believed that the adults are the ones who should play the major role in a child's upbringing and that children are not the best judge of what is good for them, stressing that discipline develops "as a result of the friendly pressure of the collective" (Lilge, 1958, p. 18). Regarding discipline as the individual's protection, Makarenko perceived the interests of the collective prevailing over those of an individual in a conflict situation. Even now, this concept remains important in the functioning of the Soviet system, whereby the group, the state, the party interests, goals and objectives prevail over personal interests. A strong believer in reward and punishment as an effective means in

education and upbringing, Makarenko replied to criticism that they impeded the free unfolding of the child's nature that not every punishment is degrading, and more important still, that children do not grow up in some paradise but in a society where their actions are subject to approval and disapproval (Lilge, 1958, p. 17). Discipline, as well as the other pedagogical methods and principles of Makarenko's educational theory is tied to the concept of collective. Furthermore, discipline is built up through the skillful organization of a collective.

Makarenko recognized that teaching children discipline and proper behavior is a complicated task, especially if these positive qualities were to be consistently displayed. He wrote, "I understand that it is easy to teach a person to behave properly in my presence or in the presence of the collective, but to teach the individual to act properly when no one hears, sees and does not know — that is very difficult" (Staff, 1984a, p.3).

In his approach to the child's upbringing, Makarenko on one hand believed in discipline, regimentation and the importance of the collective, whereby individual interests are perceived as secondary to the collective, group priorities and responsibilities. On the other hand, he was in favor of the individual approach to each child, and was a strong believer in family life and attention towards the child. Yet he criticized a sentimental attitude towards the child which regarded him as the flower of life. Too much affection, sentimentality, love and care could, according to Makarenko, produce the opposite — egotism, laziness, or other negative attributes. He advised instead, a degree of moderation in love and affection, in austerity and sternness. The most remarkable feature of Makarenko's social psychology was the so-called socialist humanism for in each child he saw positive features (Zajda, 1980, p. 28).

Makarenko assigned a major role of the child's upbringing to his home environment and parents' behavior. In his view, the success of a child's upbringing is based on the combination of a good family situation and a good school collective. Parents' attention and love are crucial to a child's development. According to Makarenko, "people brought up without parental love are often deformed people" (Lilge, 1958, p. 32).

### *Conclusion*

Makarenko made a great contribution in enhancing and further developing educational theory by discovering new methods and principles as well as further developing the recognized and accepted approaches. His main contribution is based on development of such important educational concepts as collective, education-through-work principle, discipline, reward and punishment, the use of regimentation as a code of everyday life and a means of establishing order, and many other issues and concepts related to education and upbringing of an individual.

In his work as a teacher and educator, Makarenko further stressed the importance of a teacher and his role in developing a worthy individual. By studying Makarenko's educational theory, it is obvious that he perceived the role and profession of a teacher as an art of applying different methods to different circumstances according to the dealings with a particular individual.

His basic principle of making great demands upon young people's moral resources; his use of reward and punishment; his insistence on the conscious understanding of duty instead of blind discipline; his emphasis upon the training of will and the formation of character, which placed great responsibility upon the teachers — all these fitted well into the new Soviet educational theory.

One has to consider that Makarenko's theory was developed and is still used by the Eastern Bloc countries with a specific social and educational system. Nevertheless, certain concepts could be applicable in any environment. Knowledge of Makarenko's work can stimulate and raise the professional level of people working in different areas of education.

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