

A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INCREASED GROWTH AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS WHEN PARTICIPATING IN  
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND THE ADAPTATIONS THAT PARENTS,  
SCHOOLS, AND COMMUNITIES MAKE TO MEET THESE AFTER SCHOOL  
NEEDS

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**ABSTRACT**

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The purpose of this study was to examine the correlation between involvement in extracurricular activities and the increased physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth of elementary students that participate. The study also recognized the important role that parents, schools, and communities play in getting quality after school programs available for their students. The time spent outside the classroom has become a key

factor in the lives of the students. Children spend more time out of school than in school, and this represented an opportunity to help children acquire skills that they can't get during a normal school day. The information found in this study had benefits to school districts that were interested in seeing after school programs set up in their communities. It also had benefits to parents so they can see how important their role was in planning activities that are worthwhile for the entire family.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Parental involvement during a child's early educational years is very important. No matter how busy parents are they need to play an active role in the development of their child. The literature shows that school-aged children between the ages of five and fourteen spend up to 80% of their time out of school. These hours represent an opportunity to help children grow and acquire important social, emotional, cognitive and physical skills and to help them develop life long interests (Coltin - Eric Digest #429737).

The activities that occur outside the regular classroom are called extracurricular activities. These activities can encourage the development of skills and interests that are not fully nurtured during the school day. Extracurricular activities could include the involvement in sports programs. Sports programs are broken down into team sports or individual sports. In a team sport the individual is playing together with other individuals and competing against other teams, such as in football or basketball. In an individual sport the child competes one-on-one with other individuals such as in tennis and karate. Another choice of involvement is in the Arts. The Arts is a broad category but would include participation in dance, music, studio art or drama. Another option is students becoming involved in specific clubs or organizations. These groups are formed with their own unique identity and purpose. They can be religious or civic activities. Religious activities could include attending bible classes, religious instruction, and singing in the church choir. Civic groups could include participation in boy scouts, girl scouts, etc. In addition, there are special interests groups that form their own clubs based on their specialties. Examples include chess and checker clubs, ski clubs, book clubs, etc. Children have a wide arena to choose from if they want to be involved in some type of after school activity.

Involvement in extracurricular activities provides children the opportunity to explore interests that can enrich their lives. It allows the child to explore possible career choices in sports, journalism, theatre, music or other activities. In the book, Straight Talk About Student Life, the authors explain that the activity might turn into a lifelong love or hobby. It might simply enhance one's enjoyment for some other aspects of life as one goes on to love concerts, watch ballgames, or read magazines with a deepened appreciation (Dentemaro & Kranz, 1993).

The research by these two authors also reflects that the following is true about extracurricular activities:

Apart from loving the actual activity itself, being involved in an extracurricular activity gives different parts of one's personality the chance to come out in different situations. Whether or not one is good at the academic part of school, there are other parts to personality and spirit that can be discovered in other arenas. You may even discover resources within yourself that you never knew you had. Extracurricular activities give you another place to be successful – and another place to try out the different parts of you (Dentemaro & Kranz, 1993).

The studies show that parents seem to want after school programs to provide a balance between enriching what is already taught at school and increasing their sons' and daughters' knowledge of athletic and artistic performance skills. In some cases, these experiences lead to life long interests or careers. But more importantly, the sense of competence and affiliation that can flourish during out-of-school time provides the best reason for enrichment programs (Miller, 1998).

Improving a child's outside-the-classroom education has become a key goal of educational reformers. Parents are looking for ways to enrich the lives of their children outside the regular school day. Extracurricular activities can provide the answers to these after school hours. Parents play a key role in making these extracurricular activities successful. Most children are in the classroom for only eight of twenty-four hours a day, five of seven days a week, nine of twelve months a year ("Parental Involvement" 1999). There is a lot of time for children to become involved in activities that interest them. Since we are looking at elementary aged students, one realizes that if these students are participating in these activities, it then becomes the parent's responsibility to see that their children can follow the rules and maintain the schedules that are set forth in these programs in which their children enroll. These extracurricular activities require a time commitment by the students and a time commitment by the parents, which is not always available to the single or working parent.

Overall, this is a difficult time to improve parental involvement. Families are faced with many obstacles that prevent them from being involved in extra activities at the end of their busy workday.

Families of today's modern society are increasingly fragmented.

Parents are facing ever-growing demands on their time, more competition for children's attention, and economic burdens that force more of them to work outside their home and limit the time they can spend with their children. At the same time, however, there are signs that connections between schools and families can be made stronger. One thing is clear. Parents from all walks of

life want their children to succeed. And want to work with schools in that process (“Parent Involvement” 1999).

Therefore, since parents want their children to succeed, it is essential that they become involved in their child’s activities. While academics must take a priority, one can find many extracurricular activities that can be a very positive experience for parent and child.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research has found a link between involvement in extracurricular activities and increased growth in physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills in the students that participate. The literature also reveals that parental guidance and school and community involvement play a key factor when elementary students are involved in after school activities. Therefore, the focus of this study is recognize the importance of extracurricular activities for students, and to focus on the role the parents, school, and community play in getting children involved in high quality programs after school.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose is to review, analyze, and critique the literature relating to students involved in extracurricular activities, and the role the parents, school, and community play in this. The second purpose is to formulate a set of recommendations for parents, school, and community who are interested in having quality after school programs for elementary aged students.

## Chapter II

### Review of the Literature

Chapter two will be comprised of three sections. The first section will focus specifically on how extracurricular activities affect students. It will show the reasons for participating in extracurricular activities, and the many benefits one receives when participating in these activities. The second section will cover the role of the parent. It will demonstrate how extracurricular activities affect the family, and how a parent has to monitor the extracurricular activities of their children. The final section will cover the involvement of the school and community. They play an active part in making sure there are quality after school programs available for their elementary aged students.

#### **Students**

The ages of the students in this study range from six to twelve years old. This is the age of imitation. During these years, role models are most important to a child. Rules are important, but example is the great stimulus (Ziglar, 1985). It is in this stage that the child develops his disposition that he will bring to big decisions later on such as what kind of people he will be attracted to, what kind of living he wants to make, and how important integrity is to him. This is also a time when a child establishes touchstones of belief and values, so he will have something to hang on to during his adolescence. Knowing these characteristics, one can see that extracurricular activities could play an important role in teaching and guiding students as they go through this stage of their lives. It's important to have students surrounded by people worthy of imitation.

Doing well in school needs to be the priority for students, but one can balance school commitments along with being involved in extracurricular activities. Students in the primary grades (1-3) may want to limit their activities to one per week. The students in the intermediate grades (4-6) could handle extra activities going on 2-3 times a week, and those in Jr. High (7-8) could possibly handle four to five times a week. When deciding what extracurricular activities to participate in, the following guidelines represent areas to identify before signing up a student for their activities. First, find out what the child would like to do; examine what his present skills and abilities are; and, finally decide would it be best for the child to develop these skills further or to try a new activity (Spalding, 2000). One needs to find a balance between school and the child's extracurricular activities. It's important to pursue the child's interests, but be sure they don't overtake his life.

The studies show that there are many physical and emotional benefits to the body that occur when being involved in physical activity. Being involved in an extracurricular sports activity is healthy to a child. The studies show that children who are physically active reap benefits in many different areas. With constant activity, our children discover that their bodies feel better, function better, and even look better. They are stronger, healthier, and more confident (Haug & Wright, 1991). These physical activities can be through structural activities such as in an organized sport or an individual sport. In a sports program they not only develop skills, but they also learn to respect authority, learn to meet a new challenge, and enjoy the company of friends. Kids who have been inactive during the day have pent up energy that may be released in negative ways at home or at school. Kids who get little or no exercise do not concentrate as well at school and tend to have poorer attendance (Haug & Wright, 1991). The studies have also shown a correlation between a generally positive mood and exercise. The state

of physical activity and self-esteem is related to the state of positive mood and exercise. All studies examined in this area revealed a small, but statistically significant increase in physical self-concept or self-esteem (Nessel, 2000). Physical activities not only promote good physical benefits but also adds to our emotional well-being. Children who are involved in physical activity have been linked to levels of higher self-esteem and this is important. High self-esteem helps children resist negative peer pressure, and maintain healthy peer relationships. Exercising reduces anxiety and depression, reduces blood pressure, and enhances self-esteem. Recent evaluations of the literature on a number of mental health topics have shown a positive relationship between exercise and emotional well being (Nessel, 2000). Children who are physically fit are more likely to avoid habits and behavior that are counter productive to good health (Hinke, 1997). Kids who exercise have more confidence, miss fewer days of school and usually get better grades. The brain benefits from exercise.

Studies have shown that the more you challenge your body, the fitter you will become. Your muscles and joints will gain flexibility, strength, speed, and coordination. You'll have stronger bones, and better posture, feel more alert, sleep sounder, and maintain your normal weight. And exercise will help you relax and get rid of negative feelings, such as anger, and sadness (Arenofsky, 2000).

Much emphasis is put on the physical and emotional benefits of being involved in a sports program. However, an area that is gaining a lot of attention is in the areas of "The Arts." In 1990 President Bush announced a set of six educational goals – The Arts were not listed among the core academic subjects. These goals were revamped in 1993 by President Clinton,

and the “Goals 2000 Educate American Act” was unveiled and the Arts were included. The Arts consist of programs that include visual arts, dance, drama, or music. Many schools lack the funding to commit to a strong “Arts” program. Also, when the budget is tight the Arts are “the first to go” (Canover, 1996). Being involved in the Arts isn’t always the top priority for students. The Arts have been seen as a luxury in many schools and when they are compared to athletics the Arts usually always lose. Because of the problem in funding and the lack of school involvement parents are encouraging their children to participate in these activities outside the regular school day. Children love to move to music and to sing. Because of that many music teachers advocate taking up a musical instrument at a younger age. The skills it takes to learn an instrument are used for other things. They learn about communication. It gives them a unique way to express themselves (Prince, 2000).

When children get involved in the arts they become more creative and imaginative, develop skills that make them feel more accomplished, and learn to develop speaking and writing skills.

More than eight in ten Americans felt that exposure to the “Arts” help young people develop discipline and perseverance and helps them to learn skills that can be useful in a job (Canover, 1996).

Being involved in the Arts not only brings an increased awareness and appreciation for that Art, but it broadens a student’s understanding of themselves and others. It brings about a deeper respect for other cultures and it’s a great contributor to the overall learning capabilities of the students. Students who train in the Arts, improve in many other areas of study, such as problems solving, the ability to make decisions, and self-expression. The skills that are being mastered are in the non-verbal intelligences such as musical, kinesthetic and spacial learning. Research points

to the importance of studying the Arts, but the Arts should remind us that there should be more to life than just work. Academics give a school its strength and the Arts give a school its soul (Haas, 1998).

Being involved in extracurricular activities also benefits the students in their social development. These social benefits point toward the social interaction between the students. Being involved in after school activities is fun. It's nice to find an activity that the kids like and enjoy and brings a smile to their faces. It's also a time to socialize and to meet new friends. During the activity the child learns cooperative behavior and also learns sportsmanship. A child needs to learn how to win as well as lose, and how to succeed as well as fail. One needs to know how to accept a situation where he or she has no control. A child also learns flexibility and adaptability through mastering skills and becoming a good sport. One of the most important social benefits of being involved in extracurricular activities is that it boosts a child's self esteem and confidence. Having children involved in extracurricular activities can enhance their school experience. The number one principle is to have fun. It gives the child a positive and worthwhile experience in extracurricular involvement that will lead him on the path of a happy and fulfilled academic journey through school and beyond.

### **Parents**

Parents need to take an active role in the involvement of their child's education. Research shows that the more intensely parents are involved in their children's learning, the more beneficial are the achievement effects. The research also states that the earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects will be (Cotton & Wikeland, 1989). For these reasons, it is important to emphasize the importance of parent involvement in their child's extracurricular activities as well.

A good place to begin is to look at the barriers that prohibit a parent from agreeing to the time commitments involved with after school activities. The factors such as family structure itself (dual career, single parent, teenage parents) and family work schedules (full-time, job sharing, flextime) make it difficult to be involved in activities outside the current work schedules. Also, the resources and the expertise of parents may limit them to get involved in activities they can't afford or don't have knowledge about (Coleman,1991).

Many busy parents fail to get involved at all because they fear they will be asked to do more than their schedules allow (Haug & Wright, 1991). When deciding on extracurricular activities for young children to participate in, a parent needs to evaluate his/her schedule. Can one add another obligation to the list of duties already undertaken by the parent? What will the obligations of the parent be? Will they be asked to transport kids back and forth from events? Will they need to be a volunteer and be in attendance for a certain amount of time each week? Will the weekends be tied up with events and games? A parent needs to commit to something that they are qualified to do, recognize and accept their limitations, and use their talents accordingly. One of the most important aspects is to not over extend the family. Check the family schedule, and see if this activity is beneficial to the entire family. A parent also needs to know the needs of their children.

In a book written by J. & Linda Friel, the authors examine several questions that parents need to address. Is the child getting good grades? Can the child do these activities well? Is the child staying healthy or getting sick regularly? Does the child still have time for a social life as well as family time? Can the child control his emotions? (Friel,1999). If the parent or the child has trouble meeting any of these guidelines, one knows it is time to make some changes in the participation level in the extracurricular activities. If the parent or the child is overwhelmed, one

needs to cut back on activities. Limit the kids' activities to one or two per week per season. This way the child can enjoy the seasonal sports and other activities, and still have time for quiet time (St. James, 1997). Quiet times such as reading, playing with neighbors, bike riding, etc. are just as important as any other activities they're involved in.

The role of the parent is very important. Children like being involved in these extracurricular activities, but if parents are continually "on the go," the family unit has more stress to handle. The children's activities can't take over the lives of the family. It is not only what the child can manage, but what the entire family can manage, without being overly stressed. A parent needs to set the limits, even if the child is disappointed, because it's the parent's responsibility to know the limits of the children and the family.

When seeking out programs for your children a parent needs to search for activities where the instructors are nurturing and give attention to each child.

The instructors can make or break the interest, self-esteem, and motivation of young children. It is vital for parents to find out the training, experience, and style before turning over your children to these adults. There are tips to help you put your child in a win-win situation (Iknoaian, 2000).

A parent needs to look for programs that require the instructors to have special training in whatever area your child is enrolled in. A parent needs to find out about their philosophy on the activity being presented and their philosophy of children involvement. A parent should observe the practice sessions, and watch how they handle the instruction. Look for an approach that emphasizes fun, personal development, and skill instruction. A parent should be alert for signs

that your child is being overly pressured or put down. If you think he/she is at risk of emotional or physical damage then remove them immediately.

As the children begin participating in extracurricular activities one should remember that the child is an individual. Let the child dream his dreams, not the dreams of the parents. A parent can help the child choose the activities that are best for him. A parent can support and encourage involvement without pushing too hard. The child will then reap the physical, intellectual, and social benefits of being involved in extracurricular activities.

### **School & Community**

The task of caring for our children has become big and complex. Children need a place to go after school where they are safe from drugs, sex, and violence. Many communities lack after-school programs. Recent research shows that there is a rise in juvenile crime.

The true prime crime hours are between three p.m. and five p.m.

Criminologists now have hard data that shows more juvenile crime occurs between those hours than after dark. Only seventeen percent of violent juvenile crime occurs after ten p.m. compared with twenty-two percent that takes place in the after school hours, according to FBI statistics (Nifong, 1997).

Our attention as a school and community needs to address this time period. The juvenile crimes occur in the afternoon, when kids have too much time to kill, literally (Nifong, 1997). The reasons for this increase in crime at this time of the day is that more parents are working and it is leaving children unsupervised in the afternoon than at any other time of the day. The trend is not just focused on inner city. There is concern for the well being of our youth through out the United States. Because of the concern President Clinton introduced his youth-crime initiative

and called for the funding of one thousand after-school programs. It only starts to address the issue of after-school concerns.

The out-of-school hours are the prime concern for many communities. There is a need for schools to collaborate with the community and families to meet the needs of our children.

Schools can better address barriers to learning and teaching and promote positive development when they are an integral and positive part of the community. Reciprocally, families and other community entities can better address barriers to development, learning, and parenting, and strengthen the fabric of family and community life by working in partnership with schools (Taylor & Adelman, 2000).

American families are changing. There is a need for programs for our children and a need for strong links between the family, school, and community. School systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students. But when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge (Taylor & Adelman, 2000). Schools need to open their doors and improve access and enhance opportunities and family involvement. There is increased federal funding for after-school programs at school sites. This enhances the expanding opportunities for recreation, enrichment, academic support, and childcare (Taylor & Adelman 1997). Schools don't need to close when the youngsters leave. It's the concept of a "second shift" at school sites, which is designed to respond to community needs. The school can be the focal point for encompassing a wide range of agencies and organizations that provide programs and services for our children and their families.

Across the country various forms of school-community collaborations are being tested. Because of the growing number of concerns about the well being of our youth there are a number of specialized programs designed to address these issues, and give our children the opportunities to participate in before and after school programs. In many schools there are programs set up for before and after school care. Daycare is an issue that is handled right in the school building. Children are fed breakfast in the morning and have time to play with their friends before the school day starts. After school they have a snack as well as having tutors available to help them with their homework. This type of programs helps out the working parent. In our larger communities programs such as the “Boys and Girls Clubs” are established.

Such programs strive to provide a safe, comfortable, reasonably orderly environment as an alternative to the streets. Open to all neighborhood youth, they typically have a drop-in component, some homework help, some sports, and a few specialized activities once or twice a week. They usually operate with modest funding, minimally trained staff, and minimal space (Halpern, Barker & Mollard, 2000).

One reason these programs are so needed is the children are receiving too little attention, guidance, and support from family and school. Many children live in single-parent homes and the parents have long working hours. They need a place to go after school until a parent comes home. They need a safe place to hang out with friends, and they value the relationships with the other children, and the workers. They are exposed to a lot of activities and they can receive the attention and the encouragement that they need.

Boys and Girls Clubs have been around for one hundred forty years. It has been an effective way of getting kids off the streets and into “Clubhouses” - places where sports and other wholesome activities await them (Ey, 2000). The club was founded in Hartford Connecticut in 1860 and became a national movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1990 it became the Boys and Girls Club to recognize the growing number of girls participating in the activities. The group now has 3.3 million members nationwide. Anyone between the ages of six and eighteen can join by filling out an application and paying a \$5.00 annual membership fee. The mission of the Boys and Girls Club is to help youth of all backgrounds, with special concern for those from disadvantaged circumstances, develop the qualities needed to become responsible citizens and leaders (Berg, 1998).

The state of Wisconsin has been successful in getting seven grants from the federally funded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center. A total of 6.8 million dollars was awarded to Wisconsin schools to extend regular school curriculum by adding learning activities and supervised recreation for children, especially those of working class families or in low-performing schools (Wolff, 2000). The city of Berlin, WI received one of those seven grants. They were awarded a three year grant which will supply more than \$368,000.00 to Berlin to fund before and after school programs. The programs to be offered will focus on academics, recreation, and socialization. Those who will benefit will run the gamut from at risk children to those who have been identified as gifted and talented (Wolff, 2000). Judy Parker-Leith, the grant coordinator said,

“An essential element of the learning centers is the cooperation among the schools, the local police, ADVOCAP Literacy Council, and the Berlin Boys and Girls Club. We want to work with

community partners to provide all children additional opportunities so they can be successful in school.” (Wolff, 2000).

The Boys and Girls Club is just one example of a successful organization to help our children. There needs to be more creative partnerships between schools and communities to increase the availability of extracurricular activities for our school-aged children during the after-school hours.

Successful involvement with community resources results in a partnership in which all parties feel that they have gained something important through their participation. The world is full of opportunities for partnerships; therefore, strategic choice of partners is necessary (Palmer, 1997). Communities must work together to meet the needs of education and keeping our children safe. One needs to involve people in the community, use the resources of our community, and determine mutual goals and define ways of working together to meet these goals.

The after-school hours represent a prime time for students to develop special skills and interests that aren't identified during the normal school day. It is a chance for students to be involved in extracurricular activities that help them grow socially, emotionally, cognitively, and physically. Because so many parents are working, they need to find a safe, caring environment that their children can go to after the regular school day is over. Parents play an active role in assuring the safety of their children and monitoring their child's involvement in extracurricular activities. Schools and communities need to use their resources and create after-school programs that meet the needs of children and their parents. Great partnerships can be developed to carry out the task of caring for the children of today.

## **Chapter III**

### **Critique, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

#### **Critique and Conclusions**

A review of the literature reveals that there is a large amount of out-of-school hours that students need to fill with activities that are beneficial to their entire development. Parents, schools, and communities share in the responsibility in getting quality after-school programs established. In order to promote such programs several issues must be addressed.

Families in our society today are rapidly changing from what they were years ago. The literature shows that most children come from families where both parents are working. The research also shows that many of our students come from single-parent families. These households don't have adults at home to supervise their children when they are done with school. The research states that the after-school hours are the prime hours for juvenile crimes to be committed. Therefore, the research suggests that what needs to happen is that these children need to be active in programs that keep them off the streets, and into activities that enable them to learn new skills, or to receive training in areas that enhance the learning that has already taken place during the school day.

An abundant amount of research shows that participation in extracurricular activities promotes physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills to the children that participate. There are various types of activities that children can be involved in outside the normal school day. Parents need to aid their children in finding the activities that are suitable for their children. The literature strongly encourages parents to play an active role in enrolling their children in activities that are suitable for their children, and activities that don't over extend the family.

The review of the literature focuses on the needs of children and their parents. It then focuses on the schools and communities. The research reveals that many partnerships are formed to help create after-school programs. A learning environment is created when outside resources can be used together with the school's resources. They develop programs that meet the needs of the students and their parents. The task of caring for our children in today's society is a demanding job. The research suggests that parents, schools, and other outside organizations can work together to enable our youth to be involved in after-school activities that are safe, nurturing, and fun to be involved in.

### **Recommendations**

To further enable the Princeton School District to provide services to our students and their parents, several recommendations are necessary. The school district already has an after-school detention room for grades 6-12. It takes place everyday after school from 3:20-3:45, and is supervised on a weekly rotating basis by middle school and high school level teachers. It is recommended that there also be a workroom, not a detention room, set up for the elementary aged students. This workroom would be supervised on a rotating basis by an elementary teacher. There are so many students that need additional help on their homework assignments, and this would enable them to get the extra attention that they need. This time would be pre-arranged between the homeroom teacher and the child's parents so they would all know ahead of time that the student is staying after school.

The school day at Princeton ends at 3:10 for elementary aged students, and teachers are required by their contract to be available in their rooms until 3:45. Many teachers don't volunteer for after school programs because many of these programs don't start until 3:45 and go until 6:00 at night. This interferes with many of the teacher's own personal activities and family

obligations. The time between 3:10 and 4:00 represents a time that teachers could set aside to work one-on-one with kids, help coach a sports program, give lessons in music instruction, or set aside their room to be used for a specific club or project to take place. It is recommended that the Princeton School District allow the time between 3:10 – 4:00 to be used by those teachers that volunteer their time and talents to supervise an elementary program. It wouldn't interfere with the high school activities because they would still be starting their activities at 4:00.

Having an extended after-school program with outside participation would require a larger scale investigation. It is recommended that the Princeton School District survey the parents of grades kindergarten through grade five and find out what their after-school needs are, and how they think the school district could help them. Do they need after-school daycare? Do they need tutoring for their children to help complete homework assignments? Do they want elementary sports programs? Do they want an extended "Arts" program developed after school? Would they like to see special interest groups or clubs established? Once this survey is returned it is recommended that a committee be formed of parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders to see if these needs can be met. It is recommended that an administrator look into possible federal grants that may be available to see if the district would be eligible for a grant that would help Princeton School District to start its own after-school program.

The Princeton School District opens its doors to the public for many activities. It is recommended that they take the next step and enhance their opportunities with after-school programs to help our students and their families.

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