Beth Gillis-Smith's Sabbatical project outline:

- Weeks 1-5, January 2016
    - Participated in California Community College Success Network [3CSN] "Threshold Concepts and Wicked Problems" workshop at Kellogg Retreat Center
    - Scheduled visits to Writing Centers and supplemental instructor programs:
        - Pasadena City College
        - Pierce College
        - Mt. San Antonio College
        - Allan Hancock College
        - Cuesta College
        - Oxnard College
        - California State University, Northridge
        - California State University, Channel Islands
        - California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo
        - University of California, Los Angeles

- Weeks 6-10, February-March 2016
    - Feb. 27th attended the *2016 Southern California Writing Center Association Tutor Conference* at Westmont College
    - Read *Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind,* edited by Regan A. R. Gurung and Nancy Chick*, 2008*
    - Read *Overcoming Barriers to Student Understanding: Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge* , by Jan Meyer and Ray Land, 2012
    - March 11-12 attended Tutor Expo '16, a conference by and for post-secondary tutors, faculty, and staff connected to tutoring and learning assistance within the California community college system offered through 3CSN's newest community of practice, the Learning Assistance Project, whose mission is to work across campuses to sustain a community of educators toward the professionalization of postsecondary tutoring and learning assistance.

- Weeks 11-18, April-May 2016
    - Prepared and presented several implementation options for expanded Supplemental Instruction at Moorpark College
    - Summarized and developed best practices for tutors and faculty at TLC course embedded tutoring training
    - Prepared professional development unit for faculty on understanding Threshold Concepts

    Presentations
    - April 2016   **Regional Writing Conference**: Fostering Equity in Composition: A Cross-Institutional Conversation
        - Building Equitable Communities: Pushing Back Inequity in the Composition classroom

o Program description: an interactive session where we will explore the tension that occurs when students think they understand what their composition professors are talking about, but when it comes time to use the new knowledge, student work results in mimicry or copying. Knowing how to identify these moments of suspended understanding can help us guide students not only in our composition classes but to a more authentic experience as college and university students.

- **June 2016 Online Teaching Conference,** sponsored by the California Chancellor's Office Telecommunications and Technology Infrastructure Program (TTIP)

- **August 2016 Moorpark College Flex Day Activities**
    o Program description: High-impact online practices to reach and engage under-represented student populations. Using Threshold Concepts to identify and understand liminal students in online courses.

- **March 2017 (proposal accepted)** Conference on College Composition and Communication: Cultivating Capacity, Creating Change
    o Program description: Course Embedded Tutoring to Support Student Writers-This presentation will explore best practices for faculty to collaborate with Writing Center tutors to create conditions for increased learning and change about college level writing

- **April 2017 (proposal submitted) Online Learning Consortium**
    o Program description: High-impact online practices to reach and engage under-represented student populations. Using Threshold Concepts to identify and understand liminal students in online courses.

After visiting many tutoring centers and exploring threshold concepts, the one constant is that these institutions, from four year institutions to community colleges, are using a variety of strategies to offer tutoring support that focuses on student success.

At Moorpark College our use of tutors in the classroom, most often called Supplemental Instruction, began formally with Basic Skills Success Pilot in 2007 with the Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee formation at Moorpark College in response to the Basic Skills Initiative. Those involved were classroom, learning center, and student services faculty, research coordinator, and deans in basic skills areas. The Ad Hoc Committee used the Basic Skills Literature Summary to

determine student success measure to improve at Moorpark College and design a pilot program to implement the above practices. The Basic Skills Mission for Moorpark College is to *develop, implement, evaluate, and institutionalize practices that support student mastery of reading, writing, mathematics, ESL, and learning skills, which are the foundations for college-level courses.* The pilot's goal was to increase Student Success by 10% in Math 03, Intermediate Algebra, and English 02, Introduction to College Writing. Student Success was defined as the percentage of students receiving a C or better out of the number of students enrolled at census. The Basic Skills Pilot included 5 sections of Math 03 and 4 sections of English 02 a semester. These cohorts provided students with administrative, academic, counseling, and faculty support. The pilot brought in counseling support integrated with academic courses/programs. The cohort counselor provides the following services: in-class information sessions, individualized follow-up, and one-on-one student counseling meetings. Cohort English and Math instructors who participated in the pilot attended local and regional workshops and meetings, and met regularly to discuss instructional practices and strategies. While funding for stipends was available, faculty attended monthly cohort meetings to discuss best practices, brainstorm ways to use SI coaches most effectively, and create shared assignments on career exploration and counseling activities.

The Supplemental Instruction program components focused on not just "what" to learn, but also "how" to learn it. From Fall 2008 – Spring 2010, Moorpark College Math and Writing/Reading Centers provided SI Coaches to 36 Sections of Math 03 and 17 Sections of Engl M02. The SI coaches were selected from among trained and experienced tutoring staff, providing supplemental instruction during course time and outside of class. Coaches met regularly as a group and individually with the instructor for the course. Coaches mentored

learning strategies, and they provide additional individual tutoring in onsite and online modes.

At the beginning of each semester, there is an orientation meeting with all of the SI coaches and

the faculty that have SIs. Students in the pilot program were asked to respond to qualitative

open-ended items and focus groups:

Strengths
Connection to support services:
    "I could go to ___ without being nervous"
Learning at the Student's Pace:
    "Breaking it down really helped. "
    "…made me see that I have an imagination."
Inclusiveness in College Culture:
    "We're a family here."

Supplemental Instruction Qualitative Evaluation
Challenges=Time
Personal schedules: "If it fit with my schedule, I would go."
Course load: "I'm overwhelmed with the work… The writing center itself helped but it just felt
    overwhelming that we had to do it."

      In the fall of 2014, the Basic Skills Committee were notified that the courses where BSI

monies were funding counselors and SI instructors were no longer considered basic skills

courses since they were "degree applicable."   The funding for counselor and tutoring support

was pulled, and these courses could no longer offer the embedded counselor meetings and

tutoring.

      The question I hoped to find an answer to was how to replace the effective use of SIs in

an environment of limited funding and resources. The University of Missouri, Kansas City

supplemental instruction model insists upon extensive training for both supervisors and tutors.

This is not realistic for our community college budgets. A modified supplemental instruction

program, called course embedded tutoring, is more feasible for Moorpark College; many

colleges are using course embedded tutoring as alternative means to provide support for students

in the courses at both the developmental, pre-transfer level and transfer, major preparation courses alike. Many community colleges use a four part program that involves a coordinating supervisor, trained tutors, engaged faculty, and a supportive administration. Regardless of what the college calls their program, the use of in-class tutors supports the success of students.

At Pierce College, Crystal Keikel, Director of the Center for Academic Success and the coordinator of Basic Skills and Student Success, maintains an extensive tutoring program that provides embedded tutoring support to a variety of courses from developmental to transfer coursework. Pierce College uses **course embedded tutoring**, finding it more flexible for their student population, rather than the UMKC SI model that Mt. SAC uses. Tutors are often assigned several sections of a course with several faculty members. Tutors communicate with faculty as to their scheduled hours; faculty shares their syllabi and test dates so tutors can coordinate topics and study strategies offered at the breakout sessions. Pierce College offers a four-part training throughout the semester:

1. tutor strategies, much like what we do the first hour or so of our tutor training

2. mentoring and cognitive strategies, like guided reading (Reading Apprenticeship) and learning how to talk about what we do when we study

3. culturally responsive student leadership, which begins with a discussion of equity and who is affected on the campus

4. how the affective domain and Habits of Mind influence student success

Pierce also offers "advanced" tutor training for embedded tutors as well, with a focus on speech delivery, group dynamics, learning outcomes and lesson planning for workshops, and a review of Bloom's taxonomy and levels of learning. Here's another (unsurprising) finding of Pierce

College's program: the success of the workshops has a lot to do with how the instructor presents the benefits of it in class. The combination of expert knowledge provided by the faculty and expert learning provided by the tutor is a powerful one, as it provides the novice learner (first generation, English learner, new college student) a model of how to be an active, engaged, nurtured learner.

Pasadena City College and Allan Hancock College also use tutors in the classroom, but the classes are all developmental English courses that are delivered in a computer/writing lab. The tutors are there primarily to answer questions from students as they are completing assigned modules as part of course curriculum. Tutors are not preparing supplemental lessons or modeling active learning in these modules. They are providing technical and knowledge support for the students (Lee, Rob and Velasquez).

At UCLA, The Writing Initiative addresses the need to prepare undergraduate students in the Division of Social Sciences to write successfully. Leigh Harris, Associate Director of Writing Programs and Tami Kremer-Sadlik, Director of Educational Programs, Division of Social Sciences, have collaborated on this initiative that includes the following innovative programs: a series of faculty teaching workshops in Winter 2016 that provides pedagogical tools for improving student writing and a pilot program in Spring 2015 that will offer writing training for a number of upper division Social Sciences courses through individualized feedback on writing assignments provided by trained composition peer learning facilitators attached to the course. Faculty attend a workshop that provides "faculty in the Social Sciences with best practices to help improving your undergraduate students' writing success" (Leigh). The workshop is part of a new Writing Initiative in the Division of Social Sciences where faculty are

invited to bring syllabi and writing assignments. The Workshop will address the following topics:

- Improving students' writing skills in upper division courses through individualized feedback of preparatory writing assignments that lead to a final paper

- Designing short assignments and useful feedback-revision strategies that can lead to a stronger final paper/project

- Creating evaluation rubrics to be used by instructors, TAs and Readers in grading these assignment

Dr. Leigh Harris explains, "The UCLA Social Science Writing Initiative Program addresses the need to prepare students in the Division of Social Sciences to write successfully. The current pilot program (Spring 2016) offers writing training in four Social Sciences Upper Division Courses through individualized feedback and scaffolding of preparatory writing assignments provided by Peer Learning Facilitators." The ultimate goal is to expand the Writing Initiative program across the division so that each student will enroll in at least two upper division courses in their major that include the writing training component. Along with support from tutors at the UCLA Writing Center, this UC campus is attempting to contextualize writing instruction across disciplines (Holton). This offers another interesting plan to help faculty within disciplines across campuses learn about ways to improve writing in their courses, with supplemental help of tutors.

At California State Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, tutors are used to offer supplemental instruction in yet another way. Students can sign up for a one unit supplemental workshop that is run by a peer tutor; the class offers supplemental instruction for a variety of freshman and sophomore classes in biology, chemistry, physics and statistics. These

supplemental, hour long sessions provide support to students from homework assistance to clarifying hard to grasp concepts through participating in discussions, comparing notes, developing study strategies and challenging their understanding with practice exams and worksheets. The workshops are led by trained peer facilitators, who have successfully taken the class before. The workshops are designed to be interactive, using the supplemental instruction theory that the more involved the students are, the more they learn. The facilitator is also trained to model study strategies that can be used in other classes by the participants (Jenke and "Student Academic Services").

At Santa Barbara City College, the Gateway Program has been offering course embedded tutoring (CET) for the past 10 years. Their program focuses on a faculty-grown and administered organization, offering faculty training and professional development to prepare for CET. Faculty are offered best practices and clear guidelines on the best way to utilize CET. A full time director works with several support staff to find, hire, train, and supervise tutors; approve tutor time sheets; and provide on-going professional development for Gateway instructors. The courses that qualify for Gateway funding are Basic Skills, First in Sequence, ESL, and some Career Tech classes for the semester. Instructors must select and supervise their own tutors, as well as submit the Gateway Tutor Information Form with your tutor's schedules. Faculty are also required to respond to all e-mails from Gateway's Co-Directors and Tutor Coordinator. They must also approve their tutor's time sheets. Gateway faculty may claim 10 hours of Flex per semester (Wiley and Pike).

Gateway tutors are required to complete a five-week (ten hour) Tutor Training Seminar by the end of their first semester working as Gateway tutors. Participants in this seminar, "learn how to organize tutorial sessions, help students develop problem-solving strategies, and offer

assistance with core academic competencies" (SBCC Gateway to Success).   Some of the topics covered include communication skills, learning skills and styles, culture and learning, small group management, and outcomes-based instructional support. Once the tutor has completed this seminar, he/she is certified as a Regular/Level 1 tutor with the College Reading and Learning Association. Gateway tutors keep track of their work with students through a variety of templates.   Tutors are also given extensive training best practices in the peer tutoring tradition. A 52 page booklet outlines everything from submitting timesheets, learning about campus resources as well as ice-breaker activities for students attending a tutoring session and strategies and practices for tutoring. Faculty are trusted to know how to best use CET in their courses by clear guidelines and a variety of suggestions of how CET can best be integrated into their teaching style.

These programs make use of peer tutors in the role not only of experts in the subject matter but also as mentors. They are also facilitating a unique "collaboration between academic and student affairs…whether we call it supplemental instruction of course embedded tutoring, the power of this technique is that it provides a "bridge" or "guide" for students to maneuver college-level concepts and study practices" (Minor). The partnership between faculty, tutoring centers, and students create strong student support. Frank Minor is the Director of Residential Life at the University of Missouri-Columbia (MU), and jointly developed and supervises the extensive Freshman Interest Group (FIG) program at MU; his research "tells us…that a large part of the impact of college is determined by the extent and content of students' interactions with the major agents of socialization on campus: faculty members and student peers." With this in mind, it is important to capitalize on these two components of our institution. The work that

the Teaching and Learning Center can do to strengthen the peer mentor role of our tutors within the context of a class is a powerful collaboration for student success at Moorpark College.

Even simple things that experienced students take for granted can be challenging for a new student, such as finding classrooms and offices on campus, understanding school policies for registration for classes, and learning the special language of the college such as "syllabus," "office hours "transfer and "prerequisites." Some new students find the answers by directly asking professors in their classes or talking to college professional staff. But many students find out information by asking friends, especially more experienced students. In fact, most new students find their way to the offices of college staff and professors by first talking to more experienced students. In other words, the experienced students serve as guides for new students to help them access the storehouse of knowledge and resources at the college. Moreover, new students will continue to seek the advice of experienced students regarding decisions about classes, majors, academic difficulties, and personal problems.

Mt. San Antonio College uses the UMKC model, so they offer lots of training for their SIs on collaborative learning (so the workshops are not just another lecture!) and contextualizing study skills. The Supplemental Instruction leaders (SIs) provide students with highly structured three hours of out-of-class weekly study sessions. Mt. SAC uses this training video from Rochester Institute of Technology that presents the key ideas about supplemental instruction: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbyIPLaSEt8. I would recommend using this in training sessions with new tutors and faculty. It stresses the importance of SI as a way to introduce students to study skills and strategies that ushers students through the threshold of becoming an independent learner (Smith).

Part of my sabbatical was also spent participating in the California Community College Success Network (3CSN) Threshold Project Winter Institute. My partner in this endeavor was Jessica Hasson, adjunct faculty at CSUCI and Moorpark College. We met over the course of several months with over 30 other faculty from CSU and California community colleges, in October 2016 at the RP Student Success conference and in January for a two day retreat. We worked on identifying threshold concepts in Freshman Composition and Writing Center workshop offerings to be more "student centered" and equity-minded. We read several key texts in the formation of these concepts and practices. I also met separately with Robin Parent and Mathew Luskey, professors at California Polytechnic University, SLO and facilitators of the Threshold Project. They lead a successful professional development for faculty at Cal Poly, SLO. I was able to review the plan they used to take faculty through readings and exercises to gain a greater understand of threshold concepts within disciplines, with an idea to facilitate a faculty workshop at Moorpark College.   In April, Jessica and I presented a short workshop introducing threshold concepts at the Regional Writing Conference sponsored by the Aligning Learning and Academic Success grant. Our workshop was titled, "Building Equitable Communities: Pushing Back Inequity in Composition." We explored how these troublesome threshold concepts can create liminality (confusion, frustration, or suspended understanding) in our students. When we come to better understanding of how and why these liminal moments can create tension in the classroom, we can discover ways to support our students through these areas of knowledge building.

In our workshop we used blindfolds and ear plugs to create a situation where participants could not clearly hear or see the picture and sound bites we were playing. We then asked people to respond to a question about the sounds and pictures we were showing. The reflection activity

asked people to describe the experience of being in the room, but not be able to participate fully. This exercise was to illustrate the concept of liminality. The experience or definition of liminality comes from a Latin word, limin, which means the threshold of a doorway. Derived from the word limin, the term, liminality, refers to a "threshold period." This is a time of transition and transformation; a betwixt and between, no-longer but not-yet…a person slides into a world where the "rules" no longer apply. It is characterized by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, with the potential for subversion and change. A liminal moment is a blurry boundary period between two segments of time. Most cultures, for example, have special rituals, customs, or markers to indicate the transitional nature of such liminal spaces or liminal times: the shift between adolescence to adult. Liminality shows up in literature, too. Often times, a character will come to a threshold in their life that must be either crossed or turned away from. These thresholds can be internal decisions or they can be the crossing of a physical threshold. The crossing of the threshold (either physical or mental) represents a point where two different worlds collide. Frodo Baggins in *Lord of the Rings*-literally crosses the threshold of his Hobbit home to go on the journey of a lifetime, completely changing his perspective. Anthropologist, Arnold van Gennep identifies three phases to crossing the threshold. The first phase is separation; the second is transition, and the final stage is incorporation. The second stage of transition is the stage in which liminality becomes possible. It is during the transition state that a person remains uncertain because they have been separated from their world, but aren't yet connected to a new one (Bigger). To Van Gennep, this place can be dangerous because the usual coping mechanisms may no longer work. Van Gennep's thoughts on thresholds were taken more in depth by Victor Turner. Turner said that during the transition stage a person becomes liminal. Because the person is neither attached to their previous way of life nor attached to their future

way of life, they become neutralized. Turner says the characteristics of a liminal moment "are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial."

During the 3CSN workshop and the presentation for the Regional Writing Conference, we explored what these looked like in the composition classroom and in our own lives. How do we recognize liminality in our classrooms?   Students drop the class, don't do assignments, don't read, or become disruptive. Helping students understand why they are feeling the way they are can help them look beyond the liminal moment to a where they have crossed the threshold to new knowledge. This also becomes a wonderful concept to introduce in the tutor training course for both tutors at the TLC centers as well as course embedded tutors. Tutors can explore the "threshold concepts" they have experienced struggling with, passing along their tips for how to tackle and master them with those who come for tutoring.

The exploration of threshold concepts in the Writing Center and with course embedded tutors leads me to a greater appreciation for the role the peer tutor plays in coming alongside liminal students and provided guidance and understanding about how to tackle the barriers to success that first generation or novice students experience as they begin college. As tutors model study strategies that create engagement, students see that they are able to solve the problems that higher education presents to them. Whether the problem is a new kind of writing in a communications or philosophy class or a complete problem in Algebra, the modeling a tutor can

provide can help the student feel supported in uncharted territory as well as empowered to use new found skills and concepts to attempt to solve the problems.

In *Naming What We Know*, Andrea Lunsford, Director Emerita of Stanford's Program in Writing and Rhetoric, examines how prior writing knowledge and experiences can help or hinder writers as they approach new writing situations:

> Writing is, first of all, always part of a larger network or conversation; all writing is in some sense a response to other writing or symbolic action. Even when writing is private or meant for the writer alone, it is shaped by the writer's earlier interaction with writing and with other people and with all the writer has read and learned… In some instances, prior knowledge and experience are necessary and often helpful; in others they can work against writers. When writers call on strategies they have used before when approaching a new writing task, those strategies may or may not work well in the current situation (54-55).

Students are often taught to write using a specific format like the Jane Shaffer method using the five paragraph model. When they attempt to use these strategies to write on a more complex essay topic, the format may not work as well. This creates liminality: they are attempting to use a previously successful model in a new setting. The new situation calls for more creative and critical thinking, and this can be frustrating to the learner. Creating a new model for the student, one that addresses the use of past models and explains why a new one is needed, is a step towards bringing that student through this threshold concept.

Other threshold concepts in the composition discipline focus on the multifaceted purposes and requirements of college-level writing assignments. Adler and Wardle discuss how writing is a social and rhetorical activity, a knowledge-making activity, and that it involves making ethical choices. Writing speaks to others through recognizable forms and often gets its meaning from other texts. Writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies and is linked to identity and voice. Failure can also be an important part of writing development. Each writing assignment regardless of discipline requires thought about structure and form that goes beyond a set format. These are examples of threshold concepts within the discipline of composition and in writing across the disciplines; there are also applications of this in discipline of learning assistance as well.

In training writing tutors to work writing across the curriculum, a discussion of threshold concepts can open the door to cultivating a deeper understanding of writing experience in the Writing Center. Rebecca S. Nowacek and Bradley Hughes explain that a Writing Center "is that of a space in which writers and tutors talk about the process of writing and about drafts in progress. What is less visible to individuals who have not spent extended periods of time within strong cross-curricular writing center is the incredible variety of that talk" (172). They also explain that Writing Centers make visible the idea that Writing is a Social and Rhetorical Activity (Adler-Kasner and Wardle 17), that All Writers Have More to Learn (Adler-Kasner and Wardle 59), and Reflection is Critical for Writers' Development (Adler-Kasner and Wardle 78). As tutors talk about writing assignments across the disciplines, they reinforce the idea that Writing is a Knowledge-making Activity (Adler-Kasner and Wardle 19) and that Revision is Central to Developing Writers (Adler-Kasner and Wardle 66). Nowack and Hughes further examine the role of threshold concepts in WAC training of Writing Center tutors: "Threshold

concepts framework illuminates the value of giving potential tutors an extended opportunity to grapple with a view of writing and revising as a knowledge-making activity…" (175). We can then recognize that writing is "consistently troublesome and counterintuitive for many individuals but that may change overtime" (179). When tutors can identify the resistant writing student as in a liminal state, tutors can be prepared for this and reassure the writer of the process nature of writing. The process is not about "fixing" or only editing, but of bringing the writer to a better understanding of the knowledge building process of writing.

Threshold concepts in the writing center focus on the tutor as "expert outsider" (Nowack and Hughes 181). Tutors cannot be content experts in all subjects, but at Moorpark College's Teaching and Learning Center we have a unique collaboration between subject tutors and writing tutors who share the tutoring space and can share knowledge across disciplines. By using the threshold concepts as expert outsiders, tutors share with the writers of what it means to be a savvy student who recognizes how different academic subjects call for different genres in writing. Other best practices in using threshold concepts at the writing center include bringing tutors to classroom activities during group work sessions or peer review workshops as well as using embedded tutors into specific courses (Anson 213). As tutors engage in metacognitive activity with students about writing across the curriculum, the writing center can shed light on the "fundamental principles of discipline-based communication with principles of writing instruction and support" (Anson 204).

Tutors are now taught key threshold concepts in their training at the Teaching and Learning Center: growth mindset and habits of mind. Dr. Carol Dweck's work on mindset theory explores the powerful muscle of attitude in students' lives. If they anticipate growth and

understanding through effort, they are set to learn. If they anticipate that their effort will only solidify their doubts about their intelligence and ability, they will not try. Dweck explores the power of "yet" in her books and articles; the tutors can make use of this concept while they are tutoring. By assuring a student that a liminal moment of misunderstanding and confusion is a "not yet" moment, we hope to provide them with a new perspective on confusion, leading to future knowledge and understanding. These skills help students tackle new concepts in math and science or in writing across the disciplines.

Habits of Mind also provide tutors with strategies to help liminal students encountering threshold concepts in academic life. There are 16 habits, and although they are all valuable, in the training we do at Moorpark College there are several that work well in the learning assistance discipline: persisting, metacognition, striving for accuracy, applying past knowledge, finding humor, and thinking interdependently (Costa and Kallick). These habits are intuitively practiced by "expert" learners. By addressing these habits with novice students, tutors can begin to make plain the process of learning; there are strategies that can be integrated into study time that can help students use their time effectively.

My sabbatical project took me to many learning assistance centers in the southern California area. From my observations, the role of faculty as directors in the writing and math center work well to move learning assistance from the periphery of the college into the mainstream: the more faculty support the idea that successful students make use of interdependence and engagement outside of the classroom, the more we will need to grow the space on campus where students can do this. I want to continue to encourage and build this movement at the Teaching and Learning Center at Moorpark College. During my sabbatical I

met many professionals who are using course embedded tutors and threshold concepts in tutor training and in professional development to make a difference in at their colleges; I hope to continue to do the same for students attending the colleges at Ventura County Community College District.

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