

Forging a National Identity: TYCA and the Two-Year College Teacher-Scholar

> Jeffrey Andelora

This final essay in the series evaluates TYCA's achievements since its inception, in particular its research and scholarship agenda.

It is time for us to take our rightful place in the academy, but this will not happen until we add the word *scholar* to how we see ourselves.

Frank Madden

Although it took longer than anyone anticipated, five years after the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) was first proposed at the 1992 meeting in Hinds, Mississippi, two-year college English faculty around the nation finally had a professional organization of their own, and, with it, the beginning of a national identity. In April of 1997, one month after the TYCA Inaugural Gala at the Phoenix Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), Lynn Troyka, TYCA's first elected chair, wrote to thank the NCTE Executive Committee (EC) for its financial and moral support over the preceding few years, and to point out that it had paid off: at a time when overall NCTE membership was declining, TYCA membership had grown 8 percent, with 256 new members. But growth alone was not enough, and members of the TYCA EC knew there was considerable work to be done. TYCA was not the end after all, but the means to the end, the vehicle by which two-year college English faculty hoped to reach their stated goals of greater visibility and a more clearly defined national identity.

TYCA's early chairs—Lynn Troyka, John Lovas, and Ben Wiley—were well aware of the challenges their fledgling organization faced: achieving the ambitious goals set out in both the initial TYCA proposal and its first strategic plan, finding national leaders from the rank and file of two-year college faculty, and, perhaps most important, convincing two-year college English faculty around the nation that TYCA was worth joining. As TYCA's first chair, Troyka advanced a credible agenda, and her reputation among those in NCTE, the NCTE College Section, and CCCC gave TYCA immediate status. As she moved to the position of immediate past chair, however, one of TYCA's biggest challenges lay in bringing up

strong, talented leadership from the regional organizations to build on the momentum that she had helped create. Fortunately, Lovas and Wiley proved worthy successors. Lovas's goals as TYCA's second chair were "to develop a strong national presence for two-year colleges, a very tough deal because by mission and tradition we tend to focus on the local community" and "to build an infrastructure for TYCA to get lots of people involved and to get the work done" (E-mail). He personally recruited two-year faculty from around the nation to serve on TYCA's many committees. Wiley, TYCA's third chair, was particularly concerned, as had been Lovas, with helping two-year college faculty establish a national identity without giving up their regional identity. He wrote:

This new national identity was simply to give a stronger, more visible voice to the regionals by uniting the voices. There was initial suspicion, or rather reluctance, to give up regional identity for national identity, and one of my tasks was to show the membership how the identities went hand in hand, each strengthening the other.

Under the direction of Jay Wooten and Georgia Newman, TYCA's fourth and fifth chairs, the organization made further strides. During Wooten's term, Paul Bodmer was appointed NCTE's associate executive director of higher education, providing TYCA with a well-placed advocate, one who would ensure that two-year college faculty were represented on all committees and in all discussions in which they had a vested interest. Then, under Newman's leadership, two NCTE motions further affirmed TYCA's determination to assert its voice: motion 2001:33 approved the Outstanding Programs in English Award for Two-Year Teachers and Two-Year Colleges, and motion 2001:35 approved the TYCA Fame and Shame Award. But perhaps TYCA's most significant achievement in this early era, also ushered in by Newman, occurred on Saturday, September 22, 2001, when NCTE motion 2001:109 gave the chair of national TYCA a voting seat on its EC. For many, it was TYCA's crowning moment.

This quick review of TYCA's accomplishments during its early years invites a number of questions, however. How successful has the organization been in fulfilling the vision of its founders? How successful has TYCA been in reaching the goals set out in its first strategic plan? Is TYCA currently meeting the professional needs of its constituents? What challenges are TYCA leaders currently facing? Whereas the previous three installments in this series examined the circumstances that led to the birth of TYCA, this fourth and final chapter will evaluate TYCA's achievements, as well as address ongoing issues and challenges.

Evaluating TYCA

Due to the innovation of TYCA being an "association," a kind of group not previously recognized by the NCTE constitution, TYCA was required to undergo a formal evaluation after three years. On March 9, 1998, TYCA chair John Lovas wrote Frank Madden, then chair of the College Section, to request that the TYCA

Review Committee (comprised of Ida Simmons Short, chair; Howard Tinberg; and Victor Villanueva) use the goals from TYCA's 1996 strategic plan as its criteria for evaluating the organization. The Review Committee agreed, and after a year of work presented its report to the NCTE EC on September 24, 1999. The committee found the following:

- > TYCA had indeed met its short-term goals: it was a recognized entity within NCTE, it had membership records and a vigorous membership campaign, and, although TYCA membership had declined 2 percent since its inception, NCTE itself had witnessed a 17 percent drop in membership overall. According to the report, "At a time of declining memberships throughout non-profit professional organizations, TYCA has been doing remarkably well" ("TYCA Review" 4).
- > TYCA had met several important intermediate goals, and others were being "considered and pursued." TYCA had assembled significant demographic data about its members and had developed a Web site and conducted a membership survey to help determine member needs. The survey revealed that there was still some confusion about the relationship between national TYCA and the regionals.¹ An active committee structure was in place to help meet the intermediate goals that were still being pursued. ("TYCA Review" 4-6)
- > TYCA's one long-term goal, a one-time national meeting, had now expanded into several questions about what TYCA should become in the long run. Should TYCA split from NCTE and become self-sustaining? Become its own conference, the Two-Year College Council? Attempt to retain profits from its workshops at both the NCTE Annual Convention and CCCC? Become a section within NCTE? Maintain the status quo? ("TYCA Review" 7)

In response to these questions, the committee quoted TYCA chair John Lovas at length. According to Lovas, TYCA wanted to expand its presence at the NCTE and CCCC conventions for at least another three years as an association. At that point TYCA might be in a position to consider moving towards conference status. Of course, a review of the finances showed that TYCA was a long way from becoming independent: in fiscal years 1997 and 1998, TYCA had operated at a net loss of \$47,424 and \$38,347, respectively ("TYCA Review" 8). The report concluded:

TYCA has proceeded apace during the last three years, creating a strong network with seven regionals, beginning to bring in regional leaders within the national umbrella, making its presence known at CCCC and the NCTE Annual Convention and through its publications. Based on these findings, the committee recommends that TYCA continue to develop within its current bylaws (under revision) and receive continuing financial support during the coming three years under its present configuration as an Association. ("TYCA Review" 8)

The Review Committee submitted its report to the NCTE EC, which was then asked to approve TYCA's continuing status. NCTE motion 99:143 read: "To ap-

prove the TYCA Review Report including continued status as an association as currently defined.”The motion passed. Although Article X of NCTE’s constitution required another review in three years, that never occurred. The appointment of the TYCA chair to the NCTE EC in 2001 assured TYCA of its permanent status; thus, formal reviews were no longer necessary.

But that was TYCA at age three. What about TYCA at age ten? How well has the organization, now more than a decade old, fulfilled the vision of its founders? When the original Restructure Committee met in Mississippi in 1992, the group drafted a fundamental vision for a new organization. Helon Raines explained:

The proposal [. . .] presents a framework that gives a more precise identity and greater visibility to two-year college teachers than is possible within the present National Two-Year College Council (NTCC). The proposal protects and strengthens the six two-year Regional Conferences, and it strengthens the relationship of two-year college teachers with CCCC and the College Section of NCTE. (“Editorial” 163)

The phrase “more precise identity and greater visibility” had been the stated prize, the fundamental goal of the restructure movement, and the reason for the new organization. Yet, in pursuit of this goal, the founders were determined to preserve the two networks that formed TYCA’s professional roots: the relationship between TYCA and the regionals, and the relationship between TYCA and CCCC. Raines had sounded each of these goals in her editorial, and they had guided the restructuring efforts through their completion. The TYCA proposal had also cited two key problems that the new organization would seek to remedy: NTCC had no direct link to the NCTE EC, and the regional organizations had little connection to CCCC and NCTE (Raines, “Proposal” 167). Finally, the proposal cited six specific ways that TYCA would differ from the NTCC. According to Raines, TYCA

1. Creates a specific, national body with a dues-paying, open membership.
2. Provides a stronger, more focused voice to represent our diverse population.
3. Connects CCCC and the Regionals through interlocking representation, seasonal workshops in the Regionals, and a speakers’ bureau.
4. Provides for a broader representation of various constituencies on the Executive Committee.
5. Provides a specific unit within NCTE that sponsors *Teaching English in the Two-Year College (TETYC)*.
6. Communicates with members through the “TYCA to You” section in *TETYC*, provides a newsletter, and provides a computer listing of job vacancies. (167)

Considering the vision outlined in this initial proposal, the TYCA that exists in 2008 has indeed achieved the goals of its founders. Of the two broad goals, the success of the latter, “greater visibility,” is relatively easy to evaluate. TYCA has clearly provided greater visibility for two-year college faculty: national TYCA currently has about 3,300 members, some of whom sit on the CCCC EC, the College Section Steering Committee, and the College Forum; at each CCCC the TYCA

chair addresses the general assembly, and every four years a member of TYCA serves as CCCC chair; additionally, the chair of TYCA has a permanent voting seat on the NCTE EC; *TETYC* continues to do well, with circulation averaging about 3,300 copies per issue (just under half the circulation of *College Composition and Communication* [CCC]); “TYCA to You” is a regular feature, profiling regional news, conferences, calls for papers, and local educational issues pertaining to two-year colleges. Every one of the items Raines had listed in her editorial that concerned visibility has been realized.

The other goal from the original proposal had stated that TYCA would provide two-year college English faculty with a “more precise identity.” This objective is not as easy to evaluate, as “identity” remains a slippery term. The original committee never defined the word, and it likely meant different things to different people. Two-year college English faculty did have an identity—they were teachers, not scholars; they were generalists, not specialists—but it was an identity that left them with little currency in the nascent discipline of rhetoric and composition; it was an identity that relegated them to committee status with no programmatic power under the umbrella of CCCC. What two-year college English faculty were likely searching for was not only a collective national identity, but recognition that they, as a group who educated half of America’s undergraduates, were a significant force in higher education. However, given that the means to status and recognition within the fields of English studies lay in scholarship, an enterprise in which two-year college English faculty were not actively participating, this recognition was difficult to achieve. Former *TETYC* editors Nell Ann Pickett, Mark Reynolds, and Howard Tinberg regularly encouraged two-year college faculty to research and write, but their calls met with limited success. Given the teaching load and lack of institutional incentive for research and scholarship, it appeared that there was little hope of two-year college English faculty attaining the national presence they were hoping for.

Before long, however, TYCA undertook its most ambitious and far-reaching agenda item: to redefine the identity of two-year college faculty from that of teacher to that of teacher-scholar. In 2002, TYCA appointed the first of two ad hoc committees, both of which addressed the role of the teacher-scholar. The first committee, chaired by Jo Ann Buck of Guilford Technical Community College, was charged with writing guidelines for the academic preparation of prospective two-year college English faculty. The second committee, appointed in 2004 and chaired by Frank Madden, set out to explore and report on research and scholarship in the two-year colleges. Anticipating the work of this committee, Madden wrote in 2002:

One of the major goals of national TYCA this year is to identify the role of the two-year college teacher/scholar. We have made great progress over the last decade in shedding light on the value of what we do in the classroom—on our teaching and the impact it has on transforming the lives of our students. But before we shed any more light on ourselves as teachers, this is a good time to take a close look at what else might be required to make us legitimate members of the higher education community. (440)

Madden then identified the greatest strengths of two-year college English faculty: their commitment to teaching, student learning, and providing service to their college and community. But, he wrote, two-year college faculty were missing something: “Scholarship is a prerequisite and a corequisite for good teaching. It legitimizes expertise, informs classroom practice, and provides students with models of intellectual inquiry. . . . It is time for us to take our rightful place in the academy, but this will not happen until we add the word *scholar* to how we see ourselves” (441). Soon after this editorial, Madden became the chair of TYCA and the chair of the newly formed Research and Scholarship Committee. Although this call had been issued by individuals such as Nell Ann Pickett, Mark Reynolds, Helon Raines, Howard Tinberg, John Lovas, and others for more than a decade, it now had the strength of the national organization behind it. The reports of both the Guidelines Committee and the Research and Scholarship Committee, approved by the TYCA EC in November of 2004 and officially released at the 2005 CCCC in San Francisco, will be discussed in more detail shortly.

Ongoing Challenges and Recommendations

While TYCA has succeeded in realizing the vision of its founders and has made significant progress on the goals of its strategic plan, the organization still faces a number of challenges. Many of these challenges concern helping two-year college English departments address the obstacles facing their institutions—maintaining open access in the face of growing enrollments and budget cutbacks, accommodating increasing numbers of underprepared students, and providing a quality education even as the reliance on part-time faculty continues to grow—as well as the challenges facing the field of composition studies: questioning the kinds of literacies being promoted in first-year composition, along with numerous challenges related to teaching practices, assessment, workload, teaching with technology, and growing English as a Second Language (ESL) populations, to name a few. While these are complicated issues that TYCA will need to address, I would like to focus here on the issue that has been at the core of this four-part series: the identity and status of two-year college English faculty.

Two-year college English faculty are members of a discipline that privileges, indeed depends on, scholarship. Because two-year college English faculty are bound by institutional constraints, however, they are generally not able to take part in traditional scholarship, what Boyer termed the scholarship of discovery (17). Accordingly, a hierarchy developed, and it is overcoming this class structure that presents TYCA with one of its most enduring challenges. In 1993, Helon Raines, writing of the barriers to two-year college faculty becoming leaders in education, wrote, “An unrecognized element of the profession, we have acted as oppressed groups often do, isolating ourselves from those with more prestigious positions and wearing our oppression like badges of honor” (“Reseeing” 104). For decades, the majority of two-year college English faculty who belonged to a professional organization have found their home in the regional organizations. In part, not attend-

ing national conferences was due to restricted travel funds, but there are other likely explanations as well, given that many who teach at four-year institutions also have restricted funds. Many two-year college English faculty simply feel more comfortable among their own and believe that CCCC holds little for them. But this perception is most likely born from lack of exposure. CCCC is very much concerned with pedagogy, and numerous conference sessions reflect that. What is more likely is that because two-year college faculty generally do not engage in scholarship, it is difficult to feel at home in an environment where scholarship reigns. In 2001, Howard Tinberg sounded a note similar to Raines's: "I . . . suspect that there is something in the culture of the two-year college that works against the intellectual work of written scholarship and research. Like many of our students, we may think so little of our capabilities and of the work we do that writing about accomplishments simply doesn't seem worthwhile" (50). It seems likely that a substantial number of two-year college English faculty lack confidence in themselves as scholars. At a conference like CCCC where the hallways and session rooms are filled primarily with four-year and university faculty, two-year college faculty may feel they have little to offer, or little that their four-year colleagues would want to hear.

Overcoming this lack of confidence is crucial, however. Two-year college English faculty are a vital part of the discipline—they do, after all, teach half of America's undergraduates—yet they lack the time, incentive, and, in some cases, confidence to present their expertise, their rich pedagogical experience, to the disciplinary community in a compelling way. In the end, however, two-year college English faculty cannot have it both ways: it is, and will continue to be, very difficult to maintain tight ties to a scholarly community such as CCCC without taking part in the community's scholarship. One option, separating from NCTE and severing the close affiliation with CCCC to form a two-year college conference is unlikely: it's not financially feasible and, more important, the two groups, united as they are by their commitment to teaching composition, have too much in common. The other option is to find a way to take part in the discipline's scholarship. What this requires, however, is that two-year college English faculty not only take the initiative in redefining what counts as viable scholarship, but also engage in that scholarship.

A New Identity: The Teacher-Scholar

As previously mentioned, the call for two-year college faculty to engage in scholarship has been taken up elsewhere; however, it has not been part of TYCA's agenda until recently. At the 2005 CCCC in San Francisco, TYCA released two reports: "Guidelines for the Academic Preparation of English Faculty at Two-Year Colleges" and "Research and Scholarship in the Two-Year College." The "Guidelines" document is addressed to prospective two-year college English faculty, the university graduate faculty who train them, prospective adjunct faculty, and those who may serve on hiring committees. It offers this Statement of Purpose:

Effective community college teachers are reflective and flexible teacher-scholars whose primary role is to enable students of widely differing backgrounds, needs, and interests to learn most effectively. This document offers suggestions for both the training and the philosophy that two-year college scholar-teachers of the twenty-first century need to bring to the English classroom in order to fulfill this role. (6)

The “Guidelines” then cites the significant role two-year colleges play in higher education, argues for a more deliberate training of those who wish to teach there, and offers recommendations of specific coursework along with a rationale. Although the document foregrounds the role of the two-year college faculty member as teacher, it also emphasizes the role of two-year college faculty as scholar, as demonstrated in the use of the terms “teacher-scholar” and “scholar-teacher” in the above excerpt and elsewhere in the report. The document also argues that the best two-year college teachers will be well prepared to take part in the scholarship of the discipline:

A two-year college teacher-scholar of English should be an active member of English professional organizations, conducting research to enhance his or her teaching, participating actively in academic conferences and publishing opportunities, and engaging in professional and community service to further the growth of the academy. (11)

This language is new in TYCA documents and represents a deliberate move to reconstruct the identity of its constituency: defined by themselves and their institutions as teachers for most of the last century, two-year college English leadership now began aggressively rewriting that identity to include the role of scholar.²

This shift is even more evident in the second document titled “Research and Scholarship in the Two-Year College,” the report of the committee chaired by Frank Madden, one of the most vocal figures of late calling for scholarship in two-year colleges. Claiming that in addition to being excellent teachers, two-year college faculty also need to be “knowledgeable scholars,” the report states:

Yet, unless expectations for quality community college work are rendered explicitly and accorded appropriate recognition for achievements in both teaching and scholarship, we will not achieve the hoped for balance which this document advocates. . . . It is the purpose of this document to set down explicit expectations for the teacher-scholar of English at the two-year college and the appropriate rewards for such a role, as well as provide models and resources. . . . (3)

After providing a rationale for scholarship in the two-year colleges, the authors of the report, citing the work of Boyer, then define the two-year college teacher-scholar. For them, the teacher-scholar is

that faculty member for whom teaching is informed both by reflective practice and the application of the best available theoretical approaches. Moreover, we invite such faculty to employ the skills and knowledge base that will allow them to become capable researchers whose pursuit of knowledge enriches the intellectual lives of their students. Finally, we encourage faculty to share their work through publication and presentation, receiving

feedback from interested colleagues through a process of “critical inquiry and critical exchanges.” (Slevin 69, italics in original)

The report also identifies a number of “areas of inquiry” for research—writing, literature/biography, history, pedagogy, assessment, and creative writing—not only citing work that has already been done in each area, but making suggestions for additional research. Acknowledging that two-year colleges’ attempts to redefine scholarship and research “seems to have only marginalized community college faculty further (the more rigorous and thereby privileged ‘scholarship of discovery’ is reserved for faculty in elite institutions)” (4), the report suggests that as “non-conventional research becomes more visible, teachers in two-year colleges and students will be enriched” (8). Finally, the report makes specific recommendations for two-year college faculty and their administrations and provides a bibliography of research about two-year college English and by two-year college English faculty.

While the “Research and Scholarship” document does address the most pressing issue in helping two-year college English faculty establish a respected professional identity, that is only the first step. Actually changing the academic culture in two-year colleges will take years, if not decades. The report acknowledges that defining and supporting two-year teacher-scholars

will only be accomplished when the majority of two-year college faculty strive to be teacher/scholars. Realistically, that will only happen and be sustained when two-year college administrators and personnel committees encourage, recognize, and reward the practice of scholarship . . . by its faculty members. (9)

And the report is having an impact. Sharon Mitchler, TYCA’s immediate past chair, wrote that both of these documents “have had an impact on graduate programs, regional conference presentations, manuscripts for publication, and hiring committees across the nation.” This is encouraging news indeed. Without a scholarship agenda, two-year college faculty will never become, in the words of Madden, “legitimate members of the higher education community” (440). However, if two-year college English faculty do succeed in redefining what counts as viable scholarship and in building a scholarship of composition pedagogy, they will achieve the professional and disciplinary status that has eluded them for so long. Others agree. In a 2005 e-mail responding to questions about TYCA’s future challenges, John Lovas wrote:

The new Teacher-Scholar document reflects what I see as our major challenge professionally. Again, this document reflects the notion that CC faculty everywhere are engaged in the scholarship of teaching and gives us common ground nationally. It’s the most tangible expression of the original impulse behind TYCA, in my view. The audience for the document is leaders on CC campuses, encouraging them to support faculty in their efforts at research, writing and other forms of scholarship (like weblogs, maybe?) and our university colleagues, who still evince little interest in looking closely at what we do in TYCs.

Similarly, when I asked Ben Wiley in 2005 what he thought were TYCA’s most significant ongoing challenges, he responded that “placing a renewed emphasis on

research and scholarship for the 2-year college professor, and emphasizing our mission of classroom teaching to be as worthy as scholarly research” were crucial.

But how likely is it that the field of composition studies will reconsider the kinds of scholarship it values? Certainly two-year college faculty are not the only ones making this call, nor are they the first. In 1996, Sarah Warshauer Freedman, director of the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at University of California Berkeley, wrote that “new knowledge about learning to write and read has to be generated from many sources—from formal university-based research studies, from classroom-based teacher research, from university-school and workplace collaborations” (183). Although Stephen North advances a very different agenda than does Freedman, he also calls for an expanded view of what counts as research in “The Death of Paradigm Hope.” Claiming that “we will study and report on this wider range of issues in a wider variety of forms” (203), North imagines that before long an ethnography like Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words*, an autobiography like Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary*, even “straight fiction will . . . equally warrant the designation ‘research’” (204).

In *Radical Departures: Composition and Progressive Pedagogy*, Chris Gallagher develops one possible vision that may help two-year college English faculty capitalize on their pedagogical strengths. Grounding his study in the work of John Dewey, Gallagher argues for what he terms “pedagogical progressivism,” a “commitment to putting pedagogy—the reflexive inquiry of teachers and learners working together—at the heart of our work inside and outside the academy” (196). After explaining what a “pedagogy-centered disciplinarity” for composition might look like, Gallagher offers this vision for the future of composition studies:

To be sure, changing what counts as disciplinary knowledge in Composition and Rhetoric will not necessarily change business as usual in the academy at large; we might finally be talking here about simply another kind of grist for the academic mill. Ultimately, though, I believe that as an institution, the academy would be a very different place if pedagogy—the process of shared, reflexive inquiry—truly were at its center. . . . It could help teachers, students, and community members radically rethink who is capable of making knowledge, whose knowledge counts, and how that knowledge gets used. In so doing, it could become a crucial vehicle not only for educational reform, but also for social reform—as Dewey once dreamed. (126–27)

Although Gallagher is not directly addressing two-year college English faculty, the vision he offers expands the kind of research and scholarship that is currently valued in the academy, not only to include, but to actually center on pedagogy. It is a vision that could provide a central place for two-year college English faculty. Gallagher’s model for rethinking what counts as scholarship, coupled with Boyer’s scholarship of teaching, provides two-year English teacher-scholars with a means to give voice to their rich pedagogical experience, and it is very likely that in giving voice to their experience they will be able to claim the status, identity, and confidence that has been so elusive.

Conclusion

Two-year college English faculty have long been plagued by questions of status and identity, and understanding how our predecessors have struggled to establish a professional identity over the decades is an important step in understanding the issues and challenges we still face today. Our history is part of who we are, and we would do well to understand it. In “Composition History and Disciplinarity,” Robert Connors reminds us that “gaining a historical sense means gaining a self” (4). When one considers the voice and status two-year college English faculty had within NCTE before TYCA, it is clear that extraordinary gains have been made. It is also clear that significant challenges remain. If anything, two-year college English faculty finally have a firm foundation, TYCA, from which they can address their most pressing challenges. The leaders of TYCA must now recruit and develop future leaders who understand the struggles of the past and the importance of two-year college faculty working to reconstruct their professional identity—not to help two-year college faculty become more like their university colleagues, but to make known what they already do so well. ◀

Notes

1. This confusion still exists. In a recent e-mail, Eric Bateman, current TYCA chair, wrote that many members of the two-year college regional organizations “assume that they are automatically members of national TYCA” and that many national TYCA members “assume their national membership also enrolls them as members in their regional organizations.”

2. For a discussion of these efforts prior to TYCA’s initiatives, see Andelora’s “The Teacher/Scholar.”

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Jeff Andelora chairs the English department at Mesa Community College in Phoenix and sits on the Executive Board of the Council of Writing Program Administrators. Email: <jandelora@mail.mc.maricopa.edu>.

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