Peer Review of Classroom Teaching:
Addressing Student, Lecturer, and Institutional Improvement Using an Academic Literacy Approach

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Abstract

Academic literacy has continued to gain momentum as a disciplinary field over the past twenty years, employing diverse approaches to include a focus on student, lecturer, and institutional issues. These approaches informed a graded review quiz intervention resulting from peer review feedback of teaching by an expert teacher. Used as stimulus material, these quizzes helped to close gaps in students' knowledge of the previous lesson to cue their understanding of the new lesson material. Correction of these review quizzes took place immediately upon completion in class. Notably, on commencement of these quizzes, students' punctuality and course attendance increased to almost 100%; student engagement, overall student performance, and retention of course material improved considerably by them having to prepare for the quizzes. The lecturer's classroom delivery also benefitted by drawing out quiet students; learning students' names; lecturer-student interaction; and teacher repetition for affirming students' answers, thereby making the intervention effective.

Keywords: peer review of teaching, graded review quizzes, academic literacy (AL)

Introduction

AS HIGHER EDUCATION (HE) BECOMES MORE ACCESSIBLE TO learners both at home and abroad (Murgatrotd 2019), student, lecturer, and institutional improvements are critical to the sustained and successful delivery of HE programmes. In its 2017–2018

annual report, The University of the West Indies (The UWI), St. Augustine Campus identified key areas for student improvements to include attendance, punctuality, academic performance, analytical and critical thinking as well as reading preparation for classes (The UWI, St. Augustine Campus 2018). Additionally, recommendations from its successful bid for institutional accreditation for the period 2018–2025 called for classroom observations to be conducted on a regular basis through ongoing supportive mentoring (Copeland 2018). According to Tóth, Andor and Árva (2017) the quality of faculty pedagogical delivery impacts students' performance as well as their perceptions of the teaching and learning experience at the institution. Understandably, efforts to address excellence in teaching and learning at The UWI are a top priority, given that the institution is rated among the best in the world. The Times Higher Education rankings of the top universities globally for 2018 and 2019 ranked The UWI as follows: 1st in the Caribbean; top 3% in Latin America and Caribbean; and top 4% in the world (The UWI, St. Augustine Campus 2018).

In response to the relevant student, lecturer, and institutional issues raised in The UWI St. Augustine Campus reports, the first author, a lecturer at its School of Education, adopted an academic literacy approach to her interventions in addressing these issues. "Academic Literacies" (AL) is a dynamic field that has gained momentum in the last two decades in higher education as it employs multiple approaches to addressing issues surrounding student performance, lecturer facilitation, and institutional aspirations. For instance, priority is given to lecturers helping students to make shifts in genres (e.g., texts, images, gestures, speech, and writing) during teaching. Such shifts allow for a better understanding of what is considered as knowledge in their disciplines and also enhance written and practical performance. Moreover, academic writing is a foundation for succeeding in HE and applied as a sociocultural practice influenced by context and genre. Academic Literacies also identify with power relations among peers and their abilities to enter into discourse with authority both within and across their respective disciplines. The view that reading and writing practices are seen as varied depending on the issue, context, and genre is another position of AL. Issues relating to the student, lecturer, and institution are also given a focus. These issues include relationships of epistemology and writing, such as plagiarism and course assignments (Farrell and Tighe-Mooney 2015; Lea and Street 2006; Street 2010). The purpose of this paper is to describe the strategies and results within a classroom context that were used to address students, lecturers, and institutional issues, as highlighted in campus reports, using an AL approach.

Background

Established initially as the University College of the West Indies in 1948, The University of the West Indies comprises five campuses: Mona, Jamaica; St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago; Cave Hill, Barbados; The Open Campus; and Five Islands Campus in Antigua and Barbuda. Its vision is to be recognised as a global university of excellence deeply rooted in the Caribbean region (The University of the West Indies 2020). Seeking accreditation is one mechanism by which to achieve this global recognition. Recommendations of the St. Augustine Campus' successful bid for Continuing Institutional Accreditation for another seven years (2018–2025) included areas for improvement such as regular classroom observation as part of a supportive mentoring culture. The St. Augustine campus is noted for its mature quality assurance system that advocates continuous improvement in all its operations (Copeland 2018). Therefore, faculties are expected to undertake initiatives for addressing identified areas needing improvements prior to their respective self-studies in preparation for the next accreditation bid. Additionally, the St. Augustine Campus Annual Report for the academic year 2017–2018 highlighted factors impacting students' academic performance that included the following:

> . . . low student engagement, . . . non-attendance and/or late attendance, . . . poor analytical and critical thinking skills . . . difficulty in the transfer of theoretical concepts . . . and. . . difficulty in getting students to read . . . resulting in poor writing skills. (The UWI, St. Augustine Campus 2018, 52)

In contemplating a classroom observation of an undergraduate course in instructional design that the first author facilitates at the School of Education, St. Augustine Campus, she reflected on challenges within her course. Several students were habitually late, resulting in reduced time for covering current course topics due to repetition of course material to make up for the introductions and reviews missed by the late-comers. Admittedly, late coming is recognised as part of the cultural behaviours of Trinidad's multicultural society. The late Lord Kitchener's calypso – *Anytime is Trinidad time* – resonated with the tolerance of such lateness (Maharajh and Ali 2006). Whether intentional or not, directed reading assignments were seldom done by students. Thus, before moving on to the new material in accordance with the course outline, the responsibility rested mostly on the lecturer for stimulating students' recall of previous material, as best practice requires (Branch 2009: School of Education, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus 2019).

The students' limited reading of the course materials was also reflected in the "shallow" critiques of their peers' lesson plan components that included needs analysis, goals/objectives, instructional strategies and assessment. The students were required to do these critiques as part of their peer review course work (30% of course mark). Practice in reviewing their peers' lesson plan components was intended to prepare students for their final assignment. This assignment was an instructional package comprising three lesson plans (70% of course mark) that integrated technology and was in keeping with set standards of instructional design. Regrettably, several students would usually lose marks for "skimpy" lesson plans that frequently did not reflect a thorough grounding of the academic literacy expected of a final instructional design assignment at the undergraduate level. After reflection of these key challenges, the first author was convinced that a similar peer review of the instructional design course in Semester III, 2017–2018, by an expert teacher, would be helpful for improving the course delivery. Analogously, the first author would also be "walking the talk" like her students who similarly reviewed their peers' lesson plan components as part of their course work for instructional design.

Leveraging Peer Review of Teaching for Improvement

Peer review is a strategy for looking at, examining, commenting on the work of equals, while using techniques to ensure adherence to acceptable procedures – in this case HE pedagogy. There are salient benefits from peer reviewing. Tóth et al (2017) reported that subject content, instructional artefacts and classroom delivery are better assessed by peers in the similar field. They contended that the consequence of screening concepts and procedures to ensure best practice and acceptable approaches was indispensable for mutual learning. Samson and McCrea (2008) noted that peers were usually lifelong learners, currently teaching, and possessed a wealth of experience and expertise in their respective disciplines. These characteristics, coupled with the fact that they were not enrolled in the course being peer reviewed, allowed them to be objective and significantly contribute to the process of improvement in the peer review trajectory. Tóth, Andór, and Árva (2017) concluded from their study findings that nurturing a peer reviewing culture was vital for promoting quality assurance, which in turn stimulated transformation in teaching and learning by encouraging more student-centred pedagogy.

The shift in classroom practice from teacher-centred to student-centered learning can present new challenges, particularly in HE. It demands professional learning,

supportive mentoring and consistent critical reflection (De Lisle 2017b; Stake, Conteras, and Arbesu 2017) to include pedagogical peer review. Nurturing teacher quality within schools and universities is vital for acquiring systemic excellence (The Caribbean Community Task Force for Teacher Education 2013; De Lisle 2017a; Stake, Conteras, and Arbesu 2017; Tóth, Andor, and Árva 2017). Professional learning positions the teacher as the central learner and is superior to outmoded professional development, which excludes critical self-reflection of the teaching-learning process or reflexivity (Cook 2015). Reflexivity, an effort to continually examine one's sociocultural milieu and other personal factors (Creswell 2014) encourages teachers to improve pedagogical quality. The sociocultural nature of professional learning is rooted in theoretical perspectives of Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura 1986). He demonstrated that social motivation showed increased instructional self-efficacy in teachers when they believed their capabilities mirrored their pedagogical competencies.

Pedagogical peer review allows for the development of self-efficacy through supportive teacher mentoring. Teacher mentors are veteran colleagues socialising peers into delivering professional pedagogies using varied approaches such as interpersonal collaboration, modelling, and mutual learning in one-to-one or group settings for honing best practices in the classroom (Aktas 2018; The Caribbean Community Task Force for Teacher Education 2013; Galamay-Cachola, Aduca, and Calauagan 2018; Stuckey, Collins, Patrick, Grove, and Ward 2019).Thus, mentor teacher support and peer reviewing are not mutually exclusive, but instead are combined to promote collaborative learning. When practitioners are given accurate, consistent feedback by teacher mentors and relevant specialists for reflection, they are motivated to act on such feedback that can potentially transform their practice (Galamay-Cachola, Aduca, and Calauagan 2018).

Two peer review models were engaged in the peer review exercise of the first author: the developmental model and the "peer reviewing peer" model (Tóth et al 2017). In the developmental model, a pedagogical expert with experience in teacher mentor education and mentor supervision at the primary, secondary, tertiary and national levels conducted the classroom observations. She is also the second author in this paper. In the "peer reviewing peer" model, the said expert who worked as a part-time lecturer at the first author's institution doubled as colleague appraising colleague. There were four sessions of three hours each when the first author's classroom practice was observed on the following dates: 04 June 2018; 11 June 2018; 18 June 2018; and 20 June 2018. The peer reviewer drew on her 40-plus years of experience using different instruments for classroom observations. The

following key areas of classroom practice were observed and assessed on a scale of 1–5 where 1= poor; 2 = unsatisfactory; 3 = satisfactory; 4 = good; and 5 = very good:

- *Student Concerns* – seeking students' interests, being helpful and open to their needs
- *Quality of Lesson Plan* – topic, number of students, previous lesson, and level of detail
- *Teaching Concepts* – use of andragogy, and Bloom's revised/Digital taxonomy
- *Organisation of Materials* – logic, sequence, balance, scaffolding
- *Clarity of Delivery* – voice, use of set, thoroughness, explanation, handling distractions, and reflexivity
- Quality of Presentation – use of materials, student involvement, and topic relevance
- *Questions Skills* – use of cues, higher/lower order questions, and pauses
- *Classroom Management* – use of classroom space and enthusiasm for interacting with class: equity in student interaction; power relations and diversity accommodation.

The peer reviewer's report highlighted both strengths and weaknesses of classroom practice for the instructional design course taught by the first author for her further reflection, teacher development, and aspirations for excellence. Table 1 provides a summary of the key areas observed of classroom practice, grades awarded, and sample comments from the second author and peer reviewer.

Strengths such as very good teaching concepts, good organisation of materials and classroom management were underscored in the peer review. Areas for improvement included the conspicuous number of late-comers, curbing dominant voices, learning students' names, and more teacher repetition. Appreciating the peer reviewer's comprehensive report and noting the need for improvement, the first author was motivated by the strengths highlighted and eager to explore strategies for addressing weaknesses as reflected in the social learning and teacher mentoring literature (Aktas 2018; Bandura 1986; Galamay-Cachola, Aduca, and Calauagan 2018; Tóth et al 2017). While the first author was able to challenge students to practise synthesis and reflection, it took a lot of effort as she had to give several cues for them to recall concepts from the previous lesson, because they did not habitually do independent reading of course content. The importance of AL to the success of students' performance, coupled with one of its multiple approaches

Table 1. Summary of peer review report for classroom practice

Peer Review Elements	Grade Awarded Out of 5	Sample Comments
Student concerns	4	*…conspicuous number of latecomers…17 at times, who asked …questions already answered…know…student names.*
Quality of lesson plan	4	*… set inductions, evaluation and closure in every lesson…good modelling for student teachers.*
Teaching concepts	5	*Bloom's Traditional & Digital taxonomy: Students were challenged to practise evaluation, synthesis, reflectivity and reflexivity without realising it…*
Organisation of materials	4.5	*Logic and sequence were fine… a pity… students were not early…*
Clarity of delivery	3	*…there could be more teacher repetition for the tardy students…*
Quality of presentation	3.5	*… valiant efforts to involve students in set inductions, body of lessons, evaluations, and closures of all lessons…*
Questioning skills	3.5	*… not much effort to curb the dominant voices.*
Classroom management	4	*…monitored the classroom closely by walking… making eye contact… keeping momentum… engaging your audience…*
Overall grade	4	*A salutary effort… Our best efforts are… a work in progress. Keep striving for excellence…*

Source: Medina-Charles 2018

in viewing reading and writing practices as varied depending on issue, context, and genre (Lea and Street 2006; Street 2010), led to this approach being used in crafting the chosen intervention.

Leveraging Academic Literacies for Improvement

The UWI St. Augustine Campus Bold Strokes Annual Report for 2017–2018 showed that one factor impacting students' performance across faculties is their lack of reading, resulting in diminished writing skills (52). Rose (2016) noted a similar concern about criticisms from within higher education and employers on the questionable quality of students' writing. These different contexts resonate with the approach in AL that views reading and writing in varied contexts, not merely as technical constructions but also culture-bound (Lea and Street 2006). Academic literacies evolved from two models. One is the study skills model, which takes a mechanistic approach based on superficial contextual language transmission. The other is the academic socialisation model, which is concerned with homogeneous reproduction of rules operationalised in given disciplines after students are inducted into the academic culture (Lea and Street 2006; Street 2010). Both these models fall short of the AL model, which surpasses cognitive socialisation. According to Lea and Street (2006), AL embraces " . . . effective uses of literacy as more complex, dynamic, nuanced, situated, and involving both epistemological issues and social processes including power relations among people and institutions, and social identities" (228). This broad palette of uses of academic literacy augurs well for the multicultural nature of the "Trinbagonian" classroom, which "supports the premise that students learn better in a diverse educational environment (Campbell-Whatley, Merriweather, Lee, and Toms 2016, 2). The breadth and depth of AL far surpasses the first two models because it encompasses institutions, for example, university aspirations and its administration with requirements such as plagiarism policies (Lea and Street 2006; Street 2010). The plurality of AL is crafted to sensitise students to the various genres such as notes, letters, essays, areas of overlap, and dynamic and diverse contexts, so that they will be applying these as the AL approach evolves.

In using the AL lens, the context of late-coming as part of the Trinidadian culture (Maharajh and Ali 2006) would need to be factored into the planned intervention. In this light, it would be difficult to change the late-coming embedded in the national culture, so the focus instead was to change the classroom culture of late-coming. Research on students' late-coming revealed several factors to include household chores and care giving (Jumare, Maina, and Ankoma-Sey 2015). However, the latter would not necessarily apply to the current classroom context as late-coming was part of the national culture. Moreover, students were not expected to indicate their time of arrival in the attendance register. The use of a

graded review quiz at the start of the class session was advised by an international colleague, who found it to work in a higher education setting in addressing late-coming.

This intervention would prompt students' explicit reading of the course material in preparation for the graded review quiz in stimulating recall of the previous lesson material. It would also be useful for acquiring the AL needed in instructional design and for using the Technology Integration Plan (TIP). Students apply the latter to peer reviews of their lesson plan components as well as in analysing correct answers to the quiz questions immediately upon completion of the quiz. The multiple choice quiz is acknowledged as a valid form of formative assessment for learning effectiveness at the beginning of a ". . . learning process, . . . to assess the understanding and synthesis of the prior lesson's material" (Crockett and Churches 2017, 12; Branch 2009). Examples of the types of multiple choice questions given to develop students' academic literacy for instructional design were as follows:

- A purpose of learning theories is to help teachers _____. (*Informational*)

  A. solve students' learning problems
  B. understand how students learn
  C. determine students' performance

- Recognising that your video analysis activity needed a prior briefing to better foster discussion after students viewed the video fits into which of the following phases of the TIP model? (*Analytical*)

  A. Post-Analysis/Revisions
  B. Planning for Technology/Integration
  C. Analysis of Learning/Teaching Needs

- The teacher moved on to lesson 3 but students still did not fully understand lesson 2 is a lack of which of the following in planning instruction? (*Evaluative*)

  A. Stimulating recall
  B. Stimulating media
  C. Stimulating closure

Table 2 summarises the AL elements chosen for the graded review quiz intervention in addressing student, lecturer, and institutional issues (Lea and Street 2006; Street 2010).

Table 2. Academic literacies (AL) lens applied to specific student-lecturer-institutional contexts

AL Elements	Student	Lecturer	Institution
Academic reading and writing would vary depending on issue, context and culture as well as genre (e.g., type of text and mode)	Moving from implicit reading of course material to explicit reading in preparation for introductory review quiz to inform students' written peer reviews	Moving from teacher-dependent recall of previous lesson topics to animated student-led discussion during correction of course content quizzes	Addressing challenge of students' limited reading of course materials as that results in diminished writing skills as identified in annual campus report
Social practice and collaboration (e.g., feedback and team work)	Enhanced student peer review of lesson components and epistemological acuity of instructional design (ID)	Supportive mentoring and peer review of teaching for improving practice to include culture of lateness within the classroom context	Peer review of teaching responds to institutional accreditation recommendation for classroom observation and enhancing analytical and critical thinking of students as an identified need in annual campus report
Epistemology (e.g., knowledge of what is researched)	Knowledge of subject matter for ID as well as better command of the genre switching, such as reading of course materials informing written peer reviews	Knowledge of using the academic literacy lens to address students' needs to include a better understanding of ID practices and principles	Addressing identified student difficulty in campus report with students' transfer of learning for theoretical concepts and reading of course materials using AL to bridge this gap
Ideological Contexts (heterogeneity in students' standpoints in Caribbean contexts)	Reasoned discussion among students for instructional design quiz answers prompting diverse thinking and active participation	Developing an appreciation for students' unique standpoints and accommodation made for this diversity in the pedagogical space	Developing the core value of "diversity" of The UWI for fostering an openness to different ideas and perspectives in its work/study environment and dignity of all persons

Source: Ferdinand-James and Medina-Charles 2019, based on AL concepts and principles from Lea and Street 2006; Street 2010.

Peer Review and Academic Literacies Informing Practice

Administering the 10-minute graded review quizzes on instructional design components at the beginning of the five out of six class sessions resulted in almost 100 per cent student punctuality. Just two out of the 53 (3.7%) enrollees in the Semester III Instructional Design course (May–July 2019) arrived approximately 5–7 minutes late in each quiz iteration. This was in contrast to the previous year's (2018) class attendance as shown in Table 3 where 29 (63%) arrived on time and an average of 17 were very late to almost absent. The correction of these graded review quizzes immediately upon completion added an element of excitement and engagement to the classroom interaction. Students could be seen jumping out of their seats and cheered on by their classmates when volunteering the correct answers to rotated quiz questions.

Table 3. Average arrival times: 5:00–8:00 p.m. for instructional design undergraduate students as observed by peer reviewer (Semester 3, 2017–2018)

Total Number of Students	Avg. No. of Students Present at Start of Class at 5:00 p.m.	Avg. No. of Very Late Students at 6:00 p.m.	Avg. No. of Extremely Late Students at 7:00 p.m.	Avg. No. of Students Almost Absent at 7:30 p.m.
46 (100%)	29 (63%)	5 (10.8%)	7 (15.2%)	5 (10.8%)

Source: Medina-Charles 2018

Feedback from students echoing this excitement and engagement was as follows: one enthusiastic student commented to the first author in a class session that she was *awesomefied* by learning to create and integrate digital games into her teaching. Another appreciative student stated: "Thank you . . . your efforts and support throughout this course was a meaningful one under your tutelage" (Demika Guevara-Lawrence, email message to first author, July 17, 2019). A third student admitted:

> I am aware that I did not commit to excellence . . . but I want to say that I was greatly impressed with . . . the weeks and the support you provided. It was felt and admired. The strategy of the quiz at the beginning of class was a new experience for me and as [sic] exciting as it was informative. I found you always well prepared and the course extremely well organised in a way that also allowed for private exploration. It was a pleasure experiencing you teach! (Kenwyn Murray, email message to author, July 18, 2019).

Alternatively, students engaged in animated discussion when debating with their peers and lecturer on what should be the correct response to quiz questions. These rotated exchanges among students allowed for more of them to participate voluntarily in this introductory review of the previous lesson material. Written submissions on their peer reviews for various lesson plan components also showed a greater command of the academic literacy and theoretical concepts for instructional design as a subject. This improvement was reflected in the notable increases in their pass rates to include the following: from 2 A-'s in the 2017–2018 Semester III to 11 in the 2018–2019 Semester III, and from 4 B's in 2017–2018 Semester III to 11 in the 2018–2019 Semester III as shown in Table 4.

In the lecturer's context, students arriving on time and taking responsibility for reading the previous lecture material reduced the amount of time and effort she previously spent on helping them to recall this information. The change in culture from tardiness to punctuality allowed more time for focusing on the delivery of the new material. The rotated exchanges for students to volunteer answers to the quiz questions allowed the first author to learn students' names and curb dominant voices by drawing out the quieter students. She also appreciated and accommodated

Table 4. Grade distribution for 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 semesters III Instructional Design courses

Grades	No. Awarded 2017–2018	No. Awarded 2018–2019
A+	4	4
A	8	11
A-	2	11
B+	5	7
B	4	11
B-	5	3
C+	7	0
C	5	3
F1	2	3
F2	1	0
F3	1	0

Source: The UWI, School of Education, St. Augustine Campus, 2017–2018 Semester III and 2018–2019 Semester III in-house mark sheets.

the many diverse standpoints in students' responses, while simultaneously strengthening her own understanding of ID concepts and principles. There was also growth in her own teacher efficacy as the feedback from the peer review done the year before bore fruit in the follow-up intervention and improvements seen in student engagement and punctuality.

In the institutional context, challenges of limited reading of course material that resulted in students' diminished writing skills, as identified in the 2017–2018 annual St. Augustine Campus Report, were now increasingly reversed in this specific course context. The peer-review- of-teaching exercise and follow-up graded review quiz intervention addressed the recommendation in The UWI's 2018–2025 accreditation report. As such, classroom observation was conducted on a regular basis as part of supportive teacher mentoring (Copeland 2018). The students improved in their written peer reviews that included transfer of theoretical concepts. Furthermore, their animated discussion with diverse perspectives on quiz answers helped to bridge the identified gap in their analytical and critical thinking skills (see Table 2).

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this research paper was to describe the strategies and results within a classroom context that were used to address student, lecturer, and institutional issues as highlighted in campus reports, using an academic literacies approach (Lea and Street 2006; Street 2010). This approach to the intervention of the graded review quizzes aided students to bridge the gap for reading course materials as well as change the classroom culture to one of punctuality instead of tardiness. These improvements demonstrated the student-centredness and social practice elements inherent in the AL approach that when applied can be beneficial to students' academic performance (Rose 2016). The added excitement brought to the learning environment by correcting the quiz immediately afterwards can inspire classroom practitioners to adopt these review quizzes to increase and sustain student engagement (Street 2010). In addition, this strategy can also be employed to help students read and grasp the AL needed as a foundation for undertaking and potentially succeeding in assignments within their respective disciplines, as shown in Table 4 (Lea and Street 2006).

When students succeed in their educational goals, classroom practitioners are motivated to try new strategies, such as peer review of teaching and graded review quizzes (Samson and McCrea 2008). This willingness to improve in practice also

results in their own self-efficacy as evident in the authors' application of the AL lens in this study depicted in Table 2 (Cook 2016; Street 2010). The plurality of the AL lens allows the teacher to understand shifts in academic literacies such as moving from teacher-dependent recall to student-centred animated discussions informed by prior reading of course material, as illustrated in Table 2. The challenge of successfully making these shifts can further empower teachers to explore new shifts for problem-solving and research as demonstrated in Table 2 (Lea and Street, 2006).

When institutions support classroom practitioners in their use of AL, new and innovative ways are explored for addressing institutional issues such as student underperformance and late coming. Workable solutions to these issues can then inform decision making for curriculum policy and practice (Rose 2016). The results of the current intervention of graded review quizzes at the beginning of a course demonstrate one solution to late-coming as evident in the noted increase in student punctuality from an average of 17 students late in 2017–2018, Semester III to two students arriving approximately only seven minutes late in Semester III, 2018–2019. The Academic Literacies approach can be used as a tool for change in addressing student, lecturer, and institutional issues for achieving academic success over time (Stuckey et al 2019; Tóth et al 2017).

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