

Discourse Analysis as Potential for Re-Visioning Music Education

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ABSTRACT

Discourse analysis holds great potential for re-visioning the field of music education. This paper explores works from Foucault, Blommaert, Scollon and Scollon, as well as others, to suggest a theoretical and methodological approach to analyzing discourse in settings of music transmission that takes into consideration who we are, what we do, and how we do it. Discourse is defined in this paper as meaningful, mediated language-in-place. By analyzing acts of speech as well as cultural objects (such as instruments, mallets, and bows) and concepts (such as a conducting gesture or solfege syllables) used as mediational means in situ, we can reveal how discursive sources of power dominance, inequality, and bias are initiated, perpetuated, (re)produced, and transformed in sites of music transmission. Analyzing such models may help develop a more flexible way of understanding and visioning music education—one that blurs boundaries between musics, ways of knowing music, and spaces where musicking takes place.

Keywords: *discourse, discourse analysis, music transmission, power/resistance, ethnography, globalization, contextualization, uptake, indexicality, intertextuality, mediated action, mediational means, nexus analysis, social practice.*

This paper begins with a premise that each person's musical education is made of multiple and diverse experiences that occur in settings both in and out of school (Campbell, 2002; Green, 2002, 2005; Jaffurs, 2004, 2006). Nevertheless, when we speak and write about music education, we often restrict the kinds of music, ways of music transmission, and spaces for music education that we consider. We engage in a process of legitimating music education: we privilege particular musics, such as those of bands, orchestras and choirs, along with one approach to knowing music—Western notation. Other kinds of music, such as dance, ritual, and popular music are limited or non-existent in discussions, and the value of aural transmission and embodied ways of knowing is

often diminished. Effects of this legitimation on music makers, whether they are teachers or students, can include alienation from music, and from others in social relationships of music making.

How do we understand the effects of this legitimation and engage as teachers, practitioners, and researchers in re-visioning our field to be more relevant, inclusive and understanding of multiple ways of knowing and experiencing music? We can begin with a process of answering who we are; what we know and understand music to be; and how we experience and transmit this knowledge and understanding. We can consider the tools for communicating meaning both implicitly and explicitly within and outside our classrooms. We can consider language and music as social goods, holding certain significance and enacting certain social, cultural, and historical activities and realities. We can consider how our tools of communication impact our identities and relationships; and how we use them to connect, make relevant, and privilege different ways of knowing and believing. In short, we can analyze our discourse.

Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

Many have contributed to the theory of analyzing discourse (see Blommaert, 2005 for an historical overview; Bloome & Clark, 2006; Fairclough, 1992a, 2003; Gee, 1990, 2005; Hanks, 1990; O'Connor, 2001; Rymes, 1996, 2001; Rogers, 2004; Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, and Joseph, 2005; Scollon & Scollon, 2001, 2003, 2004; Wertsch, 2002; Wodak, 2005; Wortham, 2001), some have developed approaches for analyzing discourse (Bloome & Clark, Fairclough, Gee, Blommaert, Scollon and Scollon) and a few others have looked at discourse in relation to music teaching and learning (Barrett, 1996; Dobbs, 2008; Dunbar-Hall, 2006; Jocuns, 2007; Mantie,

forthcoming; Talbot, 2007, 2008, 2010, forthcoming; Thompson, 2002). Over the course of conducting studies that use discourse analysis in settings for music transmission, I have found that a theoretical and methodological mix of Foucault, Blommaert, Scollon and Scollon has aided me best in helping work out the complexities found in such settings.

Who We Are Matters.

I embrace Foucault because as May (2006) proposes, Foucault's philosophy is focused on the question of who we are. "This is not the only question he elaborates. Yet it is the one he asks most doggedly, the one that is never far from the surface of any of his works" (p. 2). Discourse, according to Foucault (1972), "is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined" (p. 117). However, discourse is of lesser concern to Foucault than "discursive practices," which are bodies of "anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative functions" (Ibid.). Foucault also had interest in how discursive practices play out in socio-cultural systems.

Think of the systems in which many of us operate. We are members of a support unit of friends and family, we hold responsibilities in institutions of education, possibly answer to an accrediting body, perhaps are members of a union or political party, and contribute monetarily to organizations and/or government at local, state, and federal levels. Membership in these systems, whether voluntary or not, come with guidelines and tools (some more stringent than others) on how to act, communicate, and operate; and

this is known as discursive practice. Foucault is interested in analyzing these discursive practices in order to reveal (ab)uses of power and resistance. Though Foucault is interested in power, it is important to note that he does not develop a theory of power; instead, he describes how power works in particular historical situations. He claims that power: 1) is not a possession but a relationship; 2) is not exterior to other relations; that is, power entwines with practices in complex ways; 3) is present in all aspects of our everyday lives, at the micro levels of social relations; and 4) is accompanied by resistance (1978, pp. 94-95).

Ethnography, Context, and Globalization

I embrace Blommaert (2005) because I have an interest in ethnography and globalization. Blommaert, who sees himself following Foucault, indicates that discourse comprises “all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments of use” (p. 3). Blommaert (2005) outlines five basic theoretical principles rooted in linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics that have import for discourse analysis in music education. As you read these principles consider replacing the word *language* with *music*.

1. In analyzing language-in-society, the focus should be on *what language use means to its users*. We can, and must, start from the observation that language matters to people, that people make investments in language, and that this is a crucial part of what they believe language does for them and what they do with language. Consequently, we need to find out *how* language matters to people. . . .
2. We have to be aware that *language operates differently in different environments*, and that, in order to understand how language works, we need to contextualize it properly, to establish the relations between language usage and the particular purposes for which and conditions under which it operates. Every ‘model’ offered as a blanket explanation should be critically checked against the specifics of the case we are investigating.

- This goes for language, its structure, and functions, but also for society, power, history, and so on. . . .
3. Our unit of analysis is not an abstract ‘language’ but the *actual and densely contextualized forms in which language occurs in society*. We need to focus on varieties in language, for such variation is at the core of what makes language and meaning social. . . . One uneasy by-effect of this sociolinguistic use is that we shall often be at pains to find a name for the particular forms of occurrence of language. The comfort offered by words such as ‘English’, ‘Zulu’, or ‘Japanese’ is something we shall have to miss. We shall have to address rather complex, equivocal, messy forms of language.
 4. Language users have *repertoires* containing different sets of varieties, and these repertoires are the material with which they engage in communication’ they will determine what people can do with language. People, consequently, are not entirely ‘free’ when they communicate, they are constrained by the range and structure of their repertoires, and the *distribution of elements of the repertoires in any society is unequal*. Such inequality of repertoires requires us to use a sociolinguistic backdrop for discourse analysis because what people actually produce as discourse will be conditioned by their sociolinguistic background. The notion of ‘voice’ must be situated at the intersection of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis. . . .
 5. We have to conceive of communication events as ultimately influenced by the *structure of the world system*. In an era of globalization, the threshold of contextualization in discourse analysis or sociolinguistics can no longer be a single society (or even less a single event) but needs to include the relationships between different societies and the effect of these relationships on repertoires of language users and their potential to construct voice. The world system is characterized by structural inequality, and this also counts for linguistic resources (Wallerstein 1983, 2001; Blommaert 2003a). This fifth principle is a perspective on the four other principles: it adds a new dimension to the various foci of attention derived from the critical pool. (pp. 14-15, italics in original)

In elucidating these principles, Blommaert shows a departure from mainstream Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (see Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 1995), and takes a turn toward ethnography. Because music, like language, is a social good and social practice that carries meaning and value in social context, I find Blommaert’s work extremely useful in analyzing discourse surrounding music teaching and learning,

because ultimately using ethnography within our studies helps us reveal who we are in situ.

Several other theoretical ideas are important to analyzing discourse and are implied in Blommaert's five principles. Contextualization, uptake, indexicality, and intertextuality are frames for utterances. They suggest ways in which human beings make sense of and make judgments about talk on the basis of something more than words themselves. This is particularly important in a musical setting because actual utterances may be few in comparison to many musical actions that do not take place with words. These frames for utterances also suggest that talk may acquire powerful effect as it is used socially, culturally, and politically.

Contextualization. The notion of contextualization was developed by Gumperz (1982, 1992) to account for the ways in which people 'make sense' in interaction, whether meanings were said or 'unsaid'. Context and contextualization are dialogical phenomena. Blommaert (2005) explains:

It is not the speaker alone who offers context to statements and generates context, but the other parties in the communication process do so as well. And often what counts or what is most consequential is the contextualization performed by the one who receives and decodes the message – the *uptake*. (p. 43, italics in original).

Uptake. Uptake is made dialogical and occurs as part of a sequence of interaction: one actor offers a sign, cue, gesture, object, or utterance to be interpreted by others. There is a temporal dimension to the process of uptake as well. Words or utterances received can only have meaning after they are offered up for receiving; however, contextualization cues offered by a speaker may not always be noticed or understood by receivers. Blommaert comments:

Value, meaning, and function are a matter of uptake, they have to be granted by others on the basis of the prevailing orders of indexicality, and increasingly also on the basis of their real or potential ‘market value’ as a cultural commodity. The functions which particular ways of speaking will perform, and the functions of the particular linguistic resources by means of which they are accomplished, become less and less a matter of surface inspection in terms of commonsense linguistic categories. [Therefore] some of the biggest errors (and injustices) may be committed by simply projecting locally valid functions onto the ways of speaking of people who are involved in transnational flows. (2005, p. 72)

Advancements in technology, communication, and transportation and increases in global trade has connected us to endless musical soundscapes. Thus this idea of transnational flow (what I would label more appropriately cross-cultural flow) has real import into current studies examining discourse in music settings across the globe. For example, English language acquired by Balinese may offer them considerable prestige and access to higher social positions in Indonesia. At the same time, English, when spoken in the United States in the same ways by the same Balinese, may become an object of stigmatization. What is considered highly valuable in Denpasar may be considerably less valuable in Chicago. The same is true for music. For example, the *Balinese Gamelan* performed in Tabanan, Bali may not carry the same value when performed in a university setting in Urbana, Illinois.

Indexicality. Gumperz (2001) indicates that our conversations are filled with inferences that rely on two types of verbal signs: “symbolic signs that convey information via the well-known lexical and grammatical rules and indexical signs that signal by direct association between sign and context” (p. 221). These latter verbal signs are often referred to as indexes—signs that have some kind of existential relation with what they reference (Burks 1949). Demonstrative pronouns like *this*, *that*, and *those*; personal pronouns like *I* and *you*; temporal expressions like *now*, *then*, *yesterday*; placement

expressions like *here* and *there*; and spatial expressions like *up*, *down*, *below*, *above* are all words that index a particular object or idea that exists in a time and place.

According to Duranti (2007), “the property of these expressions has been called **indexicality** and has been shown to extend to much of linguistic communication” (p. 17, bold in original). Duranti further explains that “an expression like “*this table* includes an imaginary arrow to something recognizable, most likely something perceptually available to both the speaker and the addressee” (p. 18). Further complications arise when researchers consider linguistic resources in conversations that employ more than one type of language. Duranti indicates

In bilingual communities, where language switching is a daily affair, the choice of a particular language over another may index one’s ethnicity or a particular political stance toward the relation between language and ethnicity (2007, p. 18).

Bilingualism or multilingualism is particularly important to current music classroom experiences in most parts of the United States. For example, many people commonly converse in English when interacting with teachers or officials at various institutions; however, they switch to a more commonly used language in their communities during daily transactions. Language and code switching is common for almost every person in some capacity and is a matter of indexicality. Duranti (2007) sums up:

Indexicality ties language usage firmly to social and cultural practices. To say that words are indexically related to some “object” or aspect of the world out there means to recognize that words carry with them a power that goes beyond the description and identification of people, objects, properties, and events. It means to work at identifying how language becomes a tool through which our social and cultural world is constantly described, evaluated, and reproduced. (p. 19)

As music educators we need to be aware that many of our students and teachers not only code switch with language, but with music as well. For example, in a study I conducted (Talbot, 2007) of an urban 8th grade female's in and out of school choral experiences, the participant regularly helped her fellow classmates negotiate learning through written notation by switching between aural and written forms of musical transmission. Similarly, in a recent study I conducted (Talbot, 2010) of a Balinese professor teaching gamelan at an American institution, the participant regularly language and music switched between Western and Balinese musical terms, signs, and teaching techniques. This type of switching happens every day when we interact with new people in new settings and try to communicate information—we uncover pathways in order to create mutual understanding.

Intertextuality. When we speak, we produce the words of others, constantly citing and re-citing expressions and recycling meanings that are already available. Intertextuality is a term borrowed from literary theory, but Blommaert explains how it figures into discourse analysis:

Every utterance has a history of (ab)use, interpretation, and evaluation, and this history sticks to the utterance. . . . Intertextuality grounds discourse analysis firmly into histories of use—histories that are social, cultural, and political, and which allow the synchronic use of particular expressions to acquire powerful social, cultural, and political effects. It invites us to look beyond the boundaries of particular communicative events and see where the expressions used there actually come from, what their sources are, whom they speak for, and how they relate to traditions of use. (p. 46)

Nexus Analysis and Mediational Means

I embrace Scollon and Scollon (2004) because they take practice into account in a process of nexus analysis. The researchers draw upon Wertsch (1991) and his central

claim that “human action typically employs ‘mediational means’ such as cultural tools and language, and these mediational means shape the action in essential ways” (p. 12).

Wertsch continues:

It is possible, as well as useful, to make an analytic distinction between action and mediational means, but the relationship between action and mediational means is so fundamental that it is more appropriate, when referring to the agent involved, to speak of “individual(s)-acting-with-mediational-means” than to speak simply of “individual(s).” Thus, the answer to the question of who is carrying out the action will invariably identify the individual(s) in the concrete situation *and* the mediational means employed. (Ibid.)

Mediated action and mediational means. Wertsch (1991) acknowledged his debt to Vygotsky for the terms *mediated action* and *mediational means*, but he claimed that “Vygotsky relied heavily on the genetic method. He first examined some form of action, such as problem solving, and then introduced a new mediational means in an attempt to examine the resulting changes.” (p. 32) With his sociocultural approach to psychology, Wertsch intended to extend Vygotsky’s definitions with examples from anthropology, thereby analyzing the “individual or individuals *acting in conjunction with mediational means.*” He contended that “when a central role is attributed to mediational means, it becomes essential to specify the forces that shape them (and hence, mediated action)” (p. 33). Wertsch theorized that “although individual—indeed psychological—factors place certain limits on mediational means, the sociocultural approach I have been outlining suggests that cultural, historical, and institutional factors also play an essential role” (Ibid.).

By drawing on Wertsch, Scollon and Scollon (2004) foreground study of cultural objects and concepts as mediational means. They recommend separating a mediational means from language surrounding it and critically examining its history of use (p. 165).

This kind of analysis has particular import for music transmission studies because, in principle, music transmission can occur completely without language, typically when a leader or teacher offers a model and students attempt to imitate it. This can include a teacher's "my turn, your turn" gestures, mirroring, or vocables that index particular playing techniques and sounds.

Social practice. Where mediated actions occur regularly and in a particular context, Scollon and Scollon say they are indicative of a *social practice*. The researchers do not use this term to mean a broadly construed practice, such as the practice of medicine, but instead they prefer "to use it in the narrowest sense of a single, recognizable, repeatable action such as the practice of handling an object, filling in a form, switching on a computer, or answering a direct question in an interview" (p. 13). Bourdieu (1977) referred to such actions as *habitus*, but Scollon and Scollon prefer to use Nishida's term *historical body* (1958) because it situates action more precisely in the individual body. These are personal habits "that come to feel so natural that one's body carries out actions seemingly without being told" (p. 13). Scollon and Scollon (2001) point out that this idea of embodiment is central in Foucault's writings (1972, 1978); "that within sociocultural and historical periods are particular ways of seeing, analyzing, and acting in the world which distribute power such that participants in these periods take on the discipline of living out their periods' discourses" (p. 542).

Social practices are carried out at some real, material place in the world by human social actors. In these places, complex aggregates (or nexuses) of many discourses circulate. Some discourses have little relevance to specific social practices, while others are directly relevant. Scollon and Scollon use the term *discourses in place* to "call

attention to all of these discourses and to call attention to the need to study empirically which discourses are relevant or foregrounded and which discourses are irrelevant (for the moment at least) or backgrounded for the social action(s) in which [the researcher is] interested” (2004, p. 14). Thus, for Scollon and Scollon, “each actor is observed at a site of engagement which is a particular moment of time in a particular place with particular others present . . . [and] with characteristic discourses in place. When the social action is routinely taken at a recognizable time and place we call it a nexus of practice” (p. 14).

Nexus analysis, as defined by Scollon and Scollon (2004), is an approach to discourse analysis that is particularly apt for studies of music transmission. Like Blommaert, Scollon and Scollon turn to ethnography to document and analyze local, *social practices*. Balinese gamelan in a community setting, guitar instruction at a local music store, recorder in an elementary general music class are settings with such social practices. Scollon and Scollon are concerned with what language means to its users, and they emphasize mediated actions of social practices. Like Foucault, Scollon and Scollon are concerned with tracing histories of mediational means, such as musical instruments, vocables, notation, and conducting gestures, and they ask how current use is related to historical usages. Finally, the researchers are concerned with uncovering how power relationships are woven into social practices at a micro level in complex ways.

Scollon and Scollon (2004) provide a fieldguide for conducting nexus analyses. Among their recommendations are:

1. Enter into a *zone of identification* with key participants. (p. 153).

2. Map the cycles of people, places, discourses, objects, and concepts in place. Ask *How did these participants all come to be placed at this moment and in this way to enable or carry out this action?* (pp. 159-160).
3. Explore objects and concepts as mediational means. At this stage, the researcher treats the mediational means separate from the discourse and explores how they are used and how they have become internalized as discourse.
 - How did this object come to be present for this action; i.e. through whose agency?
 - What is its history of use?
 - How thoroughly internalized is this mediational means and by which social actors?
 - How widely is a concept shared among the participants?
 - What is its history of use?
 - How fully internalized is the concept?
 - Is it internalized about the same or equally for all participants?
 - Are objects or concepts the result of a resemiotization? The agenda of a meeting, for example, is normally a printed text which has resemiotized discussions among a few key administrators or managers which is then used as a mediational means for the conduct of the meeting by all participants. Similarly, a word such as learning-disabled or non-compliant may be used to resemiotize a long history of social interactions (p. 165).
4. Focus on interpersonal relationships and participation structure. Ask: *What positions and alignments are participants taking up in relationship to each other, to the discourses in which they are involved, the places in which these discourses occur, and to the mediational means they are using, and the mediated actions which they are taking?* (p. 174).
5. Ask: *How are social power interests produced in this discourse?* This includes all the forms of discourse: speech of the participants in mediated actions; texts used as mediated means; images and other semiotic systems used as mediational means; the

historical body of the participants and in the practices in which they engage; the design of the environment and objects (p. 173).

Implications

So what does this all mean and how is it useful for music teachers, practitioners, and researchers? In order for us to re-vision our field, we need examples that explain who we are, what we do, and how we do it. We can reveal this through exploring our discursive practices; but to do so we need a robust theory and method of analyzing discursive practices specific to settings of music transmission where talk is coupled with and contextualized by actions of music making.

Awareness of the ways in which discourse travels. Because transformations in the world will continue to push us towards revisions of our old and established instrumentarium, the theory and method used needs to take account for new patterns of communication that might be emerging as part of a globalization process. Blommaert's theory of discourse offers us the idea that value and meaning of discourse are matters of uptake. If teachers in sites of music transmission become aware of the ways in which discourse travels, they might switch readily between languages and musics. Suppose, for example, an elementary instrumental music teacher hopes to acculturate his students toward Western music notation. Further, suppose he recognizes that many of his students have legacies of participation in Gospel choirs where an aural call-and-response kind of music learning is common. If he finds that a student is struggling to learn Western notation, the teacher can reach into the student's own aurally based musicianship to bring him toward Western notation.

Small resistance to centering institutions. Because institutions where music transmission takes place may have a centering function, we need a theory and method that takes into account practices that have social, historical, and political relationship to a particular culture and a particular setting. According to Blommaert (2005), “centering almost always involves either perceptions of or real processes of homogenization and uniformisation” (p. 75). In the face of today’s standardization craze, teachers might find inspiration to resist in ways that enhance learning through hopeful action. For example, imagine that a violin teacher discovers that the common practice at the community school where she is newly employed is that parents drop their children off for a lesson and return thirty minutes later. The violin teacher believes in Suzuki’s philosophy, so she invites parents to an open lesson time, shares Suzuki’s philosophy, and asks parents to be active participants in their children’s violin lessons and daily practicing. The teacher has resisted the standard practices of the community music school, and has brought a bit of her own background and values to the instructional environment.

Consciousness of our own histories and musical resources. Because our histories, contingent as they may be, orient each of us toward knowing music and making music, we need an approach that can help us reveal our histories. As music teachers, awareness of our histories can help us become conscious of the musical resources we bring into the classroom. We can acknowledge the kinds of musical engagement that are satisfying, and we can hope that participants—our students—might find similar satisfaction. Thus for teachers, exploration of our histories and consciousness of our own musical resources may reveal ways of musical knowing and norms of participation worth sharing with others. Envision a Techno fan who deejays a variety of popular music styles

at a club on the weekends. By day, she is a middle school general music teacher. Because she finds sampling, mixing, and (re)creating music satisfying, she believes her young adolescent students might find similar enjoyment through such musical activities. The female deejay may become aware of her own musical resources, and she may hope, through her art, to inspire young people to become informed listeners and consumers of a wide variety of music and media.

We should also consider that human beings engage with musical practices from outside their own legacies of participation not to somehow transpose themselves into a new culture, but to expand their soundscapes, their ways of being musical, and their self-understanding. In other words, we participate in music to learn who we are and become who we are not yet. As teachers, we can recognize that students might derive satisfaction from musical practices and legacies of participation that we share with them, or they might become frustrated with the legacies we share. Indeed, teachers can learn through analyzing discursive practices in their own classrooms that students' satisfaction and frustration, acceptance and resistance will most likely exist at the same moment in a single site of music transmission. If teachers can view themselves and their students as shaped by histories that are contingent rather than inevitable, they can view students' frustration merely as a temporary state of being. Teachers can see the possibility that students might understand, appreciate, and embody new legacies of participation later in their personal histories.

Challenges and Our Future

In sum, I suggest that, in an age of globalization, every site of music transmission is one where several histories of knowing and making music converge. If they are aware of various legacies of participation, teachers and students alike gain freedom to discover who they are and freedom to become who they are not yet through music. Writing on Foucault's philosophy, May (2006) contends:

The complexity of our historical legacy allows us to question some areas of our lives, but not all of them at the same time. We may question aspects of who we have come to be, but we cannot step outside ourselves, leap from our own historical skin to choose our lives from some vantage point beyond the vagaries of our history and context. . . . [but we may] try other ways of being that may turn out to be more tolerable than who we are now. (p. 124)

Music teachers, in all sites of music transmission, may have more freedom than they take up. Using discourse analysis, teachers may discover successful ways to switch between languages, musics, and legacies of participation. At the same time, teachers are free to resist homogenization of practice that comes from a centering institution. Teachers are free to share their cherished ways of knowing and making music with students, just as students and teachers are free to explore new ways of knowing and making music together.

Applying discourse analysis to musical settings is a challenging endeavor because there is often very little talk. Objects (such as instruments, mallets, and bows) and concepts (such as a conducting gesture or solfege syllables) used as mediational means are more common. Sites of music transmission include both talk and mediational means, so there remains a need for a robust sort of analysis to examine talk and mediational means separately, and to then to reconstruct them in the larger discourse. The eclectic

mix of analytical tools brought to bear in this paper have been found to be helpful with analyzing discourse in settings of music transmission; however, the tools might not account for mediational means used in all types of musical settings. Nevertheless, this method of analysis could be used in studies of music transmission to determine its limits. Future research might document historical legacies and their uses, ways in which music is transmitted outside of institutional settings, and models of resistance within institutions, so that teachers can draw inspiration when they face dominant and potentially homogenizing musical practices. Such models may help expand the reach of this paper in developing a more flexible way of understanding music education—one that blurs boundaries between musics, ways of knowing music, and spaces where musicking takes place.

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