

# Chapter 4

## Mentoring as a Pathway to Leadership: A Focus on Nonnative English-Speaking Professionals

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If U.S. academia is a “black box” for all professionals entering it, it’s twice as black for those of us who come from the “outside” (that is, professionals who speak a language other than English as the home language, come from cultures that are not highly represented in academia, or have been educated in countries other than those in the Inner Circle) (Kamhi-Stein, 2004).

This statement, made at a presentation on TESOL teacher preparation and nonnative English-speaking (NNES) professionals at the 2004 TESOL Convention, reflects the way many of us who come from the “outside” feel when we enter U.S. academia. While it is true that many TESOL professionals who are “outsiders” become highly successful, it is also true that the path toward success is stressful and often times may come at the expense of a balanced life. In the case of NNES professionals, we believe that the “black box” can be made “less black” if they are initiated into the profession by mentors who help them deconstruct U.S. academia and give them career counseling and psychosocial support. In this chapter, we describe the mentoring relationship in which we, Luciana, a novice NNES professional from Brazil, and Lía, a more experienced NNES professional from Argentina, have had since 1998. We believe this is a topic that needs to be discussed since, to our knowledge, there are no publications focusing on issues of mentoring NNES professionals for leadership positions.

### INTRODUCTION: FIRST ENCOUNTERS

*Spring 1998:* We met at the first California TESOL (CATESOL) conference colloquium that addressed issues focusing on NNES professionals. Lía organized the colloquium, and Luciana was a member of the audience. As part of the lively

discussion that followed the panel presentation, Luciana, who at that time was a graduate student in a TESOL M.A. program, made a strong statement about the need to create a group in CATESOL that would address issues related to NNES professionals in California. Lía was deeply impressed by Luciana’s eloquence and passion about her ideas. Following the colloquium, in December 1999, a new interest group (IG), Nonnative Language Educators’ Issues (NNLEI), was approved by the CATESOL Board of Directors.

*Spring 2000:* Lía was invited to give a featured talk focusing on issues related to NNES professionals at the 2000 CATESOL conference. Luciana attended the session and participated actively in it. Toward the end of the session, Lía mentioned that she was editing a special *CATESOL Journal* volume focusing on NNES professionals. Luciana offered to contribute an article to the volume. Once again, Lía was impressed by Luciana’s determination and motivation. Therefore, after the session, we got together and discussed Luciana’s ideas about the article. Luciana also suggested a variety of topics for future CATESOL colloquia and sessions and recommended directions for the future of the IG. Lía realized that Luciana was full of ideas, and she had a significant amount of experiences to contribute to, what at that time, was an emerging area of research and an emerging movement. She invited Luciana to write an article for the special volume of *CATESOL Journal*.

Over the next few months, Luciana (and her co-author, Sally Richardson) engaged in the process of writing the manuscript and Lía engaged in the process of reviewing it. Although Luciana lived in Northern California and Lía lived in Southern California, they managed to meet online through email and in person at regional and state conferences. Initially, the focus of our conversations was the manuscript, but our conversations moved on to topics such as our lives in the United States with a husband (in Lía’s case) or a boyfriend (now Luciana’s husband) as our sole support system, cultural differences between their countries of origin and the United States, our self-expectations as former successful EFL professionals. We also realized that Luciana was beginning a road that Lía had taken a few years back: that of Ph.D. student and future professional in the field of TESOL/applied linguistics. Therefore, we found ourselves spending more time talking about Luciana’s professional future and her path toward leadership positions.

What had started as an author-editor relationship had slowly turned into a relationship of mentor and mentee, or “more experienced” and “less experienced” friend in a highly competitive field. However, central to our relationship was the fact that both of us demonstrated significant respect for each other and realized that we had a lot to gain from the relationship—though *what* exactly was unclear at the outset of our relationship. In the section that follows, we describe our evolving roles as mentor and mentee and show the importance of mentoring as a pathway to leadership for NNES professionals. We first review the literature on mentoring and relate it to our views about mentoring. We then describe our experiences working together and make recommendations for those professionals interested in entering into a mentoring relationship.

### VIEWS ABOUT MENTORING

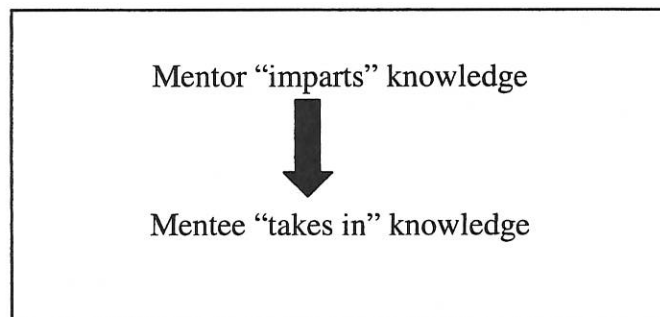
Mentoring is traditionally defined as “a deliberate pairing of a more experienced person with a less experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the less experienced person grow and develop specific competencies” (Murray, 1991, p. xiv). This definition emphasizes the distinct roles that both the more-experienced and the less-experienced person play: While the more-experienced professional “gives,” the less-experienced professional “takes.” In this view, it is the less-experienced professional who has opportunities to grow and develop. And the more-experienced professional imparts knowledge so that the mentee can grow within an organization or a profession.

We view this notion of mentoring as being rather limiting since it is parallel to a banking view of education (Freire, 1970), one in which the teacher “knows all” and students are expected to be filled with information. Such a view of mentoring assumes that mentors, much like teachers in the classroom, do not have anything to gain from the mentor-mentee relationship. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of this view of mentoring, which could be called Mentoring as a One-Way Directional Approach.

In contrast to this notion of mentoring, we propose the notion of “mentoring as transformational leadership.” In this view of mentoring, there are three central characteristics: First, rather than looking at what mentors can provide mentees in a mentoring relationship, we view mentoring as a dyadic—two-way—relationship, one in which both mentee *and* mentor gain from the relationship. Both the mentor and the mentee create learning opportunities at different levels.

Second, in our view of mentoring, both the mentor and the mentee take and create learning opportunities to grow both professionally *and* personally (a point also proposed by Sosik, Godshalk, & Yammarino, 2004). Rather than solely focusing on career development (by providing support, protection, challenging assignments, exposure, visibility, career counseling, etc.), we believe that mentoring as transformational leadership should also emphasize the

**Figure 1:** Mentoring as a One-Way Directional Approach



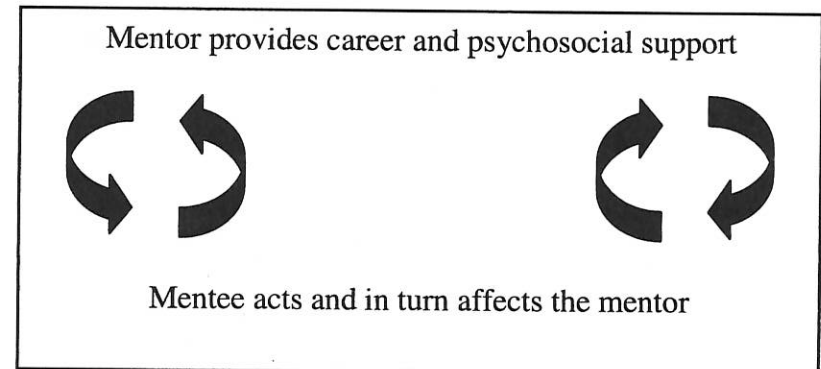
notion of psychosocial support—coaching, counseling, promoting self-confidence and acceptance, creating an awareness of the importance of a sense of personal and professional balance, sharing life lessons, and serving as a role model) (Godshalk & Sosik, 2003; Koberg, Boss, & Goodman, 1998; Scandura, 1992).

In looking at the lessons mentors share in transformational leadership, we found the work by Sosik, Godshalk, and Yammarino (2004) relevant to our relationship. They argue that mentors impart “values and standards of behaviors” (p. 245) and as a result of this, mentees view their mentors as “displaying various degrees of transformational leadership behavior” (p. 245) in the form of “idealized influence” (p. 245) (by showing personal achievement, serving as a role model of exemplary behavior, etc), “individualized consideration” (p. 245) (by coaching, counseling and giving personal attention), and “inspirational motivation” (p. 245) (by instilling positive self-perceptions and allowing the mentee to perceive himself/herself as a contributor and future contributor to the field).

The third characteristic in our notion of mentoring as transformational leadership is that as the mentor-mentee relationship evolves, there is a spiral process of meeting goals, setting new and higher goals accompanied by higher expectations (for both the mentor and the mentee), and creating conditions to meet such goals. It is through this spiral process that we see opportunities for leadership development. However, we should note that our definition of leadership is a broad one and does not necessarily require that the mentee be in a position of power (a point made by Boyatzis, Smith, & Baize, 2006) since leadership may take different forms for professionals working in different settings and at different stages in their leadership development process.

Figure 2 presents a visual representation of our view of mentoring.

**Figure 2:** Mentoring as a Two-Way Directional Approach toward Leadership Development



### Mentoring and Nonnative English-Speaking Professionals

Mentoring is often seen as an integral part of a novice teacher's development and is part of many induction programs that pair a novice teacher with a veteran teacher with the goal of supporting the novice teacher's development and providing support (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). However, issues of mentoring and visible ethnic and language minority professionals have received limited attention in the field of TESOL. While professional associations like TESOL are making attempts to increase minority representation in leadership positions in the form of the Leadership Mentoring Program Award, to our knowledge, there are no publications that deal with the mentoring of NNES and minority professionals in the TESOL field. However, we believe that the literature on visible minority professionals is relevant to our discussion. Therefore, this section reviews the work, though limited, on minority teachers and mentoring.

While minority teachers bring to the teaching field valuable life experiences, they often report feeling isolated and incompetent in a new environment. When they are placed under the mentoring of a colleague, they tend to feel less intimidated as long as their colleague is not judgmental (Stallworth, 1994). Novice teacher support in the form of conferencing with mentors, being observed by mentors, etc., has been reported to be helpful. However, recent research by Ortiz-Walters and Gilson (2005) has shown that *who* mentors minority graduate students enrolled in Ph.D. programs makes a difference in the experiences of minority mentees. Ortiz-Walters and Gilson argue that professionals of color may benefit from having a relationship with a mentor of color because of the "comfort and interpersonal attraction that exists when individuals share similar racial/ethnic backgrounds" (p. 461) (an argument that could apply to NNES professionals). Therefore, they set out to investigate the extent to which a match in the race/ethnicity and/or in the values between mentors and mentees were associated with satisfaction and support. The results showed that graduate students perceived their mentors of color to provide them with a higher level of psychosocial and instrumental support, and reported a higher level of comfort and satisfaction, although sharing the same race/ethnic background was not an issue. In relation to values, the study showed that mentees who perceived their mentors to share their values were more satisfied, felt more interpersonal comfort, and received more support. At the same time, interpersonal comfort and commitment were found to mediate between race/ethnicity and values. As explained by Ortiz-Walters and Gilson (2005), this result suggests that it is important for mentors and mentees to have opportunities to get to know each other before collaborating and that while surface level characteristics like race/ethnicity do not influence the perceptions of mentors, they are still of consideration to mentees.

The notion that sharing similar backgrounds creates a feeling of comfort and facilitates the mentoring experience is also described in a recent article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. In the article, Wilson (2006) describes

the mentoring experiences of Hispanic female professors at Central Florida University. These women created an organization called "Mujeres Universitarias Asociadas" (Associated University Women) designed to mentor, network, and support female Hispanic professors, many of whom feel "like we're interlopers in academe" (p. B6) and are concerned that someone will say, "You don't really speak English, you don't really deserve this job, so get out" (B6). As explained in the article, the women attribute much of their survival and ultimate success on their campus to the support of the other women in the association.

The ideas reported by Wilson and Ortiz-Walters and Gilson have implications for the mentoring of NNES teachers and mentors in the TESOL field. It could be argued that sharing racial/ethnic backgrounds and/or the second language learning experience contributes to facilitating the mentor-mentee relationship and to increasing the degree of comfort needed to work in such a relationship. However, it could also be argued that coming from similar backgrounds is not the only factor that contributes to creating a high level of comfort. Factors such as shared values and beliefs also contribute to a feeling of satisfaction and comfort.

### MENTORING FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: OUR EXPERIENCE

What did we learn from our experience working together? How did we succeed in having a mentoring relationship in which we both gained something, professionally and personally, and engaged in a spiral process of leadership development? We have been asked these questions several times, and we have always found ourselves providing quick answers. However, it was not until writing this chapter that we had an opportunity to look at the literature on the topic in detail, analyze our relationship, and become aware of the factors that have contributed to the success of our mentoring relationship as well as to the failure of other mentoring relationships that Lía had in the past. Therefore, to write this section, we looked back in time and reflected on conversations and emails that we have exchanged over the last few years. Following are some examples of how we engaged in a two-way directional approach toward career development and psychosocial support.

#### Career Development as a Two-Way Directional Approach

Individual initiative is at the heart of a good leader, and Luciana learned early on that taking action is part of individual initiative that leads toward career development goals, particularly in the case of novice NNES professional leaders. Luciana realized that to be successful in a leadership position, one needs to take individual initiative very seriously. In turn, the mentor needs to encourage the mentees to participate in professional organizations and provide the kind of support needed to be successful. This encouragement can take several forms; what is fundamental is the mentee's initiation or beginning involvement. Being

a leader in a professional organization means purposeful engagement attained by actively participating in several arenas, such as attending business meetings to get to know the organization's workings, conducting presentations, and reading proposals for regional and state meetings. Lía always encouraged Luciana to participate actively, and in some occasions suggested ways in which Luciana could participate. Lía encouraged Luciana to become active in the CATESOL IG by presenting on the topic of NNEIS professionals. To this end, Lía invited Luciana to co-present with her, which made Luciana very comfortable because she knew she could count on Lía for feedback and guidance.

In 2001, Luciana was nominated and elected coordinator-elect of the NNEIS IG in CATESOL and started becoming more involved in the CATESOL association. Luciana was IG coordinator from 2002 until 2004. Once Luciana was involved in the IG, Lía then suggested that Luciana run for a Level Chair position on the CATESOL Board of Directors, a position elected by the CATESOL membership. Luciana, at the time going through qualifying exams in the Ph.D. program, was not sure about her nomination because of the work involved. Lía explained to Luciana what the work would entail and how important it would be for the organization to have another minority professional on the Board. In 2004, Luciana was elected Assistant College/University Level Chair and became Chair in 2005. Lía's career development support helped Luciana to become more *visible* (Sosik, Godshalk, & Yammarino, 2004) as a presenter and leader in the association. Throughout Luciana's terms in leadership positions, she and Lía engaged in conversations about the association and Luciana's roles. These meaningful conversations led to the development of new levels of trust and respect for one another.

Another career development function includes the provision of specific feedback, guidance, and advice, described by Sosik, Godshalk, and Yammarino as important career development functions. In the early stages of leadership, new leaders may feel they may not be dealing with some issues appropriately. Advice and guidance can help new leaders become more confident in their own decisions. However, mentees must take the feedback and advice from mentors seriously and, rather than following the mentor's advice without critically reflecting about specific choices and decisions, the mentor and mentee share and bounce ideas off of each other to reach a particular decision together. For instance, on one occasion, Luciana and Lía discussed what should be done to increase leadership in CATESOL's IG. They talked about specific strategies, such as involving more graduate students in presentations and conducting meetings at regional conferences where potential leaders could be recruited. Luciana identified several potential IG leaders and encouraged them to become involved in the IG. As the women in Wilson's article attributed their success on their campus to the support of their minority mentors, Luciana attributes her accomplishments in several leadership positions to Lía's continuing support and guidance. However, Lía always reminds Luciana that her accomplishments can't be attributed to Lía. Had Luciana not been motivated to grow into leadership positions, Lía's encouragement would not have mattered.

While the mentor-mentee relationship provided Luciana several benefits, it also contributed to Lía's career development. For example, Lía helped Luciana with her job search process. In this process, Lía was forced to reflect upon her own job search strategies. This process of reflection allowed her to develop explicit awareness about the strategies she had used to obtain her current position at California State University, Los Angeles. She went back in time and recalled how a colleague, an ethnic minority professional himself, had made her aware of the importance of matching her skill sets to the job call. So in some way, Lía was passing on to Luciana what she had learned from someone else. Moreover, by working with Luciana on her job search, Lía gained an understanding of the current market expectations for a new Ph.D., a fact that is important for any faculty member in a TESOL Program that may be running a search for a new position in the near future.

A second career development benefit that working with Luciana provided Lía was in the area of writing. One of the challenges Lía experienced as an author was related to her difficulty in "showing her voice" as a writer. Giving feedback to Luciana on her (and Richardson's) co-authored chapter for a volume Lía was editing allowed her to develop increased awareness about some of the challenges she herself faced as a writer. Both of our home languages are Romance languages, and we perceive our languages to allow written discourse that is less direct than that of English (when writing for academic purposes). Therefore, sometimes, Lía could see Luciana's writing reflecting the same pattern of indirectness that Lía's writing exhibited. So by providing Luciana with feedback on her writing, Lía was able to develop increased awareness of how to adapt her writing to meet the expectations of different audiences.

A third career development benefit for Lía was when Luciana invited Lía to serve on her Ph.D. Qualifying Examination Committee. Lía took this invitation as a great honor since she knew it would allow her to have access to Luciana's ground-breaking research that investigated the writing for academic purposes of middle school and high school history students using a functional linguistics approach. In addition, by serving on Luciana's Qualifying Examination Committee, Lía had an opportunity to meet colleagues from disciplines other than TESOL/applied linguistics.

#### Psychosocial Support as a Two-Way Directional Approach

Another important function in a mentor-mentee relationship is psychosocial support for purposes of transformational leadership behavior. Included in this function is role modeling. Role modeling may be the most important mentoring function for NNEIS professionals since it provides mentees with examples of "idealized influence" (Sosik, Godshalk, & Yammarino, 2004, p. 245). Mentors of NNEIS professionals who are leaders serve as role models for new leaders in a variety of ways. Role modeling from the part of the mentor may not be a conscious effort but is undoubtedly a very important part of the mentoring

relationship for the novice NNES professional leader. Mentees look up to the mentors' actions and observe how they act and react in situations that deserve particular attention. This is especially important for novice leaders learning to deal with difficult situations. Part of the mentee's role is to observe and reflect on the mentor's actions in certain situations and consider what the situation prompted the mentor to do. This is leading by example. Lía, having been in several leadership positions, is a role model of personal achievement. Lía inspires Luciana in several ways at a personal and professional level.

First, because of Lía's background, a Latina and nonnative English speaker in academia, she serves as a role model at a personal level. At a professional level, Lía is a role model of professionalism and professional competence. For NNES mentees, the act of receiving positive affect from the mentor encourages greater development, which in turn may lead to more involvement, as the NNES mentees feel supported and confident in continuing their contributions and improving as leaders. This was the case with Lía and Luciana. In addition to her involvement in CATESOL—which with approximately 3,900 members is the largest TESOL affiliate in the United States—Luciana started getting more involved in the TESOL association after she participated in TESOL's Leadership Mentoring Program, which is designed to help underrepresented groups get more involved in the organization. Lía nominated Luciana for this program, and Luciana was selected as one of the 2005–2006 program participants. Lía was her mentor, and together they organized a New Leaders Forum, a workshop for novice professionals that provided participants with practical tools and strategies to help them to understand how to get more involved in leadership.

Several features can be highlighted in Lía and Luciana's mentoring relationship. First, the collaborative work that Lía and Luciana engaged in at the TESOL convention in Tampa shows Lía's continuing belief in Luciana's leadership and involvement. To Luciana, this means that Lía believes she is able to take on tasks and be successful, which leads her to believe in herself as a leader even more. This is an important source of psychosocial support for Luciana. In addition, Luciana's continuous involvement shows a level of commitment on which Lía can count.

While Luciana perceives Lía to be a role model for her, Lía also perceives Luciana to be a role model for her and for other NNES professionals. In what ways was the notion of Luciana as a role model realized? First, when Luciana and Lía met at the CATESOL Colloquium on NNES professionals, Luciana, though sitting in the back of the meeting room, did not hesitate to express her ideas in a vocal and assertive manner. Lía immediately admired Luciana's determination to overcome her fear to participate in front of a large audience since it had taken several years to overcome her silence and to develop the confidence needed to express her ideas. Once we established a relationship, Luciana's work as an emerging leader in CATESOL and TESOL became a topic of conversation with Lía's graduate students. Lía used Luciana's experiences to motivate her students to become involved in professional organizations.

Another source of psychosocial support from Luciana toward Lía was in their work in the CATESOL association. Luciana and Lía served on the Board. In Luciana's first year as coordinator of the NNLEI IG (2002), Lía was serving as CATESOL President and the subsequent year, she was the Past President. Lía was CATESOL's first NNES professional to become President. Therefore, besides the responsibility that comes with serving as the President of TESOL's largest U.S. affiliate, Lía felt responsible for representing NNES professionals in the best possible way. During Lía's presidency, Luciana was a sounding board for Lía. Luciana represented the professionals that CATESOL wanted to reach: novice professionals, with the added bonus that Luciana's status as a triple minority (female, Latina, and nonnative speaker) provided her with a perspective that did not reflect that of the mainstream in CATESOL.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This section includes recommendations for specific leadership guidance for novice professionals.

- **Introduce yourself to experienced professionals and leaders when you attend professional conferences.** As you meet these people, reflect on whether or not there is some level of comfort with them. Think of what you have in common with these people, whether it is values, ethnicity, background experiences, country or city of origin, etc. Knowledge about or expertise in the field of study should not be the sole factor in a mentoring relationship. To be in a mentoring relationship, it is important that both the mentor and the mentee feel some level of interpersonal comfort and that as mentor and mentee work together, the level of comfort grows.
- **Make your voice heard.** Do not be afraid to speak up during a session or to offer to submit a chapter or an article. Individual initiative is an extremely important feature of new leaders.
- **Initiate your contributions early in your career.** This will allow you to meet professionals who will become interested in your work. This in turn may result in a collaborative relationship with successful leaders.
- **Always think of the mentoring relationship as two-way support.** This means that you will not only be receiving support but providing it, too. When you contact a leader in the field, think of ways in which the relationship can be two-way support. If you describe the potential benefits that mentors can gain from working with you, potential mentors will be more open to the idea of working with you.
- **Find a mentor who can give you continuous feedback.** Continuing encouragement is important for novice NNES professionals.
- **Have realistic expectations.** Mentoring relationships, like all relationships, evolve. Start by working on small projects; as the relationship grows, so will the nature of the projects in which you and your mentor become involved.

As we wrote this chapter and reflected on our collaborative experiences, we were concerned about depicting a picture that was too rosy. However, we were not able to find anything that did not work in our mentor-mentee relationship. Our explanation for this is that a combination of factors, which we have described in the chapter, contributed to the growth of our relationship. These factors are: our values and beliefs, our experiences as former international students with very limited support systems in the United States, our background as South American women, our status as NNES professionals, and our willingness and openness to learn from each other.

Early in our relationship, we realized that the mentor-mentee relationship provided both of us with opportunities for personal and professional growth that might otherwise have been missed. Central to these opportunities was the fact that each of us valued and respected the other personally and professionally and that we were, and still are, willing and open to learn from each other. A good example of this openness and mutual respect was the writing of this chapter, which allowed us to reflect on and learn from our past experiences as a way to build toward the future.

#### SUGGESTED RESOURCES

##### *The TESOL Leadership Mentoring Program*

This program is designed to help underrepresented groups become more involved in the TESOL association. To be considered for the award, a TESOL member must be nominated by another TESOL member. For more information on this program, go to [www.tesol.org/](http://www.tesol.org/).

For further information on the topic of mentoring and leadership, we recommend consulting the following journals:

- *The Leadership Quarterly*, published by Elsevier, in affiliation with the International Leadership Association ([www.ila-net.org/](http://www.ila-net.org/))
- *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, published by Elsevier
- *Group & Organization Management*, published by Sage.

#### Discussion Questions

1. According to the authors, what are the most important features of mentoring NNES professionals in leadership development? What other kinds of support do you think are essential for new NNES leaders?
2. Reflect about mentoring relationships in which you have been involved. Have they been similar to or different from what the authors described? What were the most important features of the mentoring?

3. To what extent, if any, should mentors and mentees share common characteristics for the relationship to work? Why or why not?
4. This chapter described mentoring functions that were particularly important for the authors. In what ways can mentoring functions strengthen the leadership skills of new NNES leaders?

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