

The Global South Network for Critical Practitioner Inquiry and Social Development – Position Paper

Lars Dahlström, Department of Education, Umeå University, Sweden

Abstract

This position paper situates the on-going struggle over the preferential right of interpretation in education at the global arena. The recent influences from neoliberalism is emphasised and placed in a perspective based on analyses of the post-apartheid teacher education reform in Namibia as an example of a counter-hegemonic attempt. The conclusion drawn from the global and local analyses is that new alliances need to be created based on a refurbished solidarity perspective in the North in support of the preferential right of interpretation of 'the poors', particularly in the South.

It is after twenty years of development work in the South combined with the parallel observation of a displacement of critical pedagogical ideas in the international discourse on education that this paper can be seen as a call for a restoration of a critical agenda under altered circumstances.

The absence of practitioners' preferential right of interpretation over educational practice in the official academic discourse has been an integrated part of this displacement. A struggle has been staged between academics and other practitioners and played out as a divide in scholarly power.¹ The altered circumstances referred to above are at present to a large extent related to the overwhelming international influence on education from neo-liberal thinking and the recent illusions created by information technology symbolically represented by expressions like 'the global village'.

Contextual reasons and possibilities for an alternative perspective

Traditional colonialism and imperialism created deficient educational systems that in many instances still are in place in de-colonised countries.² Even after victorious liberation struggles, where the critical role of education was emphasised, national systems continued to follow a conservative charter. Schools in such systems can at many places be characterised as deficit copies of the original idea in the sense that they have reinforced the problematic sides of formal education while the progressive sides have been weakened. For example, selection and examination have been emphasised at the expense of participation and growth. These educational systems have on a different level contributed to dichotomise societies instead of creating societies characterised by cultural and social integration.³ Classrooms have to a large extent signalled the illusion of mass opportunity to participate in the modernised world not

¹ See Kenneth Zeichner (1994) *Beyond the Divide of Teacher Research and Academic Research*. Unpublished paper. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

² Traditional colonialism refers to the period when colonialism was exercised through the annexation of third world territories by the colonial powers in the West. A less common concept, informal imperialism, puts colonialism in a new light as a way to enhance imperialism through "free trade" on conditions dictated by the West. See e.g. John Bellamy Foster (2003) *Imperial America and War*. *Monthly Review*. Volume 55, Number 1. 1 – 10. The characteristics of prevailing imperial powers are also attended to in Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri (2000) *Empire*. Harvard University Press.

³ See Staf Callewaert (1998) *Society, Education and Curriculum*. Copenhagen: Department of Education, Philosophy and Rhetoric.

least through slogans like ‘education for all’.⁴ Contrary to that promise the majority of learners have continued to be sent back to the village and considered even less useful in that or the alternative available detour, i.e. the locations to join ‘the poors’ at the brink of the attractive urban and modernised enclaves.⁵ The HIV/Aids epidemic has aggravated the situation even further as it will soon have the same local effect as the triangular slave trade, meaning that an indispensable social layer of society might disappear in a not so far future.⁶

From this perspective we can ponder over the role of formal education in the furtherance of social justice. International organisations and government representatives alike point to the positive role of education in their rhetoric almost on a daily basis as if education by nature changes things to the better. However, education plays dual and contradictory roles. On one hand education is critical and forward looking and on the other it is a conservative force in the sense that it maintains structures of power not least through the way the preferential right of interpretation, i.e. the right to name and analyse social practice, is played out.

Formal education has always had a strong conservative agenda as a way to socialise citizens into the status quo. Therefore, education is not what it portrays itself to be but works in many ways in contradiction to its liberating agenda not least through the apprenticeship of observation that every pupil experience and that underpins the common sense about schooling.⁷ Modern schooling is also in some absurd ways something that almost by definition takes place at an early stage in life⁸, in spite of the rhetoric of life-long endeavours that often become limited to its corrective purposes to satisfy new needs on labour.

On a broader political and global scale, and even more so after the staging of the war against terrorism, American triumphalism has set the agenda after the fall of the Soviet Union. This triumphalism coincides with the preferential right of interpretation assigned to the economists and their market perspectives that have taken a hegemonic hold over the way we look at education as an integrated part of neo-liberal marketisation. Thus, human capital theory turns education into a commodity while the efficiency claims ignore learning as the unit of education and sends the policy attention in the wrong direction. Further on, schooling as a delivery system has maintained the type of practice that Paulo Freire once called banking education and further marginalised the innovative, critical, and liberating aspects of education.⁹

The international donor community, that still plays an important and strategic role in the South, has followed the mainstream trends and left their previous solidarity charter for the neo-liberal bandwagon. Organisations like the World Bank has even highjacked what initially was considered as counter hegemonic attempts, like teacher research, and transformed it into a

⁴ See Bruce Fuller (1991) *Growing up Modern. The Western State Builds Third World Schools*. New York: Routledge.

⁵ See Ashwin Desai (2002) *We are the poors – community struggles in post-apartheid south africa*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

⁶ Jeffrey Joseph Goveia (2000) *Education and the Epidemic: The Effects of HIV/Aids on Basic Education in Namibia*. Masters thesis. The University of Texas at Austin; Carol Coombe (2001) *HIV/Aids, Poverty and Education: The Circle of Hope and Despair*. In Mia Melin (ed) *Education – a Way out of Poverty?* Sida New Education Division Document No. 12. Stockholm.

⁷ Karl-Georg Ahlström (1988) *The University and Teacher Training*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis No. 56. Uppsala universitet.

⁸ Staf Callewaert (1998) *Society, Education and Curriculum*. Copenhagen: Department of Education, Philosophy and Rhetoric.

⁹ Samoff, Joel (1998) *Institutionalizing International Influence: The Context for Education Reform in Africa*. A paper prepared for presentation at the Conference on International Trends in Teacher Education, Faculty of Education, University of Durban-Westville, Durban, South Africa, 20-22 July 1998.

technical rationality and thereby evicted its critical edge.¹⁰ The agenda of the WTO to turn education into a commodity through the effects of GATS is alarming.¹¹ This transformation process has already started and will, if it succeeds with its intent, leave one of humankind's common assets, the right to education, in the hands of profit makers as already has happened with other basic needs.¹²

It is in the above context that we should critically consider the message from the prophets of information technology that we all live in a global village as this conceptualisation builds on vain hopes. Castells has elaborated on the agenda and global effects of the network society for countries in the South, especially in Africa.

An alternative model of development, one that would in fact be more socially and environmental sustainable, is not a utopia, and there is an abundance of realistic, technically sound proposals for self-reliant development models in a number of countries, as well as strategies for Africa-centered regional cooperation. In most cases, they assume the necessary partial de-linking of African economies from global networks of capital accumulation, given the consequences of current asymmetrical linkages.¹³

Castells is not alone in his conclusion that changes are possible but that development in the South need a re-orientation and de-linkage from global capital networks to be able to create new possibilities.

We have to be able to design practical action programmes linking democratization with social advancement, with sufficient courage to implement effective policies within such a framework and to deal boldly with the risk of conflict that arises from the thrust of capitalist expansion.¹⁴

Samoff has noted that there are a number of reasons for the lack of sustainable development in the field of third world education. He has attributed many of these reasons to the mainstream trends in the development donor business.¹⁵ The development of alternatives to the marketisation of education and its devastating effects in the third world are needed.

The slogan "Knowledge is Power" was previously entertained in the educational struggle for social justice. As a consequence those who officially represented the struggle attempted to get hold of that knowledge. When that knowledge was acquired the smell of the attached power was sensed. Many lost interest in turning back to address the second step in their liberating mission, namely the question of redistribution, due to the distancing that power often creates.¹⁶ This distancing process changed the original slogan which then

¹⁰ See Julio Diniz-Pereira (2002) 'Globalisation': is the teacher research movement a critical and emancipatory response? *Educational Action Research*. Volume 10. Number 3. Triangle Journals. 373-398.

¹¹ See Daniel Monteux (2003) Education – The Grip of GATS. Attac France. Workshop outline for World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brasil, January 20th, 2003.

¹² Ashwin Desai (2003) Neoliberalism and Resistance in South Africa. *Monthly Review*. Volume 54, Number 8. MR Press. pp. 16-28.

¹³ Manuel Castells (1998) *End of Millennium*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. p. 128.

¹⁴ Amin, Samir (1997) *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*. London: Zed Press. p. 146.

¹⁵ Samoff op. cit. (1998)

¹⁶ This is a well-known phenomenon amongst practitioners who leave their original practice and enter the academy. Many of those who never have had the opportunity of such practice and enter the academy straight from school have difficulties with this perspective as it threatens their self-assumed preferential right of interpretation. Recently, this process of political and social distancing has stirred the academic pot in France by Daniel Lindenberg's publication *Le Rappel à l'ordre*. Enquete sur le nouveaux reactionnaires. Seuil. See www.aftonbladet.se/kultur/story/utskrift/0,3285,235189,00.html (Olle Svenning). A different conception, but still part of the same problem, is the ironic saying in Namibia that independence would bring 'white education [and therefore also privilege] for all'.

critically was read “Power is Knowledge” by the marginalised and powerless. In today’s common discourse of the network society knowledge is reduced to information. Information access has become the recent blessing while the real flows of power hides behind the communication curtain where information is created at the will of business interests in the North.

The information highways have accelerated the hegemony of neo-liberal ideas. These highways are in a sense treacherous through their accessibility and face-validity. They also have a tendency to silence critical perspectives as they build on what is perceived as free choices. This perception never asks for what is missing or encourages questions related to the problems with free choices based on neo-liberal ideas. The neo-liberal free choice rhetoric has worked in at least two ways. First, it has ignored the types of social and cultural capital needed, in addition to the financial one, to create situations of choice for all, if ever possible in a world divided by wealth and poverty on both national and global levels. Secondly, it has created a narrow reinterpretation of ‘freedom’ as ‘freedom of choice’.

The perception of participation is strong amongst teachers and learners in the South who are included in international school networks where they can chat across the globe with their affluent partners in the North. This participation is often moulded by a hegemonic world-view usually sponsored by business interests that are seldom questioned but rather praised for their social charity and philanthropy. It comes without fail that schoolyards in the South are transposed to advertising pillar for multinational corporations. These pillars become the illusionary signs of membership in the global village for the ‘lucky ones’.¹⁷ Further on, the difference between information and knowledge and the impact of the dominant world culture are seldom critically discussed when the floodgates of information are opened as they create an impression of fortunate accessibility. Thus, the new information and communication technology will further the hegemonic globalisation trends unless consciously used for other than mainstream purposes and as potential sites for resistance.

Alternative possibilities are already demonstrated by international grassroots organisations outside the educational sector that points to the possibilities to recapture a progressive initiative.¹⁸ These initiatives are however often hidden by the hegemonic language of economists or marginalised through the way social problems are pathologized and criminalised.¹⁹ So far has similar networks in the field of education either been confined to the academic world and its exclusive preferential right of interpretation or negated the critical, political, and global perspectives beyond the affluent societies in the North.²⁰

¹⁷ It is worth noting that only 0,4 % of Sub-Saharan Africa is web-connected and most of these connections are set up in the special case: South Africa, while the drive to become connected is seen as the new blessing for development.

¹⁸ For example, Attac was initiated in France in response to global financial politics and the devastating global currency speculations and capital flows and is now an organisation with local branches all over the world. The World Social Forum that started in Porto Allegre, Brazil, is now organising itself across the globe as a parallel alternative agenda to the one set by institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation. Organisations like Attac and World Social Forum represent a new and critical global force that to a large extent organise itself through a combination of the new information technologies and physical meeting points; See also Tony Fitzpatrick (2002) Critical Theory, Information Society and Surveillance Technologies. *Information, Communication & Society*. Volume 5, Number 3. Routledge. 357-378.

¹⁹ Ashwin Desai’s account of the community struggles in South Africa is a good example of a situation where social problems are criminalised. Desai (2002) op. cit.

²⁰ Organisations like www.rethinkingschools.org in the US and the educational initiatives of the Movimento Sem Terra (MST) www.mst.org.br in Brazil have potentials to develop into something radical even beyond the American borders in the future.

Alternative conceptions - born and bred in the South

The post-apartheid teacher education reform in Namibia included a number of initiatives that were based on counter-hegemonic conceptions in relation to the previous dispensation and even when placed on the mainstream international arena beyond the African continent.²¹

A retrospective analysis of the teacher education reform was mainly based on conceptions from Antonio Gramsci like hegemony, traditional intellectuals, common sense and their antagonist conceptions counter-hegemony, organic intellectuals, and good sense.²² The struggle over the preferential right of interpretation was analysed through the lenses of these conceptions at the three major levels of policy as an imperative reform framework, contested programme imprints, and the creation of a counter-hegemonic reform agency at institutional level.²³ It was this struggle that on a general level created a transposed reform with mixed reform imprints while the counter-hegemonic influences remained strong in certain areas like critical practitioner inquiry.

Critical Practitioner Inquiry (CPI) was introduced in the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD), the new teacher education programme for basic education, after independence in 1990. CPI was developed from an alternative research concern that was moulded in exile during the liberation struggle and further emphasised through the inclusion of scholars like Ken Zeichner, Melanie Walker, John Elliott, and their writings in the change efforts.²⁴

This part of the reform was seen as a thrust against the prevailing research tradition that relied on practises that in principle tried to imitative laboratory testing in the social fields as an attempt to point out the truth to the practitioners and the way forward for their educational practice. The writings and practical co-operation with Staf Callewaert also supported the development of alternative practices like CPI, but from a different perspective. Callewaert has for long maintained that scientists have no right to claim the preferential right of interpretation over what practitioners need to do.

It is simply not true that the scientist can tell people how to solve problems. He does not know, even if he, for social reasons, maintains that he is the person who has the final word, even in practical matters. The social hierarchical structures of all professional sectors are made up according to the logic of quasi-theory telling the practitioner what to do. That is the way power is organised. There are causes explaining why this is so, but there are no reasons why it ought to be so.²⁵

The neo-behaviourist tradition that was reborn through teacher-proof material after independence in a USAID sponsored project could even be seen as a continuation of the pre-

²¹ Lars Dahlström (2002) *Post-apartheid teacher education reform in Namibia – The struggle between common sense and good sense*. Department of Education. Umeå University.

²² Antonio Gramsci (1971) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers; See also Dahlström op. cit. (2002) p. 247.

²³ Dahlström op. cit. (2002) see pp. 165 – 234.

²⁴ Ken Zeichner, Alina Amukushu, Mirjam Katonyala, Peggy Shilamba, (1998) *Critical Practitioner Inquiry and the Transformation of Teacher Education in Namibia*. *Educational Action Research*. Volume 6 No. 2. 183-203; Melanie Walker (1996:a) *Images of Professional Development*. Pretoria HSRC Publishers; John Elliott & David Ebbutt (2000) *Practice-based Inquiry as a capacity-building strategy in a distance-learning context: The problems and potentials*. In Lars Dahlström (ed) *Perspectives on Teacher Education and Transformation in Namibia*. Gamsberg Macmillan.

²⁵ Staf Callewaert (1999) *Towards a general theory of professional knowledge and action*. *Nordisk Pedagogik/Journal of Nordic Educational Research*. Volume 19. Number 4. NFPF Scandinavian University Press. 209-222.

independence policy under a new label, which as a consequence prolonged the war of position on the reform arena in Namibia.²⁶

Teacher educators at the colleges developed and applied CPI as part of staff development courses. These courses were designed to introduce CPI and to develop a critical knowledge base of education in Namibia. The contributions so far to such a knowledge base show both the trouble and successes with counter-hegemonic efforts. A look at the reports from the Higher Diploma courses during a five years period (1996 – 2000) identifies a few tendencies pointing in a counter-hegemonic direction.

Table 1. Tendencies in Higher Diploma reports following a Critical Practitioner Inquiry approach.

From	→	Towards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Testing of hypotheses. ▪ Situations explained through a deficit filter. ▪ Action as add on. ▪ Pseudo-theoretically driven through literature referencing. ▪ Defining inquiry as imitative objectivity through a ‘theoretical package’. ▪ Reliance on external wisdom. ▪ Writing for the tutor. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concern about development issues. ▪ Situations contextually analysed. ▪ Change efforts in focus. ▪ Systematic analyses of practice and context for critical understanding. ▪ Acknowledging partiality in conscious choices. ▪ Referencing to and building on internal wisdom. ▪ Writing for community and a knowledge base.

The Masters’ reports from 1999 – 2000 indicate the future potentials of academic courses that follow a CPI approach if sustained beyond the initial optimism they generate.²⁷ The experiences from CPI in Namibia have been analysed elsewhere also by Melanie Walker (1996:b), Chuma Mayumbelo & John Nyambe (1999), Lars Dahlström (1999), Ken Zeichner (2000), and Lars Dahlström (2002).²⁸

Júlio Emílio Diniz-Pereira (2002) makes an overview of what he calls teacher research and identifies three main approaches.²⁹ These are the hegemonic technical approach and the counter-hegemonic practical and critical approaches. The present introduction of Critical Practitioner Inquiry can be categorised as a critical approach. The strengths of critical

²⁶ For an analysis of this neo-behaviourist intervention in Namibia, see Staf Callewaert (1998) *Programmed Teaching and Learning – The Florida State University Intervention*. In Staf Callewaert op. cit. (1998), pp. 179 – 224.

²⁷ See Lars Dahlström (2001) Internal Course Appraisal and Recommendations. Paper compiled at the Department of Education, Umeå universitet.

²⁸ Melanie Walker (1996:b) Subaltern Professionals: acting in pursuit of social justice. *Educational Action Research*. Volume 4. Number 3. Triangle Journals. 407-425; Chuma Mayumbelo & John Nyambe (1999) Critical Inquiry in the Pre-service Teacher Education: Some initial Steps Toward Critical, Inquiring, and Reflective Professionals in Namibian Teacher Education. In Ken Zeichner & Lars Dahlström (eds) *Democratic Teacher Education Reform in Africa. The Case of Namibia*. Westview Press; Lars Dahlström (1999) Critical Practitioner Inquiry and Teacher Education in Namibia: The First Attempts to Build a Critical Knowledge base for Education. *Perspectives in Education*. Volume 18. Number 1. RSA; Ken Zeichner (2000) Critical practitioner inquiry and the reform of Namibian teacher education. In Lars Dahlström (ed) *Perspectives on Teacher Education and Transformation in Namibia*. Gamsberg Macmillan; Lars Dahlström (2002) *Post-apartheid teacher education reform in Namibia. The struggle between common sense and good sense*. Pedagogiska institutionen. Umeå universitet.

²⁹ Júlio Emílio Diniz-Pereira (2002) op.cit.

approaches are usually found on the local level, while they are weak on a more structural and global level. The Global South Network is an attempt to create a stronger global agenda.

New global structures as an emerging possibility

One conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that the common international trends also affect the field of education through the “institutionalising of international influences” to borrow the words of Samoff.³⁰ Therefore, from a broader perspective, new agendas need to be institutionalised to create a sustainable preferential right of interpretation by practitioners over their own practice.

A new division of power over the preferential right of interpretation is possible. The *Global South Network for Critical Practitioner Inquiry & Social Development* is an attempt in that direction. A tentative policy framework has been developed for the Global South Network that is based on educational experiences from the South within the framework presented above.

The main purpose of the network is to encourage the furtherance of radical pedagogy and innovative practices through an international institutional network that works in pursuit of local and global social justice. For that purpose the network will operate towards the furtherance of inquiry that through conceptions of radical pedagogy will move the preferential right of interpretation over educational practice closer to practitioners across national, cultural, and gender barriers.

The activities of the network are positioned within a policy framework that acknowledges contextual pedagogic and critical practitioner inquiry. Within this framework, the pedagogy attempts to uncover forces that affect social situations and to expose practices and structures that produce or reproduce inequalities also beyond educational settings. This policy framework comprises a number of tentative postulates:³¹

- Conventional academic perspectives have a tendency to view practical knowledge (knowledge of practice) as an application of academic knowledge and not as a form of knowledge in its own right. Hence the need for *situational knowledge* as an alternative form of knowledge. The concept situational knowledge is used to describe a combination of knowledge of practice and contextual knowledge that is carried out through a research practice called critical practitioner inquiry. Knowledge of practice is a type of embodied knowledge that often has been adapted to the academic paradigm. This adaptation has given it a theoretical dress that has been delivered back to practitioners as educational recipe books. Critical Practitioner Inquiry is an attempt to break this adaptation. Hence the need to combine the embodied knowledge of practice with contextual knowledge, i.e. critical knowledge about the conditions for practice, without allowing a conservative academic turn.³²

³⁰ See footnote 8.

³¹ These postulates have Namibian background as part of different attempts to address staff development for teacher educators. Contributions have been made by Staf Callewaert (1995) A postgraduate education programme and related issues concerning teacher education for basic education in Namibia. Okahandja: NIED/TERP Document; Lars Dahlström (1998) A Position Paper for An Integrated In-service Staff Development Programme for Sustainable Capacity Building in Teacher Education for Basic Education in Namibia. Umeå: TERP Document; and from Ken Zeichner as well as influences from John Elliott and his team working for TERP in Namibia. I am responsibility for the present text, in spite of these influences.

³² The divide between practical and theoretical knowledge is avoided by purpose. Situational knowledge is both practically reflective and theoretically critical. Problems have all along arisen, when academics have portrayed their models of understanding as the only source and wisdom for other practitioners. For further readings see Ken Zeichner (1994) Beyond the Divide of Teacher Research and Academic Research. Unpublished paper.

- In order to cope with social situations in a realistic way, educators as well as other practitioners have to integrate into their perspective the view that both practical and structural knowledge are social constructions in a pluralistic and often difficult terrain. The ensuing conclusion is that a constant struggle is staged over which knowledge is legitimate and who are the legitimate learners of that knowledge. Hence the importance of a view that looks at curriculum as a social construction and a field for the struggle over the preferential right of interpretation.
- A basic problem is that education tends to be seen as a system of delivery that does not take into account critical thinking, previous experiences, or learning in society as a whole because delivery systems are based on taken for granted knowledge (common sense). Hence the importance of a pedagogy that includes critical, historical and experiential perspectives that avoids reducing education to a simplistic and linear process of ‘learning as teaching’.
- Education has to take a drastic turn to invent a new humane practice out of the destructive confrontation between tradition and mainstream westernisation that is taking place in the South. A new direction shall acknowledge and institutionalise practical and contextual knowledge and the social construction of meaning. It shall involve community and bring back in an accessible way to community the knowledge and skills that education generates. Hence the importance of a radical pedagogy that acknowledge culture and civil society as integrated fields of educational endeavours.

The tentativeness of these postulates is due to the fact that it is the member institutions that work out the policy framework for the network. Such a policy framework is not a static construction forever cut in stone, but will go through a continuous development process. The Global South Network for Critical Practitioner Inquiry & Social Development is initiated by the Department of Education³³ at Umeå University as its facilitator and developmental midwife. Tentative nodes in the network are based on contacts with institutions in Africa, South America, and Asia. The initial activities of the network are organised in the following way.

- The development of an international institutional network that encompasses and facilitates South to South co-operation and capacity building.
- The creation of physical meeting places and colloquia for the furtherance of the network’s intentions.
- The joint development of internally and externally financed projects that foster the furtherance of Critical Practitioner Inquiry as a tool for social understanding and development in line with the network’s intentions.
- The joint development of courses on undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels that follow Critical Practitioner Inquiry approaches.
- The building of a radical knowledge base of pedagogy and social practice that is accessible through a network website and/or printed publications.

There is a governing idea based on a critical rationality that runs through the argument above. This idea can be illustrated by a quote from Richard Taylor et al. They express this idea with reference to the writings of Pierre Bourdieu as follows: “intellectuals *qua* cultural producers

University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA, and Staf Callewaert (1997) *The Idea of a University*. In Nilsson, Ingrid & Lundahl, Lisbet *Teacher, Curriculum and Policy*. Department of Education, Umeå University. 181-200.

³³ Pedagogiska Institutionen.

hold a specific kind of symbolic power, which they may put at the service of the dominant or the dominated”³⁴.

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³⁴ Richard Taylor, Jean Barr & Tom Steele (2002) *For Radical Higher Education. After Postmodernism*. Routledge. Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. p. 155.

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