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A proposal for the secondary reading instruction unit to be incorporated into teacher education at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa

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A proposal for the secondary reading instruction unit to be incorporated into teacher education at the University of Fort Hare, South Africa

Abstract

It has been observed over a number of years that college students in South Africa, especially the blacks, experience problems in their academic performance. Approximately 20 percent of all the students who enroll for junior degree studies in black universities complete their studies in the minimum expected period of three years. About 70 to 80 percent of all freshmen at these universities fail to obtain sufficient credits to pass on to the second year course studies.

A PROPOSAL FOR THE SECONDARY READING
INSTRUCTION UNIT TO BE INCORPORATED INTO
TEACHER EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
FORT HARE, SOUTH AFRICA

A Research Paper

Submitted to

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

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THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed over a number of years that college students in South Africa, especially the blacks, experience problems in their academic performance. Approximately 20 percent of all the students who enroll for junior degree studies in black universities complete their studies in the minimum expected period of three years. About 70 to 80 percent of all freshmen at these universities fail to obtain sufficient credits to pass on to the second year course studies.

The major reason for this difficulty has been diagnosed to be the students' inadequate reading and study skills. High school graduates entering college for the first time lack badly in skills in these two aspects of learning. There are at least three direct explanations for this problem:

1. Direct reading instruction stops at grade four.
2. At present there are neither remedial teachers, reading specialists, nor ordinary developmental reading teachers in black secondary schools in South Africa.
3. Black high school and college students in South Africa are required to study through the English language which is used as a medium of instruction or language of education. These students may now be accurately described as reluctant poor readers.

While it may be true that the schools ought to prepare their students better for college studies, yet, under the prevailing circumstances in South Africa, the universities also cannot be complacent with this failure rate.

The university teacher education programs must become more accountable for entering into a solution to this problem. Every black child in South Africa learns at least three languages to varying extents during school years. Seeing that there is a need and a potential for direct continuing or developmental reading instruction at all levels in black secondary schools in South Africa, it is imperative for the departments of education in black universities to institute programs or course units in their teacher education for the training of secondary school teachers for developmental secondary reading instruction which will resolve many of the high school students' learning problems and therefore result in greater success for these students in college. The starting point in any attempt to solve this long-standing problem is to incorporate units in the teaching of reading and study skills into secondary teacher education programs.

Definition of Terms

While the problem is quite common among blacks and whites in South Africa yet the focus of this proposal is specifically on blacks. All references, therefore, specified and unspecified, will refer to the black situation in South Africa. Although teacher education for secondary school teachers in South Africa takes place at the Colleges of Education (university establishments) as well as at Teacher Training Colleges, the terms college and university here are used interchangeably. Secondary school teachers may or may not possess university degree qualifications but all must be in possession of a professional teaching certificate. Pupils, children, and students refer to secondary or high school learners where both secondary and high schools are one and the same type of school. Under this proposal inservice education for secondary school teachers will be

embarked upon at the same time as the normal training process for new teachers.

Limitations of the Proposal

The following factors can be seen as possible limitations to this proposal:

- i) The question of introducing direct instruction in reading in the secondary schools is not yet even being debated as a likelihood.
- ii) There are always bureaucratic snares to the introduction of any new course unit at university.
- iii) It is not easy to convince all the universities and Teacher Training Colleges about the need for this service to the nation. A very small beginning on one campus without the support from the official departmental agencies may soon get strangled and not be realized.
- iv) Secondary school teachers will not be easily won over by this idea; yet they are among the first groups among whom the idea must sell well in order to succeed.
- v) The white controllers of black education may place this idea very low on their priority lists.
- vi) The proposer himself may run into problems by being absorbed too much into his routine duties and responsibilities and not find time to champion this cause and to keep it alive and hot in people's minds and thoughts as a long-term project.

THE NEED FOR DIRECT READING INSTRUCTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

It would appear that schools throughout the civilized world face challenging reading problems of one kind or another. Since learning to read is a useful lifetime process that cannot be completely mastered by the end of elementary school, secondary schools have a responsibility for helping students continue their growth in reading. Educators in South Africa are aware that secondary school students probably need direct instruction in developing specific reading skills.

Academic and literacy standards in South Africa are continually rising. That implies that students should be helped to improve their reading skills in order to keep up with educational, technological, and other survival demands. Only through efficient reading can present-day citizens be able to sift through all the ideas, ideologies, opinions, and other types of information to discover what their responsibilities are and which rights to exercise. Reading skills developed in the primary school often fail to see the student through his/her secondary school reading requirements where speed, comprehension, interpretation, and critical discrimination seem to be some of the essential skills necessary. Stating a similar problem in Nigeria, Thelma Obah says, "There is little or no support for the teaching of reading from any of the quarters that one might expect it." (Obah, 1982, p. 315). She says that the belief is still strong in Nigeria that reading instruction belongs in the primary schools. The feeling among most people, she adds, is that reading need have only two purposes, namely--"reading to get by" and "reading to break the code." (Obah, 1982, p. 316).

Notwithstanding the fact that reading is not yet part of the culture of an African, there is the added problem that militates against the

institution of a developmental reading program in secondary schools in South Africa. That is the inaccessability of books to read. Public and school libraries are virtually nonexistent. Books are rather expensive for the ordinary family to afford, especially if they are to be read for pleasure or recreation. The desire to read extensively is in any case not there because there are not sufficient published materials of varied categories available in African home languages. The home environment in the majority of cases is not conducive to reading or to leading an academic lifestyle. The illiteracy rate among the general populace is still very high, so that those who can read are not actually motivated or inspired to do so. Reading too much would make them uncomfortable and probably socially unacceptable.

The situation in South African black high schools today can briefly be described as follows:

- a) About 35 percent of the high schools are situated in sparsely populated rugged rural areas where electricity, running water, and library facilities and conveniences are unknown. Poverty is ripe, truancy is common, and long distance walking to school is common where some students have to walk about ten miles to school daily.
- b) About 65 percent of the high schools are situated in urban and suburban areas where there are sometimes overcrowded classrooms with insufficient library facilities and other learning and teaching facilities. Electricity supply and water are not always readily available. Unfavorable home environment, poverty, and lack of motivation are contributing factors to the high drop-out rate.

- c) About 50 percent of the teachers in high schools are insufficiently qualified to teach the classes they do now. (South African Ministries of Education: Educamus).
- d) The average high school ratio between students and teacher stands at 65:1 resulting in crowded classrooms. Official figure is 48:1.
- e) Classes are heterogeneous both in age and ability so that it is quite common to find age differences of about 7 to 10 years in one class and an ability range of 3 to 4 grade levels. This is happening despite the pass-fail promotional system at the end of each class or grade.
- f) The biggest handicaps in the high schools are the absence of appropriate learning materials beyond the prescribed text, lack of teaching equipment, poor motivation among students and teachers, insufficient funds, and the scarcity of qualified teachers.

THE NEED FOR SECONDARY TEACHER EDUCATION

COURSE WORK IN READING INSTRUCTION

There are three myths or misbeliefs that need to be dispelled in South Africa, namely:

- i) that direct reading instruction belongs to the elementary school where it is done fully, efficiently, and sufficiently.
- ii) that the reading ability of students at the secondary school level develops on its own through studying content subjects.
- iii) that reading skills automatically get taught when students read English and other content subjects. Those who cannot cope under current conditions should be referred to special classes.

The actual position is that many secondary school students have enormous reading problems and need direct reading instruction in order to overcome their problems. It is also true that generally secondary school teachers are not specifically trained to teach reading as such. English teachers are expected justly or unjustly to equip students with effective reading skills that would see them through all their studies. Content subject teachers seem to regard as their sole responsibility the impartation of facts and information in their subjects to enable the students to pass their examinations at the completion of a year's syllabus.

Since it is quite evident that secondary school students actually need direct instruction in reading, properly trained teachers would be required to do this job. If teacher education in South Africa is to provide for developmental reading in the high school, it may be necessary to create new courses with additional requirements for graduation. The least that seems feasible as a start is a kind of reorganization of existing courses with a view to focusing on what McGinnis calls the emphasis to accomplish the

desired end (McGinnis, 1961, p. 97). In South African circumstances such a course unit could be incorporated into the methods course for English teachers and later on sub-units of the course could form part of methods courses for certain content subjects such as history and science.

It would seem that it is imperative at the moment to include in the training of secondary teachers program the development of skills to plan, organize, and manage developmental reading programs in English and in other secondary subjects to solve reading problems at high school and consequently at college. High school reading teachers would need to know their students' needs and reading problems and how to meet them. They would need to be familiar with the reading skills in general and reading instructional techniques or strategies.

The current situation in secondary teacher education in South Africa may be briefly described as follows:

- a) Secondary school teachers are trained at colleges of education in the universities and at teacher training colleges. The goal is that all secondary school teachers should be university graduates.
- b) There is no coordination among the teacher educators so that each institution has its own program. The standard of professional training in all the institutions, however, is quite high; programs extend two to three years depending on the certification being sought.
- c) High school teachers may be classified into the following categories:
 - 1) Graduate = B.A. plus a one-year teacher education diploma called a H.E.D.

- ii) Graduate = B.A., H.E.D., B.Ed., M.A., or M.Ed.
 - iii) Graduate = B.Ped. which is a four-year teaching degree similar to the U.S.
 - iv) Undergraduate = H.S.T.D. - Higher Secondary Teachers Diploma requiring two years of university academic course work in four school subjects like mathematics, history, science, etc., and one year professional training.
 - v) Undergraduate = S.T.D. - Secondary Teachers Diploma requiring one year of university academic course work in four subjects and one year professional training. These teachers are not expected to teach grades higher than 10.
 - vi) Undergraduate = J.S.T.D. - Junior Secondary Teachers Diploma offered at the Teacher Training Colleges where primary school teachers are also trained. This is a 3-year diploma and these teachers are not expected to teach grades higher than 8 or 9.
- d) Facilities available at teacher education centers but some of which are not always available at the majority of secondary schools are:
- chalk board
 - overhead projector
 - tape recorders
 - 16mm film projectors
 - slide projectors

---library

---video tape machines

A dilemma arises when teachers, who have been trained to use all the above resources, find themselves having to improvise at the schools because most of these either cannot be used or are simply nonexistent.

- e) At present, teacher education does not provide for the training of remedial or special education teachers and reading specialists at all levels of schooling.
- f) Representing the case for South Africa the writer would concur with Thelma Obah's assessment of the Nigerian popular reasoning behind reading that, "reading for pleasure and reading with greater sophistication are not considered important teaching goals." (Obah, 1982, p. 316.

REVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH

One important factor that the writer immediately foresees as militating against this concern for reading instruction at universities, colleges, and high schools is the fact that the education system in South Africa is still growing and is, therefore, under tremendous stress from such pressing problems as crowded classrooms, lack of essential facilities, insufficient basic learning materials, and lack of teachers. Emphasizing direct teaching of developmental reading skills at the secondary schools at this stage could be regarded as a luxury that the system can ill afford. Nevertheless, the writer believes that the time has now come to regard this problem as legitimate and genuine and worthy of being kept fresh in educators' minds.

Secondary Schools

Megumi Komachiya, a teacher of English as a second language at a secondary school in Japan, believes that reading is part of the total communicative process and its instruction at secondary school integrates experiences in reading, writing, listening, and speaking English as a living language (Komachiya, 1982, p. 437). This applies fully to South Africa where the majority of the inhabitants use English as a second language and a language of education.

Alma Read suggests that a developmental reading program at secondary level should aim at answering the following questions:

- a) How can we get a fuller understanding of the nature of the reading process?
- b) How can permanent interest in reading be developed?
- c) What are the basic requirements of a developmental reading program at various secondary school levels?

- d) How does reading contribute to the personal and social development of adolescents?
- e) How does reading help to develop intellectual power, thinking ability, and creative ability in adolescents?
- f) What are some appropriate reading instruction methods for slow, average, and gifted pupils?
- g) How is listening skill related to reading?
- h) What is the value of various mechanical aids for the improvement of reading?
- i) What are some basic research findings that have significance for reading? (Read, 1963, p. 2)

All of these are pertinent to the proposed program. Again, Alma Read clarifies the distinction between developmental reading and remedial reading by stating that developmental reading is a sequential program of instruction which reinforces and extends those desirable reading skills and appreciations acquired in previous years and develops new skills and appreciations as they are needed to comprehend advanced and complex forms of written communication (Read, 1982, p. 5).

Janet Larsen states that the ability to succeed in college may be directly related to reading competencies associated with mature skills including rate flexibility, critical reading, concentration, and study strategies. She goes further to suggest that the improvement of reading during the high school years would prevent some of the reading problems encountered by college students (Larsen, 1979, p. 399). This assertion holds true for South Africa.

Sean Walmsley believes that secondary school reading programs should receive the attention and the funding traditionally given to elementary

school reading programs. He declares that a goal for a secondary reading program, while based on learners' needs, surveys of contemporary life, and the opinions of reading specialists, is nevertheless to be guided by philosophical considerations (Walmsley, 1981, p. 75).

Brother Leonard Courtney quotes John Gardner as having said that some subjects are more important than others. Reading is the most important of all. He quotes Francis Keppel as having declared that every learning disorder seems to show some association with reading difficulties (Courtney, 1966, p. 204). Writing about an integrated reading project in the secondary school Courtney touches on some points that would apply in the South African situation such as the following:

- i) Instituting a special reading program that would initiate all eighth-grade students to those reading skills considered essential for academic growth and successful living.
- ii) English teachers putting particular effort to incorporate reading and study skills into the language arts curriculum with special attention being given to slower students.
- iii) Conscious effort being made by all content area teachers to instruct students in those reading skills specifically relevant to their content (Courtney, 1966, p. 207).

Courtney concludes his article by proposing certain conditions which he says would help make a secondary reading program a success. Some of the conditions that would be feasible to meet in the South African situation are the following:

- a) An administrative conviction, direction, and provision because the principal of a school is usually in a better position than the

reading teacher to resolve disciplinary differences and enlist departmental cooperation.

- b) A clear idea of why the program should exist and what it ought to do for that particular school and those specific children.
- c) A decision as to whether the reading program should exist as a separate department at a school or a sub-department of another department.
- d) Adequate facilities, materials, and equipment must be available and these should be suitable for the varying needs, interests, and abilities of the students in all secondary school levels.
- e) A sound machinery for careful and continuous appraisal of reading proficiency for all students (Courtney, 1966, p. 210).

Harvey Littrell lists the following program features as desirable for a secondary reading program:

- i) Development, correction, and remediation.
- ii) Reading as a means for personal and social development, a source of information, and a desirable recreational activity.
- iii) Availability of teaching materials at various levels of difficulty and including basal textbooks, workbooks, teacher-made materials, and various audio-visual devices.
- iv) Evaluation techniques in the form of standardized tests, teacher-made tests, and student self-evaluation techniques (Littrell, 1964, p. 114).

It would appear that secondary school reading problems anywhere in the world will not be solved until more teachers become vitally interested in the problems and possibilities of improved reading instruction.

Marcia Nash, speaking about evaluating reading instruction suggests that a secondary/school principal should find out how much reading is going on. This would mean reading instruction as accelerated instruction for enrichment; developmental instruction for the development of literacy skills; and remedial instruction as intensive help for disabled readers (Nash, 1981, p. 52).

Teacher Education

Dorothy McGinnis says that in 1961 in the State of Michigan, of all the teachers who were teaching reading at secondary school, less than 10 percent had received any instruction on how to teach reading to high school students. She concluded her study by recommending that:

- a) the existing courses in teacher education be reorganized to accommodate instruction in reading for secondary school teachers.
- b) content area teachers be trained to teach reading skills that stimulate critical thinking in their subjects (McGinnis, 1961, p. 93).

These recommendations are in keeping with the core thinking on the proposal for a South African course unit in teacher education.

Most of the research done in this country on the subject of reading applies to a great measure to the situation in South Africa today. Harry Sartain and Paul Stanton say that in 1974 most elementary teachers and very few secondary teachers, if any at all, had had more than one or two brief courses in teaching reading. Those teachers had little knowledge of the difficulties which children can encounter in learning to read, of how to diagnose those difficulties, and of the instructional adjustment that can be made for different individuals to produce better results (Sartain & Stanton, 1974, p. 3).

John Manning, referring specifically to the preparation of reading teachers says that the undergraduate reading methods course should enable the student teacher to develop an understanding of the reading process and of the general field of reading instruction obtainable through directed readings, use of detailed study guides, and periodic assessments of undergraduate progress. The undergraduates should be provided with eclectic instructional techniques which are not peculiar to any one reading program but are adaptable to all (Manning, 1974, p. 242).

George McNinch and Mark Richmond report that reading achievement scores are highest in the schools where the principals are former reading professionals who have the experience necessary to provide active leadership to the teachers and professional resource staff under their administrative and supervisory charges (McNinch & Richmond, 1981, p. 235). This can be seen to be a long-term objective in the proposal plan for South Africa.

John Schaff states that subject area teachers' attitudes and practices toward reading in the secondary schools present a curious paradox. On the one hand a large majority of these teachers including language arts teachers claim that they are emphasizing reading skills in their teaching and that it is important for all content area teachers to complete a course in secondary reading methods. On the other hand content teachers do not view the teaching of reading as their job because they say they are not trained for it. They claim that they do not have time in their crowded course schedules to substitute reading instruction for content instruction (Schaff, 1981, p. 79). To the writer it is clear that the success of any reading program in the secondary school is contingent upon the attitudes

toward reading of subject area teachers, principals, reading specialists, school boards, and administrators.

Lois Bader, after investigating certification requirements in reading for secondary school teachers in the U.S. in 1975 felt convinced that ideally classroom teachers ought to be equipped to handle developmental reading responsibilities (Bader, 1975, p. 237). This is necessitated by the feeling that reading must be an integral part of secondary programs of instruction if the goals in the content area are to be achieved.

Dorothy Welle reports that as state certifying agencies have moved toward requiring reading methods courses as a prerequisite to elementary and secondary teacher certification, reading educators have been elated while secondary education majors have been dismayed at the increase in requirements (Welle, 1981, p. 134). Such a reaction can be expected almost anywhere where this program is being introduced as a new program. Welle further reports that taking a course in reading methods led to more positive attitudes toward reading in content areas for those who would be entering the field (Welle, 1981, p. 135). This gives hope to those who are still considering the introduction of such a course in teacher education. This illustrates further that the attitudes of teachers are affected primarily by their perception of how applicable reading training is likely to be in their own area of specialization. This has implications for the course itself that the reading methods courses should be specific about the aspects of reading skills that are useful or essential in each content area.

Richard Burnett and Thomas Schnell, reviewing the Competency-Based Teacher Education (CBTE) and its relation to secondary reading, state that courses in teacher education tend to be so crowded with both general and

professional subject requirements that it would be difficult to create time in the curriculum for new courses (Burnett & Schnell, 1975, p. 546). This is true of the teacher education programs in South Africa. If the university professor in South Africa were expected to make decisions regarding changes in instructional approaches, the task of instituting a reading instruction component in teacher education would be much easier. Educational problems in South Africa tend to have a strong political flavor which turns them into a kind of forbidden area for professors to tread. The consequence of this is that the responsibility for relevance or lack of it of teacher competencies rests on the shoulders of the mandators, administrators, and politicians rather than of the instructors.

It may be that South Africa should start by training special reading teachers and then let them train other teachers through inservice programs. We may also run into the problem of secondary school teachers who themselves lack the reading skills they are supposed to teach and who may be reading at levels below those of some of the students.

Dianzungu Dia Biniakunu describes how inservice training in reading instruction for underqualified French secondary teachers in Zaire helped to improve the reading ability of eighth graders they taught (Biniakunu, 1982, p. 662).

PROPOSED COURSE OBJECTIVES

Secondary School Component

If and when the proposal and accompanying scheme sees the light of day all the students in grades 8 through 12 would hopefully receive instruction in reading to meet the following objectives:

1. To provide the individual student with skills to read all kinds of printed material with relative ease, flexibility, confidence, and accuracy while at the same time developing the love for reading.
2. To stress the importance of developmental reading skills in the secondary school program whereby attention would be paid to a broad view of reading and study skills as applicable to the English language and other subjects.
3. To help the students establish better self-concepts and develop stronger confidence in themselves as readers.
4. To instruct students in specific individual skills under the following broad categories:
 - a) Literal comprehension
 - b) Interpretive comprehension
 - c) Critical thinking
 - d) Vocabulary skills
 - e) Study skills

The above objectives would be supported by the following aims of instruction:

- i) To improve the students' comprehension which includes the location, selection, organization, and retention of information, following directions, and reading graphic materials.

- ii) To improve the students' rate of reading and flexibility skills which include varied speeds for reading narrative and expository writing according to purpose, skimming, and scanning.
- iii) To spur enthusiasm and interest in reading for academic, leisure, and recreational purposes.
- iv) To encourage and improve students' listening ability and appreciation of literary styles and techniques.

Teacher Education Component

If and when the proposed course unit comes to fruition, all language arts teachers and possibly some others too would receive instruction during their regular training or through inservice programs in methods of direct instruction in reading at the secondary schools under the following objectives:

1. To enlist interest, concern, and involvement in the problems of reading experienced by secondary school students.
2. To establish willingness and readiness to grapple with the following questions or issues:
 - a) What is reading?
 - b) Do our students in the high schools have reading problems?
 - c) Is it necessary to teach direct reading at the high school at all?
 - d) Who should teach reading at the high school?
3. To sensitize the university college of education to the problem so that it may organize itself into action for broader involvement.
4. To institute the program by familiarizing student teachers with such reading equipment and materials as magazines, newspapers,

paperbacks, games, workbooks, recorders, record players, film-strips, movie projectors, teacher-made materials, etc., and how they can make reading instruction effective.

5. To equip student teachers and serving teachers with relevant assessment or evaluation techniques whereby reading abilities of students could continuously be reviewed.
6. To equip present and prospective teachers with the knowledge and strategies to enable them to impart to secondary school students the following reading skills:
 - a) Vocabulary skills
 - b) General comprehension skills
 - c) Critical reading skills
 - d) Study skills
7. To motivate and encourage teachers to improvise in the situations where facilities are inadequate or conditions are too adverse for the easy implementatin of the program.

The above objectives would be supported by providing the vivid awareness that Narang believes should stay permanently in the minds of teacher educators. Such awareness is provided through attention to the following factors:

- i) Effective teaching
- ii) Reading proficiency
- iii) Reading instruction
- iv) Structure of secondary education
- v) Teacher background
- vi) Teacher characteristics

vii) Teaching skills

Narang suggests that these descriptions imply heavy teacher responsibilities which should include competencies in successful teaching of background concepts, the reading skills themselves, use of appropriate instructional strategies, and the just and fair execution of measurement and evaluation procedures (Narang, 1976).

Some implementation constraints that Burnett and Schnell regard as real should be emphasized:

- a) Time scheduling factors and planned learning activities should be compatible with the existing broader scope of the whole teacher education program.
- b) Developing clear ideas regarding the balance between lecture-discussion component, group interaction and simulation activities, reading materials, field experience, and evaluation processes.
- c) Locating and identifying suitable and valid criteria to determine pupil reading problems to be catered for by the new course for teachers.
- d) Establishing some follow-up procedures whereby it may be verified that those who complete the course successfully perform the functions on the job that the course was intended to prepare them to perform.
- e) Provision for the need to modify the course in the light of feedback received from previous students.
- f) Making the course flexible enough to cater for individual interests of teachers and levels of operation.
- g) Opening the options for the course to be segmented (Burnett and Schnell, 1975, p. 548).

CONCLUSION

From the above exposition it is now clear to this writer that a starting point should be with teacher education especially with the programs that are undertaken at university colleges of education. Once the majority of the people concerned with secondary education are aware of the need for the proposed reading instruction course, there will be no major obstacles to going ahead and teaching the students provided the teachers, facilities, and materials are available. Facilities and materials can easily be acquired when funds become available. The remaining problem would be identifying those who will train or teach the university professors of education in South Africa in reading instruction methods so that they in turn may teach their students to handle direct reading instruction at secondary schools. When and where can university instructors receive such inservice training except at an American university like the University of Northern Iowa which has a long and outstanding tradition and reputation for teacher education? Three or four instructors could receive an intensive six-week course. The existing teacher education structures in South Africa would adequately take care of the rest.

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