

SCHOOLS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE¹

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UNDER certain conditions, schools can make a difference—a constructive, positive difference in the lives of those associated with them and, in turn, to the society of which schools are a part. At this time of extreme dissatisfaction—indeed, disaffection—with our schools, this assumption is more a statement of faith than of reason. The key words are, of course, “under certain conditions.”

To articulate such an assumption is to run the danger of being branded, at best, a somewhat old-fashioned dreamer who ignores the facts and, at worst, an establishment reactionary who ignores the insidious role of the schools in maintaining a class society. The course must be run, nonetheless.

In regard to the first danger, the facts are compelling. “Overall, the input-output studies provide very little evidence that school resources, in general, greatly influence student outcomes” (Averich *et al.*, 1974). Studies of early childhood educational intervention programs indicate that only minor effects can be teased out and then only through the use of the most sophisticated

“The time for binding up our professional wounds, for reflection, for determining priorities, and for determining a place to begin the necessary reconstruction is fast upon us. That place is the single school with its principal, teachers, and pupils as primary participants and parents, community residents, and citizens generally as secondary participants. . . . The school could become, indeed, the source of our enlightened self-interest, joining us all in constructive endeavor.”

statistical techniques (Bronfenbrenner, 1973). But, for me, such findings only help to illuminate the problem. The conceptual models from which we derive interventions in schooling and indices of their effects are inadequate—at best impotent and at worst wrong.

Cross-national studies of childhood socialization have uncovered behavioral traits among children in some countries that do not overlap (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). In effect, there are discrete characteristics showing up in children of one culture that are not found in another. Such findings suggest the potentiality of powerful cultural conditions or interventions in the lives of young people. Posed beside research regarding the effects of

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schooling as measured within the framework of an input-output model, these cross-cultural studies suggest the mildness and impotence of both the substance and process of our efforts to improve schools. More powerful interventions or modifications are required.

In effect, regarding the reconstruction of schooling, it is likely that we scarcely have tried. Instead, we have tinkered a little around the edges and delivered up a few pills and tranquilizers, most of them placebos. Not surprisingly, measurement has revealed "no statistically significant results." What we have failed to realize is that we have been measuring the effects of non-events (Charters and Jones, 1973). We suffer seriously from CMD—chronic measurement diseases, such as pulling up plants to look at them before the roots take hold or subjecting to scrutiny plants already dying for lack of care and feeding. And, of course, we are far more preoccupied with the plant's height and weight than with whether it is pleasing to the eye.

Before moving on, I should advance two caveats. First, it is exceedingly doubtful that schools, *as now generally conceived and conducted*, can make much of a difference. The changes called for are profound. The total time spent in a place named school is brief: less than 7 percent of all living hours by the age of 13; a little more than 8 percent by the age of 17. By the latter age, television has consumed about 9 percent of all living hours. Clearly, then, we must think of schooling as a concept rather than a place—a concept embracing the fostering of knowledge, wisdom, and a host of qualities of mind and character—in effect, as society's ways of educating, if it is to make a significant difference. Let us begin with the reconstruction of what we have, helping it to evolve into something more compelling.

Second, because the changes must be profound and because, in the process of reconstruction and evolution, they include much more than places called schools, we are addressing public policy. Consequently, for the schools to try to "go it alone" can lead only to disaster. A school is part of a larger ecosystem within which it is a unique subculture.

This observation leads easily to slogans, myths, and unrealistic expectations regarding citizen or community involvement in schools. We do not yet know how citizen involvement can be made effective. Citizen involvement is fraught with problems and the concept of community is being dangerously redefined. For sound public policy regarding the conduct of our schools to emerge, it probably is necessary to approach the problem of reconstructing our schools as a rather bold social experiment involving a good deal of risk and the probability of failures as well as successes. During the process, it will be necessary to suspend many conventional rules and to legitimate the right to fail.

II

One of the most serious commentaries on our times is that most of our institutions are in disarray. Since institutions are "the bones of our civilization" (Eisely, 1969), this is a most disquieting observation. There is a pervasive malaise of uncertainty and distrust, accompanied by feelings of impotence or ennui and a tendency to blame others while remaining in a state of inertia. The schools and those in them are part of this disturbing picture.

For a generation, the schools have been expected to deal with all the problems of war, peace, poverty, crime, joblessness, segregated housing patterns, racism, and the rest which the larger society seems almost powerless to resolve. Then, schools have been prodded and poked from all sides and with all manner of instruments until one wonders how they have managed to survive at all. Such unrealistic expectations could lead only to external disillusionment: ". . . nobody has a kind word for the institution that was only the other day the foundation of our freedom, the guarantee of our future, the cause of our prosperity and power, the bastion of our security, the bright and shining beacon that was the source of enlightenment, the public school" (Hutchins, 1972). So much prodding and poking could lead only to internal demoralization.

Inadequate, uncoordinated, and some-

times arrogant efforts from the outside to reform the schools have contributed also to a divided education profession. Researchers and practitioners are so divided that it becomes increasingly difficult to get the data needed to approach educational change afresh, simply because those best able to guide data collection no longer are welcome in schools wishing to be left alone. Researchers are identified with those research, development, and diffusion (R, D, and D) people who, in the 1960's, thought they knew what was best for the schools (and that sometimes included "teacher-proof" materials).

But practitioners don't trust each other, either. Some chief state school officers are associated with accountability plans which appear to point ultimately to teachers as the only ones to be held accountable. Individual teachers seek both strength and professional anonymity in powerful teachers' associations or unions from which *all* administrators usually are excluded. These same state officers seem unable to connect current approaches to accountability with a rising need to cope with union leaders (Goodlad, in press).

Many teachers are specialists first and educators second, identified with the central office as supervisors, or, at the secondary level, organized into departments which tend to divide rather than unite the faculty. In a no-person-land between the central office and the teachers stands an uncertain principal who has no status as a teacher. In many schools, most of his or her time goes into the management of disparate projects funded by categorical aid which often has been requested neither by the principal nor any of the teachers. And some of these projects divide the pupils into segregated groups and, indeed, classes of school citizens. If one believes, as I do, that for constructive changes to occur, self-interest and the commonweal must come together, then the chances of such changes emanating from a profession thus divided are dim, indeed. The self-interests are too divided and too parochial.

We have met some benefactors and taken the fools' gold. We have met some enemies and taken their abuse. We have jostled with our most available adversaries,

abusing them most vigorously because of their kinship, failing to realize that they are us. The time for binding up our professional wounds, for reflection, for determining priorities, and for finding a *place* to begin the necessary reconstruction is fast upon us.

“I remember with considerable pain my success in promoting, simultaneously, high academic achievement and cheating among elementary school children.”

That place is the single school with its principal, teachers, and pupils as primary participants and parents, community residents, and citizens generally as secondary participants. It is the sole institution invested exclusively with educational functions, even though we have corrupted it with an array of non-educational and mis-educative ones. It is the one place where researchers, reformers, and all those practitioners who call themselves teachers, music specialists, principals, supervisors, curriculum directors, superintendents, and chief state school officers can meet in common endeavor. And it is the only place where most parents and citizens can view the practices of education in any tangible way, gain understanding of our vast educational enterprise, and secure some sense of meaningful participation. The school could become, indeed, the source of our enlightened common self-interest, joining us all in constructive endeavor.

The single school is the largest and the proper unit for educational change. The single teacher is too small a unit to be a focus for significant change. Cultivation of teachers' necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes is no assurance that the culture of the school will support their use. The school system is too large a unit and it is structural, not organic. What is good for its maintenance frequently is a destructive pollutant for the school. Ideally, the system exists to nourish

each individual school, in the way the school should exist to nourish its inhabitants: to legitimate the authority it needs to fulfill its responsibilities, to channel needed resources, to provide it with a protective umbrella, to nourish its individuality, and to encourage the risk-taking involved in productive change.

My assumption is that those within the school are both capable of and responsible for creating more satisfying settings for their daily living together. The accompanying assumption is that everyone outside of the school exists, so far as their school interests and affiliation are concerned, to help make this happen. Such a conception differs in kind from most extant conceptions of how to improve schooling. Such a conception demands fundamentally different roles, activities, and sources of satisfaction for all involved.

III

There have prevailed two fundamentally different views or theories of change and both have spawned their share of models or strategies:

There is one view which is inclined to say that the only way in which life alters or changes is when change is forced upon it. . . .

But there is another point of view, which is that in life itself there is a centrifugal dynamism of sorts, not just in man but in all living creatures. It does not wait upon its environment, instead it intrudes farther and farther into it, experimenting on its own (Eisely, 1969).

The first pervades Western civilization and is deeply engrained in current social policy in the United States. The techniques were refined in the military and widely adopted in business and industry. They were employed by the National Science Foundation in curriculum reform and, subsequently, by the Office of Education in various other school reforms. The bias is a rationalist one: purpose precedes action. Those who most ardently hew to it convert the bias into a belief. There is no room for debate, the bias serving as a blinder screening out any alternative positions. Current applications, in addition to those cited, include some oper-

ating plans of accountability, PPBS, competency-based teacher education, and performance contracting.

The second is found in so-called non-directive counseling, some approaches to group therapy, psychoanalysis, and the like. The bias is that change begins and flows from within. The analyst, for example, is a temporary crutch who helps the person find self and gain increased control over daily existence. The bias eschews all activity following purpose and enters the alternative of purpose, if any, following or being discovered in the activity. The extreme bias is that "nobody can teach anybody anything."

So far as the two extremes in bias are concerned, my position is, essentially, "a plague on both your houses." My leaning, however, is toward the second—in large part on value grounds but also because we have not seriously applied it to institutional change. Many forms of the first position have been used, accompanied by millions of supporting dollars, to reform the schools, especially in the research, development, and diffusion model, with disappointing results. Those seeking to reform the schools did not take time, usually, to seek to understand the schools or to find out how those in the schools perceived the problem or any problems. They simply sought to put the products of R, D, and D into the system. But the system effectively deflected, defused, or co-opted what was delivered to them, nullifying or modifying possible consequences. It becomes increasingly clear that the developers and the intended users live in two different worlds and operate from profoundly different assumptions (House, 1974).

The second approach calls for the kind of trust people in and out of the education profession seem loath to give to one another. The current situation reminds me of the company slogan: "Our new incentive program—one mistake and you're through." When teachers fail to make decisions as some of us would have them do, we assign the decision-making authority to a higher level of incompetence instead of providing these teachers with the support and assistance they obviously need. And then we



puzzle over why it is that all decisions become more costly with respect to both the dollars spent on education and the relevance of decisions for those in the schools.

Inner-oriented change processes are unlikely to attract funds. This probably is a blessing since the demands to account for their use undoubtedly would distort that use. Few funding agencies are interested in proposals devoid of the rationalist bias and the array of pre-stated ends-means relationships that go with it. I recall only too clearly the stern foundation executive demanding that I spell out specifically the nature of each innovation I intended to develop or introduce! Since then, in the face of similar demands, I have learned to keep my temper because such people know not what they do. In spite of the probability of much money being injurious and the greater probability of not being able to get it for self-renewing activity anyway, it is tantalizing to think of how much schools might be reconstructed if those who, in the final analysis, must ultimately do the job were given it to spend.

Earlier, I spoke of the need to suspend certain conventional rules or ways of thinking about how to produce more effective, satisfying schools. What we must suspend,

above all, is the conventional paradigm for effecting and evaluating change, which adheres closely to the rationalist bias. This assumes that schools should be goal-oriented. It also assumes that they are. Schools need only better or clearer goals and then their activities can be aligned with them. How good they are is then determined by evaluating the degree of goal-achievement.

I am not asking that such a view be condemned to oblivion (it is much too hearty to be affected by that); only that it be suspended long enough to give inner-oriented views a fair hearing. The purposes-before-action orientation has some legitimate uses, especially where the need for social engineering is abundantly clear. But, carried to the extremes so frequently employed, there are some serious problems.

First, the assumed relationship between general goals for students and some precise instructional objectives is deceptively attractive but exceedingly fragile. High attainment on the latter provides no assurance of advancement toward the former. Stated goals usually espouse virtues such as human understanding, appreciation of our heritage, critical judgment, creativity, honesty, good work, and the like. But we have yet to estab-

lish any relationship between these and achievement in what is emphasized in schools. And attaining our specific objectives often interferes with the virtues we espouse. I remember with considerable pain my success in promoting, simultaneously, high academic achievement and cheating among elementary school children.

Second, it is doubtful that schools are goal-oriented. To expect them to be is to intro-

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duce the prospect of a profound and perhaps unsettling innovation. The expectation for change can be nicely circumvented, however, by learning to formulate precise, elegant objectives, whether or not they are used to guide personal teaching behavior. Teachers have been called upon to do so many things that they have become, in self-defense, exceedingly skilled in such circumvention. But the process of doing so takes a great deal of time which might be turned more productively to other, more self-directed things. Schools are survival- and activity-oriented. Time might be spent better simply in improving the variety and quality of activities. For those teachers who do find it appropriate to teach at least some of the time with objectives in mind, learning to formulate them well is an asset. But such should not be required of all teachers nor for all realms of learning activity.

Third, in terms of a school's actual functioning, stated goals usually are puerile. The *real* goals are not stated, nor consciously worked toward, nor evaluated through paper-and-pencil tests. They are embedded in the woodwork, in the regularities by means of which the school conducts its activities and survives. These goals have to do with providing a labor force, preparing for institutions of higher learning, assuring military preparedness, and advancing the level of the GNP. Meanwhile, the school serves such residual or

latent functions as keeping children off the streets, freeing parents for other activities, providing homework to reduce evening competition among family members for television programs, and the like. The aims, goals, and functions actually served by schools are only obliquely related to any formal statements of goals formulated for them. But they are fundamentally involved in the regularities by means of which schools conduct their existence.

Fourth, the goals-activities-evaluation paradigm seems inevitably and relentlessly to narrow the range of educational preoccupation, shifting attention from qualities inherent in the activities to what can be rather easily defined, prescribed, and measured. We become more concerned with whether five- and six-year-olds are developing skills in reading than with whether they joyously are pursuing meaningful tasks. We do away with what fails to produce significant differences in achievement and, since hardly anything does, we constantly are trying new things with fresh dollars instead of persisting in approaches reflecting our best use of intelligence.

What I am asking for is not new; it has been called for time and again. What I am asking for is that we suspend for a time as a matter of policy our pathological preoccupation with pupil effects, as defined in statements of objectives or norm-based achievement tests. What I am asking for is that we concentrate, as an alternative, on the *quality of life in schools*—not just for pupils but for all who live there each day.

I am asking that this become a preoccupation for researcher and practitioner alike. It must be remembered that the primary participants are those who occupy the setting, but they do not own it; and that they cannot do it alone. What is needed, then, for reconstruction of the schools is productive tension between an inner drive for renewal and ideas, services, and encouragement from without. Neither perpetuation of the status quo on the part of those on the inside nor temporary gratification of self-interests or missionary zeal on the part of those on the outside will suffice.

What commends such a proposal to us now when it has fallen on deaf ears before is the nature of the times and our recent experiences with change and innovation. There seem no longer to be vast sums for R, D, and D. The evidence regarding sums already spent is disappointing. It is clear that the users' interests were ignored; that those in the schools were viewed as passive or only mildly resistant (House, 1974). Alternative proposals have little to lose. They are worth a try, if only because they have not received serious attention.

More important, focus on the quality of life in each individual school stirs no grand strategies and demands no large sums of money. Each school group begins with its own culture and its own resources and joins with essential elements in its own school-community ecosystem and beyond. But there is more to it than casual processes of self-improvement. To obtain and maintain the tension necessary for significant change and renewal to occur, there must be symbiosis—a coming together of dissimilar organisms. To this I now turn.

IV

In 1966, several colleagues and I created, in collaboration with school districts in Southern California, a consortium of 18

schools named the League of Cooperating Schools. At the outset, it was a symbiosis—a merging of dissimilar organisms: the schools and a new entity, the Research Division of the Institute for Development of Educational Activities (/I/D/E/A/). There were several rather loose initial agreements with the 18 districts in which the schools were located and a clear *quid pro quo*: the schools, in the process of helping themselves improve, would receive some support and encouragement from us; we, in turn, would have access to the schools in studying what happens when schools seek to change themselves, when they endeavor to introduce those many innovations some of us so glibly describe and prescribe.

Nobody had in mind any specific innovations, however. The League was the innovation; it suddenly existed, at least in embryonic form. There were three major components: each school, a network or potentially new social system embracing the 18 schools, and the /I/D/E/A/ research office. Envision, if you will, a wheel with spokes connecting our office, the hub, with each school and a rim connecting the 18 schools. It was our intention to reduce, over time, the strength of the spokes in favor of strengthening the rim connecting the schools. In effect, the schools would be helped to help themselves and one another.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (Signed) JOHN H. BRALOVE, Business Manager.

But it is incorrect to describe this physical entity as the League. It was much more. There were sets of relationships: hub to each school, hub to the schools collectively, the reverse of these relationships, school-to-school, individual-to-individual, several of these to several others, and so on. All of these promised synergy—a combined action through which the sum total of results might exceed the sum of individual effects. There might very well be serendipity, too, or unexpected fallout from this unique array of relationships once they were smoothly functioning. The League was, indeed, a physical entity, but it was also these sets of relationships and their potentiality for productive change.

A few conventional rules were suspended at the outset. But this was less a specific agreement than an awareness that some such suspension might be necessary. For example, it was anticipated that time would be needed for principals and, perhaps, staffs of schools in the League to come together. As it turned out, it became necessary to request and, often, to fight for each suspension of the rules, even rather trivial ones. Custom and routine keep school systems functioning; asking to change them, even a little, can be quite threatening especially to middle managers whose job roles often are created by those who occupy them.

One agreement was that the principals would be released to meet together one day each month. For a year, they sparred with one another at their meetings, fearful of revealing their feelings of inadequacy. Not much happened in the schools but, many principals said, this was largely because of inadequate teachers. Meanwhile, it became apparent that these schools, like most schools, lacked any meaningful dialogue regarding existing problems (Goodlad, Klein, and associates, 1970). We encouraged such activity.

In time, teachers, principals, and members of our staff agreed on the need to improve the process of dialogue in schools and developed criteria for a process of D D A E—dialogue, decisions, action, and evaluation. Conducting business through such a process

became a way of life for all of us (/I/D/E/A/, 1972). It also became a kind of dependent variable for our research activity. Increasingly, it seemed to us that such elements as content, salience, and comprehensiveness of the dialogue might serve as criteria for judging the quality of D D A E and suggest the ability of a school staff to conduct its business effectively. In effect, D D A E might serve as a measure of a school's propensity for change (Barry, 1974).

At the request of the schools, and to a degree on our own, we provided annotated bibliographies and readings on microfiche regarding current innovations and ideas for educational improvement. Clusters of teachers began to discuss possible new practices, to become curious about alternatives. A few, working together, began to try some things. Then, they wanted to know more, and especially to find out what teachers elsewhere were thinking and doing (Lieberman, 1973). This is not the change cycle assumed in the R, D, and D model.

These stirrings on the part of teachers often were threatening to principals. The latter began to discuss more serious problems at their monthly meetings. These "inadequate" teachers were making demands, demands which threatened the previously more secure role of principals. The principals sought support and ideas from one another and from us. The idea of assuming some leadership appeared and, of course, was very threatening to principals at first. For perhaps the first time in their lives, these men and women seriously wanted help; they wanted to acquire the skills and confidence necessary for guiding the burgeoning activity of teachers. They helped one another, with our help, acquire some of the personal resources required.

One of the most essential elements in what proved to be an exciting experience in inner-oriented change with support from the outside was the process of D D A E. In those schools developing high D D A E, some other interesting variables were at a relatively high level: teacher morale, teacher professionalism, and teachers' sense of power or potency (Bentzen, 1974). It appeared that many

teachers were achieving increasing control over their own individual destinies and the conduct of daily life in the schools.

An interesting development was increased desire on the part of the teachers to find out what peers in other League schools were doing and, later, to seek help from and give help to these colleagues. Increasingly, our role became one of serving as a switching station to bring together those who wanted specific assistance and those who viewed themselves as able to give it.

The way in which specific changes or innovations emerged is interesting. There was very little fuss or fanfare. Possible educational changes entered rather naturally into the D D A E process. Teachers discussed and used them as they did textbooks, films, or any other resource. They simply tried what seemed to make sense, more or less "on the run," in the process of conducting and refining an educational program for children. The smoothness of execution, in many instances, would be somewhat dismaying or unnerving to those who think that all significant changes must be imposed systematically from without.

It had been our intention at the outset to cultivate the League in such way that our office would become unnecessary and unwanted. This turned out to be a questionable premise. Admittedly, we were needed and called upon less and less for assistance with specifics; the teachers sought out each other for this. But we were asked more and more for reflections on educational trends and future possibilities and for impressions regarding the schools' activities. Interestingly, they increasingly wanted feedback from our research findings. We were needed for a host of legitimatizing, encouraging, and critiquing roles. Apparently, we provided something not normally available in the formal system. We had no jurisdiction over the professional lives of principals and teachers. In our eyes, it was all right to fail. Failure is always close by in the risky business of trying to change. People are unlikely to try to change when failure is not accepted as a possible outcome by those in positions of authority.

The foregoing provides only a glimpse

of what began with an attempted symbiosis of dissimilar organisms seeking to combine self-interests for mutual welfare, the synergy that resulted, and the serendipity we all came to appreciate. The League approach represents an alternative to R, D, and D as a strategy for school change and improvement. It does not rule out the usefulness of R, D, and D and its products, but these become meaningful after, not before, the people in a school begin to examine themselves and their settings through the process of D D A E. This approach does not rule out, either, the presence of interested, outside parties; in fact, they are essential. When those within the school begin to stir, they need to establish a relationship with sympathetic, constructively critical elements on the outside. Forces on the inside and forces on the outside establish a productive tension conducive to change. Perhaps the entire process is best left unnamed; but, if we must, "S, S, and S" will suffice—symbiosis, synergy, and serendipity.

V

Many people have asked me about where or how one begins. I abhor prescriptions. As a general guideline, however, let me suggest beginning with an examination, accompanied by dialogue, of how the school conducts its business—with the regularities of the school in which the primary participants live each day. Let us not begin with one more formulation of puerile goals. This is a subtle way to postpone doing anything. As I said earlier, the real goals of the school—indeed, its educational values and functions—are embedded in the structures, in ongoing relationships, in *what* is rewarded, in the nature of the reward system, in what is taught, in the allocation of time, in the rules and regulations, in what is done hour after hour in the school. It is from all of these that children learn each day to value or reject achievement, to love and to hate, to trust and to distrust, to play fair and to cheat. Let us look, then, for our hypocrisies, for the discrepancies between what we say we believe and what we actually do, in the regularities of schooling.

At this time of the Bicentennial, in the

aftermath of Watergate, we are more conscious than before of moral and spiritual values. There are many proposals for how these should be taught, usually in a period or two each week set aside for the purpose. But this will avail us very little. In fact, it could do harm, because children soon will ferret out the discrepancies between what we teach in such periods and what we do the rest of the time, judging us and our petty pieties accordingly. If we are truly concerned about moral and spiritual values, let us seek to find in the daily regularities of the school what values we are inculcating. And in these values we will find our real aims and goals and, indeed, the functions being fulfilled by the school.

Preferably, primary and secondary participants should join in examining the ongoing functions of the school. There is much more to gain than to lose by so doing. Parents, too, must come to see how we corrupt any reasonable concept of education through requiring the school to assume inappropriate burdens. For those within and those without to confront reality together and to decide together what should be done is a wholesome response to demands for accountability. All

of us, not just teachers, should be held accountable for what is expected of schools.

The criteria for deciding what should be strengthened, modified, or eliminated must be derived from more than immediate, parochial community interests, however. The schools belong to all of us. The school down the street must serve the interests of more than its residential area, more than any race or socioeconomic class. We want young people to be proud of their ethnicity. But we want them, also, to take pride and joy in the fact that they are part of a much larger democracy and, indeed, of humankind. If being brown or black or white or yellow is beautiful, then being sensitively aware of being part of humankind is ecstasy.

In some respects, the process and its results undoubtedly will be chilling. Those involved will not always uncover what they would prefer to find. But subsequent actions could cause our schools to make a difference—a positive, constructive difference for everyone living there and, ultimately, for all of us. Let us begin. But remember,

“Traveller, there is no path. Paths are made by walking”—Antonio Machado.

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