

# **Civic Education Versus Citizenship Education: Where is the Point of Convergence?**

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## **Abstract**

*Defining Civic Education and Citizenship Education is rather problematic especially to the practitioners and researchers in the field of Civic Education. Based on anecdotal evidence, the practitioners and researchers in the field of Civic Education, tend to view them as one and at times they apply them interchangeably. It is important to state note that the two terminologies are not the same as they carry different meanings. Admittedly, they can be used interchangeably depending on the context upon which one wants to use them, provided the point of convergence is created or attained. Otherwise, by any stretch of the imagination, there is need to examine the daily application of the two concepts and arrive at the correct point of convergence. In other instances, it would be counter-factual for one to try and use them under the guise of implying Civic Education to mean Citizenship Education or the other way round. No wonder Muleya (2017b:125-148) argues that contemporary conceptions and assumptions of Civic Education and Citizenship Education tends to reflect some level of ambiguity in the manner the two concepts are taken*

*or viewed. Therefore, in this article the author wants to demonstrate that Civic Education and Citizenship Education though have a point of convergence might in fact not mean one and the same thing. In this article, the author distinguishes between Civic Education in its broadest definition and Citizenship Education in its implicit position of belonging to a particular discipline in schools. It is this implicit and broadest position between the two concepts that tend to create confusions among the practitioners and researchers in the field on how they apply them in formal and non formal learning settings. The author is aware that such a distinction is not easy to sustain because the two concepts are always driven by the ideological strands which might not be addressed in this particular article. What characterises Civic Education and Citizenship Education is an issue of particular interest in this article. The distinction between Civic Education and Citizenship Education allows the author to show the shifts as well as the points of convergence between the two concepts. Before discussing the characteristics of the two concepts, the author intends to address the definitions associated with these two concepts. The author noted that in this article, he intends to clarifications on the similarities and differences between Civic Education and Citizenship Education. The reason for this is simply meant to bring out the useful points of convergence between two concepts.*

**Key words:** Civic Education; Citizenship; Citizenship Education; Convergence

## **Introduction**

In the last 30 to 40 years, scholars and researchers all over the world have been interested in writing and developing programmes of

Civic Education and Citizenship Education to be part of the school curricula and systems. This position is now well documented by scholars such as Cohen (2013); Van Deth (2013); Kennedy and Brunold (2016); Kerr (1999); Kennedy (2008); McCowan (2009); Muleya(2017a); Muleya (2017b); Muleya (2015); Biesta (2012); Peterson (2011) among others. These scholars have reported similar developments towards the consolidation of Civic Education and Citizenship Education in different countries and the role played by the two in the school curricula. Yet in all this literature very little is heard about the point of convergence between Civic Education and Citizenship Education- when is Civic Education, Citizenship Education and the other way round? What should Civic Education and Citizenship Education be like? By examining the two concepts in this article, it is hoped that the author would expand and clarify the existing understanding of the way Civic Education and Citizenship Education are used by the practitioners and researchers in the fields of education and social sciences. It may also show us how they are influenced by the beliefs, values, skills and dispositions of the two concepts. As such in the first part of the article, the author will be examining the question of definitions between Civic Education and Citizenship Education. The author will then demonstrate the distinction between Civic Education and Citizenship Education. The last section of the article will deal with the point of convergence if any and finally draw the conclusion.

### **Civic Education and Citizenship Education**

Before demonstrating the distinction between Civic Education and Citizenship Education, it is important that different definitions that constitute Civic Education and Citizenship Education are examined.

## **What is Civic Education?**

In the wake of renewed interest in education for democracy and consolidation of democracy across the globe, Muleya (2016: 185-198) observed that Civic Education as a subject involves active participation of citizens in managing themselves in society and making sure that everyone who needs help is supported. This kind of understanding about Civic Education is important in that it creates opportunities and possibilities among the general citizenry to learn how they ought to relate with one another as well as respecting divergent views and supporting each other whenever need arises in the community.

Strandbrink (2017:65) defines Civic Education in terms of normativity that transcend 'culture' altogether in favour of secularist and neutralist patterns. The view of Strandbrink is that Civic Education is not generally designed or practically expected to disadvantage anyone in the community but as an educational system that supports divergent cultural practices or creeds in democratic societies. Biesta (2011) on the other hand, defines Civic Education as learning which occurs in and through the processes and practices that make up the everyday lives of children and young adults in the community. Though the definition sounds narrow in focus, the point being made is that Civic Education generally viewed as playing a role in the lives of people across communities.

Carretero, Haste & Bermudez (2016: 295-308) as cited in Muleya (2017: 125-148) define Civic Education as a contested field with intense discussions about its goals and what teaching and learning processes should be privileged. They further argue that Civic Education as a subject reflect a transition from traditional models to new modern models that considerably reflect civic

participation. In other words, they view Civic Education from the point of view of praxis, that is to say that Civic Education ought to be seen as an action-oriented subject and not an abstract concept. It is concerned with different levels of interaction among the learners in the manner they use the tools and objects of life. How they experience and reflect on the assumptions, approaches, paradigms, worldviews, philosophies, systems, structures and people of diverse backgrounds as the means to gain great understanding through hands-on- knowledge on the ways of life in society.

In its broadest definition, Crittenden and Levine (2013: 1) state that “Civic Education” means all the processes that affect people’s beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities. The point at issue is that Civic Education is interwoven with ideas and beliefs that tend to affect members of society in the manner they approach matters of life in the community. Civic Education is developmental in nature as opposed to something that is static. The argument here is that Civic Education need not be intentional or deliberate; institutions and communities that transmit values and norms about Civic Education need to attach meaning to it so that citizenship is lived and experienced. Otherwise, it would be meaningless to talk about it if there is no link between what is learnt and what is eventually experienced in everyday life. One would also argue that Civic Education is certainly not limited to schooling and the education of children and youth. To the contrary, it also plays an important role in such matters as families, governments, religions, civic authorities, traditional authorities and mass media are just some of the institutions involved in civic education, understood as a lifelong process.

Muleya (2017)’s definition of Civic Education is that it is a subject which is encouraging free deliberation of the people in public

sphere. This means that Civic Education creates opportunities where citizens should be free and without any imagination of fear to discuss matters that affect them in the community. Matters of health, education, food, housing, governance just to mention a few require the engagement of citizens in addressing them and this means that these citizens must be civically informed. From this point, Civic Education becomes important in shaping the civic skills and civic knowledge of the citizens in society.

According to Peterson (2011:1), 'Civic Education' refers to any formative attempt to teach knowledge, skills and dispositions required for citizenship. From Peterson's definition of Civic Education I argue that the subject has to be taught in a manner that is structured and formalised such providing an organised and clear curriculum that speaks to pertinent matters that have a bearing on people's livelihood in the community. One other aspect that comes out of Peterson's definition of Civic Education is the argument that it comes in many guises such as the passive rote-learning of civics to the active and participatory type. The fact that Civic Education is taught formally in secondary schools does not mean that other processes and systems in the community cannot provide it. It is taught informally and formally through debates in the community. As such this aspect is in agreement with the point Peterson raises. The point is that Civic Education incorporates classroom-based lessons that reach outside the classroom and incorporates not only the structures and ethos of schools themselves, but activities within the community as well.

From the forgoing it is clear that the concept of Civic Education tends to find expressions in different writings. However, I argue that even if the situation is that way about the subject, there are commonalities in their definitions that I have highlighted above. From their definitions, it suggests that Civic Education is simply burgeoning or put another way re-surfacing province of political

thought which is wrong. I see Civic Education as representing something of a call to action. This is by any measure a fundamental and necessary action in the community that carries with it a number of positive benefits. With such observations made about Civic Education, in the next section I intend to examine different expressions and principles about Citizenship Education. I hope that readers will understand and appreciate why the two concepts are defined the way they are defined in a range of writings. In a similar fashion as I did with Civic Education, I would also like to recognise some definitions regarding Citizenship Education. The idea behind is for us to arrive at the point of convergence between the two concepts which tend to be used interchangeably. This point is affirmed by Muleya (2017: 59-81) who argues that the meaning of Civic Education also known as Citizenship Education is dependent on the context and as such it could be called by different names in different countries.

### **What is Citizenship Education?**

In trying to examine Citizenship Education, Scot and Lawson (2002) stated that the concept of citizenship was central to the understanding of Citizenship Education. There can never be Citizenship Education without having to bring into focus the concept of citizenship. As a concept, citizenship is composed of a number of key elements speak to Citizenship Education. These are notions of participation in public life, the idea that a citizen is one who both governs and is governed, a sense of identity, an acceptance of societal values, and rights and responsibilities. While this may be the general agreement over the core components of citizenship, it would appear that there is no universal agreement about the precise meaning of each of these components, which have been brought out by Scot and Lawson thereby giving a

conceptual difficulty on Citizenship Education. This is because the aims and objectives of Citizenship Education tend to be influenced by the understandings of citizenship itself which as seen in the above elements reflects some sort of contestation.

According to Halstead and Pike (2006:7) they contend that the definition of Citizenship Education ought to be located in the concept of citizenship. But what exactly is citizenship and how should the concept be interpreted? At its most basic level, Halstead and Pike (2006) state that, 'citizenship' refers to membership of a state or country or similar settled political community. They argue that there are layers of complexity even within this ostensibly simple definition. Firstly, there is need to clarify precisely what community or communities are referred to in the definition: Put in another way, what are we citizens of? Secondly, there is also need to clarify what benefits citizenship offers and what rights and duties the term 'membership' implies. What does a country expect of its citizens? Is it this membership that gives citizens their primary identity? How far does the loyalty demanded of citizens extend? These questions are fundamentally important in helping me to determine the meaning of Citizenship Education. In this context, Citizenship Education is the subject which teaches citizens on how they ought to act as members of the community or prospective members of the community. One could also define Citizenship Education a subject that provides an opportunity for children and young people to reflect on local, national and global issues, on their own beliefs and values as young citizens, and on the kind of society in which they wish to live.

Another definition worthy considering here with regard to Citizenship Education is based on my assumption that it is a subject with a wide range of ethical theories aimed at teaching young ones moral behaviour in society. To be a morally educated citizen, a person must: understand key moral principles and



their importance; have arrived at that understanding through a process of reflection, rather than being simply indoctrinated and behave morally in practice. Therefore I argue from this position that Citizenship Education as a subject involves the transmission of good values to the young ones so that there are able to act positively and in society.

Another definition worth reflecting on is one that is given by Pearce and Hallgarten (2000) as cited by Halstead and Pike (2006:34) that, Citizenship Education may be narrowly or broadly conceived. In its narrow sense, the aim of Citizenship Education is to produce 'citizens capable of addressing in the ballot box political arguments posed by democratic debate', whereas in the broader sense the aim of Citizenship Education is to produce 'citizens who share in a common social endeavour'. The narrow conception of Citizenship Education is education about citizenship, which is designed to produce informed or politically literate citizens. The broader conception of Citizenship Education is education for citizenship. In other words, Citizenship Education is the education which is intended to produce active citizens with a commitment to certain public values and practices. Citizenship Education from the above definitions includes not only political literacy but also moral and social responsibility and community involvement such as helping out those that may require assistance.

Annette and McLaughlin (2005:56-72) observed that, Citizenship Education is a subject comprising three separate but interrelated strands: social and moral responsibility, political literacy and community involvement. The focus in this definition is centred on providing information to the young ones on social, moral responsibility, political literacy and community involvement. This information is important in building strong communities where people will be able to demonstrate social and moral responsibilities in any community engagement.

Tilly (1997:198) as cited by Cohen (2013) defined Citizenship Education in a democratic state as, “rights and mutual obligations binding state agents and a category of persons defined exclusively by their legal attachment to the same state”. By logical conclusion I would argue that Citizenship Education is a subject stressing a democratic citizenship, includes the equal access to rights and the commitment to mutual obligations on behalf of the citizens, such as paying taxes and serving in the state military among the many other commitments required by citizens.

Butts (1980) as cited in Cohen (2013) defines Citizenship Education as a subject that “embraces the fundamental values of the political community, a realistic and scholarly knowledge of the working of political institutions and processes, and the skills of political behaviour required for effective participation in a democracy” . Therefore, Cohen (2013) states that based on these notions and with respect to the definition offered above, Citizenship Education has three main pillars: (1) knowledge (2) values and (3) dispositions. The pillar of knowledge concentrates on information regarding life in society such as the characteristics of type of regime, the branches of government and historical facts. The pillar of values does stress on the common attitudes and beliefs that are seen as essential in the maintenance of society. They include freedom, tolerance or the value of labour. All these aspects put together are necessary elements that citizens should possess if society is to be developed.

Himmelmann (2013: 3-7) states that there is a changing use of terminology in the meaning of Citizenship Education which is corresponding to the changes, concerns and concepts of citizenship – as conceived to meet actual and future challenges of democratic societies. According to Himmelmann the subject has shifted from mere state-centered, nation-centered or even narrow political “instruction” to a broader “Citizenship

Education,” more specially, to a new “education for democratic citizenship.” The focus of the new Citizenship Education is not fostering passive and affirmative learning but emphasising on active, social, cooperative and critical learning. Instead of call for more obedience and loyalty to the ruling powers, new Citizenship Education is striving for experimental and practical, for social, moral and responsible self-government and participation of the learners in the society they belong to. Further instead of nationalistic, patriotic, ethnic, tribal, racial or even mono-religious learning there is a call for intercultural and environmental education, of peace education, moral and social as well as media learning. Instead of accumulation and testing of mere knowledge; the new Citizenship Education is stressing equal efforts on democratic knowledge and understanding; democratic values, attitudes and common awareness. These competencies should be accompanied by practical skills like problem solving, conflict solution, service learning, entrepreneurial or project learning and civic engagement. From all these ideas as stated by Himmelmann, it is clear that Citizenship Education means much more than what is casually implied in different definitions given so far in the article. As such, this one reflects some conceptual changes in the manner the concept is viewed in that it transitions from an approach of knowledge and instruction to an approach that emphasises personal attitudes and individual moral and social behaviour as well as common values and dispositions of the citizens themselves. The change can also be seen to bringing about a considerable amount of content in the field of Citizenship Education. It also tends to highlight the moral and affective approach of what Citizenship Education ought to bring in school and beyond.

Nonetheless, it is not my intention to keep on discussing different definitions of Citizenship Education, but re- stating the

fact that there are many expressions attributed to the concept. I argue that Citizenship Education is more than just a concept as it carries with it a number of positive benefits required in a functioning society. These may include respect for one another, tolerance of the divergent views and positive responses towards work in communities.

In the next section, I intend to highlight briefly the characteristics of both concepts - Civic Education and Citizenship Education which find expressions in a range of writings before getting to the point of convergence.

### **Characteristics of Civic Education**

In trying to underscore the different characteristics of Civic Education, I will rely heavily on the ideas that have been identified by Muleya in his recent article that was examining the difference between Civic Education and Civics. In my considered view what comes out of Muleya's article with regard to the characteristics of Civic Education is worth considering in this article as well. Muleya (2017b:125-148) states that Civic Education is an intentional and systematic educational effort, in school with the ultimate goal of promoting a global enrichment of students as people and preparing them for active participation in society. Civic Education falls within the parameters of adult education and lifelong learning (Ngozwana, 2017 as cited by Muleya, 2017b). This means that Civic Education is not only limited to the formal structures of the school system but goes beyond and hence lifelong learning among the general citizenry.

It is also important to stress here that Civic Education as observed by Biesta cited in Muleya, (2017a) is based on two assumptions of socialisation conception of civic learning and the subjectification concept of civic learning. Biesta sees civic

learning as a necessary part of an existing socio-political order. While the subjectification concept of learning implies learning that involves engagement in community matters or the public discourse. This implies that Civic Education is a broadly concept that embraces a lot of things.

Baumann, Millard and Hamdorf (2014: 14) as cited by Muleya (2017b: 125-148) argue that Civic Education focuses on its significance as it prepares students with knowledge of action in society. This means that those exposed to it should hold deep values of liberty, equality, individual worth, open-mindedness and willingness to collaborate with people of differing views and backgrounds towards common solutions for the public good. Put another way, Civic Education is anchored on key fundamental principles such as classroom instruction, discussion of current events and controversial issues, service learning, extra-curricular activities, school governance and simulations of democratic processes.

Over and above, they Civic Education comprise of civic competency, civic knowledge, civic skills and dispositions. Civic content knowledge deals with the ability of the learners to be able to apply themselves in different settings without having to struggle. Civic skills deal with the intellectual and participatory skills. Intellectual skills have to do with the ability to analyze, describe, explain, and assess different matters that confront them in the community. Participatory skills deal with how citizens cope with in groups and organisational settings. Civic dispositions are interpersonal and intrapersonal values, virtues and behaviours that could be exercised in the light of achieving equality and this is possible only through effective communication where listening is part of it.

Nogueira and Moreira (2011: 1771-1776) in Muleya (2017b: 125-148) contend that, 'Civic Education is a non-disciplinary

curriculum area whose focus seeks to develop mechanisms to support the teaching and learning process in this domain'. In other words, Civic Education is such a broad subject that it transcends beyond breadth of the school curriculum.

Nogueira and Moreira (2012: 1779-1783 as cited in Muleya, 2017b: 125-148) argued that in fact Civic Education was mainly a multidimensional, dynamic and social construction. Put another way, Civic Education is characterised by different dimensions such as citizenship education orientations, content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, resources, pedagogical approaches or practices, context in which it takes place as well as the people that get to interact with its assumptions. Having stated briefly the characteristics of Civic Education, next part looks at the characteristics of Citizenship Education. We cannot exhaust all of them but will share a few of them in the following section.

### **Characteristics of Citizenship Education**

It is important to note that citizenship is the unifying concept that enables people from different beliefs and backgrounds to live together co-operatively in spite of differing allegiances, opinions, priorities and tastes. It is with this in mind that probably Halstead and Pike (2006) contend that the purpose of Citizenship Education is to help children to understand their roles as citizens, to develop a commitment to these roles in practice, and ultimately to engage in critical reflection on the rights and responsibilities associated with this role. Living together as citizens requires a framework of shared political and civic values, and this is what tends to characterise Citizenship Education.

Citizenship Education is also said to be value free activity that stands back from the aim of producing active, committed citizens and aims simply at providing information about citizenship

(Halstead & Pike, 2006). The task is a cognitive one, of extending children's knowledge and understanding of political ideas, institutions and issues. Thus, Citizenship Education becomes a subject with its own body of knowledge, understanding and skills; for example, students learn about what they are entitled to from public agencies, about the rights which the state guarantees to its citizens, and about the corresponding obligations which it demands (Beck, 1998: 108; Davies *et al.*, 1999: 17 as cited in Halstead & Pike, 2006).

Another characteristic of Citizenship Education is that it has a central role in promoting a broader idea of citizenship that stands to strengthen the meaning and experience of belonging to a shared social and cultural community. In other words, Citizenship Education supports the assertion that learners must learn how to live and act in society through shared social values and cultural practices defining their community.

The other characteristic of Citizenship Education is one which is increasingly viewed as an educational agenda that has great potential for addressing the social and political challenges facing contemporary societies (Torres 1998 cited in McCollum, 2002) Torres argues, that the questions of citizenship, democracy, and multiculturalism are at the heart of discussions worldwide on educational reform, and affect most of the decisions people face in dealing with the challenges of contemporary education (Torres 1998 as cited by McCollum, 2002). Therefore, one gets the sense that Citizenship Education thus represents a response to profound social and political change in every society

Van Deth (2013: 8-19) provides a broad view on the characteristics of Citizenship Education in the following statement:

education, training, awareness-raising, information,

practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law.

The above statement though broadly conceived brings out certain characteristics of Citizenship Education that tends to challenge the rather limited visions that people have about the main characteristics of the subject as well as that of a good citizen. Citizenship Education does not only develop political literacy but also encourages moral and social responsibility and community involvement; it must include the development of values, dispositions, skills, aptitudes and commitments as well as knowledge and concepts. Citizenship Education is not narrowly viewed and any form of it which seeks to reinforce patriotism through nationalistic rituals or through any kind of teaching that discourages critical reflection defeats the true characteristic of Citizenship Education. Citizenship Education in real sense supports an open-minded approach that recognises diversity and which also includes global and cross-cultural issues.

From the above sections regarding the characteristics of Civic Education and Citizenship Education, it can be stated here that an attempt to understand the meanings on each of the two concepts has been given. The meanings reflect different expressions which are viewed through the perceptions of the writers. In the last part of this article, I wish to bring out what I consider to the point of convergence between Civic Education and Citizenship Education.

### **The Point of Convergence between Civic Education and**



## **Citizenship Education**

It is important to state here that though Civic Education and Citizenship Education appear to be different, there is, a point of convergence between two, as follows: both concepts emphasises to serving an educational agenda. This also shows that both Civic Education and Citizenship Education have great potential for addressing the social and political challenges facing modern societies today. Both Civic Education and Citizenship Education provide a sense of renewed interest that represents a response to profound social and political change in the community through exposing the learners to different forms of knowledge and skills in the areas of politics, culture, social and economic development.

In both there is a challenge in the manner the two are supposed to be defined and what exactly they mean. It would appear that in both there are layers of complexity even within their definitions of what is referred as either Civic Education or Citizenship Education. This tends to create points of clarifications in both concepts by different writers and even the readers who have an interest in the area of Civic Education and Citizenship Education. This does not also leave out the researchers and practitioners in this area where most of the time they tend to confuse the two concepts during their lessons and research.

In the continuum suggested by McLaughlin (1992:237), you will find that the arguments being advanced tend to point to two fundamental interpretations based on minimum and maximum conceptions of Civic Education and Citizenship Education. This means that one could look at Civic Education and Citizenship Education on the basis of minimalistic view to imply passive respect of the law in formal, legal and juridical terms. This means that there is always a possibility where one could easily apply Civic Education principles for Citizenship Education and the

other way round. While on the other hand the opposite could be the same about the two concepts, thus Civic Education and Citizenship Education could be connected to active participation by the citizens in social, cultural and psychological terms. McLaughlin (1992: 238- 239) as cited by Cohen (2013) further explains that Citizenship Education and Civic Education looked at as the provision of information whose emphasis is on the procedural aspect of citizenship. By citizenship, it means having knowledge on the rights and responsibilities required citizens to operate effectively in the community. Having knowledge of rights and responsibilities in the community is one thing but how this is translated into action is another thing. He points out that as a result, this conception does not include any critical reflection or understanding thereby creating what may be described as an “unreflective socialization into the political and social status quo”. With this scenario, it is possible to have citizens who do not take time to analyse issues correctly in the community. This position is clearly affirmed in both Civic Education and Citizenship Education. Similarly in opposition to the above conception, it is also true that the maximal conception of Civic Education and Citizenship Education require a “considerable degree of explicit understanding of democratic principles, values and procedures on the part of the citizen, together with the dispositions and capacities required for effective participation in democratic citizenship”. This argument again demonstrates the assertion that both Civic Education and Citizenship Education have points of convergence in many respects and therefore it is important that these two concepts are understood as such. No wonder, Muleya (2017a:59-81) asserts that defining Civic Education also known as Citizenship Education is dependent on the context and as such could be defined differently in different countries. This means that where the context suits Civic Education

even if it is Citizenship Education one would still argue from the basis of Civic Education. This position has also been affirmed by Cohen (2013) in his recent works that defining Civic Education and Citizenship Education is becoming embarrassing among the researchers in this discipline due to different contextual settings. Similarly, where the context suits Citizenship Education even if it is Civic Education, one would also argue from the basis of Citizenship Education. Therefore the distinction between Civic Education and Citizenship Education is not an easy one as the points of convergence outweigh the differences. What is important though is that both Civic Education and Citizenship Education are relevant concepts that gear different educational experiences in various societal settings.

## **Conclusion**

In this article an attempt has been made to discuss the two concepts thus Civic Education and Citizenship Education. It is undoubtedly, clear that the two concepts are not that easy to define due to various expressions that are attributed to them by different writers within and outside field of education. In conclusion, this article demonstrates that though there are differences in the way the two concepts are applied, the points of convergence are usually outweighing such differences. More importantly, a further purpose in this article has been to argue that there are different characteristics that underpin Civic Education and Citizenship Education. In this regard, it is crucial to identify and understand the point of convergence. In short Civic Education and Citizenship Education though complex in the manner they are used and applied in everyday life, they do have points of convergence as demonstrated in this article and it is critical that researchers and practitioners within Civic Education and Citizenship Education

or indeed outside these areas understand this point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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