Promoting The Madrasah Students’ Critical Thinking
In Language Learning through Project
Based Learning using Edmodo

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Abstract

Project-based learning (PBL) is a comprehensive learning where students pursue solutions to nontrivial problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artifacts. PBL is an effective and enjoyable way to learn which is needed in English language teaching at Madrasah as until recently teaching strategies commonly used cover the classical method involving lecturing, question and answer and assignments. Implementing PBL is also prospective to enhance students’ critical thinking. Furthermore, the issue becomes more intense when the project is related to the use of social media helpful for language learning such as Edmodo. Therefore, this study aims at answering the research problem on “How is the effectiveness of PBL to promote the students’ critical thinking in language learning?” The design chosen for this study is action research collaborating with some teachers of Madrasah Aliyah in Malang. Comprehending the way to promote students’ critical thinking in language learning through PBL is important given that the issue is becoming significant due to the objective of the education in Indonesia. By reaching to an explanatory level, this study will be significant for shaping the learners’ critical thinking development through the finest construct of English language teaching method at madrasah level. In addition, understanding the best way to implement PBL happens to be an onset significant step to develop students’ critical thinking especially in madrasah in Indonesia for the shake of bridging to their future academic success.

Keywords: Project Based Learning, Critical Thinking in Reading and Writing, Edmodo.
The English language learning in Madrasah today needs improvement as the teaching strategies commonly used cover the classical method involving lecturing, question and answer and assignments (Wijayanti, 2001). Considering that the students in Madrasah get the less amount of English class and get more various course compared to those in state schools, more strategic learning method is essential to enhance the quality of English proficiency. In addition the issue on integrating English language learning with critical thinking becomes more intense nowadays. Therefore, this study offer the use of Project Based Learning (PBL) as a way to promote the Madrasah students’ critical thinking in English learning context.

PBL is a teaching method in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to a complex question, problem, or challenge. Blumenfeld, et al.(1991) defines PBL is a comprehensive perspective focused on teaching by engaging students in investigation. Within this framework, students pursue solutions to nontrivial problems by asking and refining questions, debating ideas, making predictions, designing plans and/or experiments, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, communicating their ideas and findings to others, asking new questions, and creating artifacts."

PBL is an effective and enjoyable way to learn. Why are so many educators around the world interested in this teaching method? The answer is a combination of timeless reasons and recent developments. As the basic reason, today’s students, more than ever, often find school to be boring and meaningless. In PBL, students are active, not passive; a project engages their hearts and minds, and provides real-world relevance for learning. After completing a project, students remember what they learn and retain it longer than is often the case with traditional instruction. Because of this, students who gain content knowledge with PBL are better able to apply what they know and can do to new situations.

In the 21st century workplace, success requires more than basic knowledge and skills. In PBL, students not only understand content more deeply
but also learn how to take responsibility and build confidence, solve problems, work collaboratively, communicate ideas, and be creative innovators. The common core and other present-day standards emphasize real-world application of knowledge and skills, and the development of the 21st century competencies such as critical thinking, and communication in a variety of media.

Critical thinking skill is the competence on using reasoning and logic focusing on what to believe or do based on the mechanism such as conducting conceptual and argument analysis for problem solving and decision making (Paul & Elder, 2005). Unfortunately, after the reformation era in Indonesia, critical thinking is interpreted unwisely as the effort of finding fault of others particularly of government shown by sporadic action of demonstration conducted by students, labor or common people.

Critical thinking indeed has become an important cognitive skill to be acquired which involves logical thinking and reasoning. Developing critical thinking has emerged in international benchmark of education by the idea to add reasoning into the current 3R literacy (reading, writing, arithmetic). By having 4R basic competence (reading, writing, arithmetic, and reasoning), learners are equipped with skills needed to support their current and future life economically, socially and culturally (Hayat & Yusuf, 2010; Depdiknas, 2004). This issue has become more significant particularly in facing the more global world.

Improving critical thinking has been a main concern for improving the quality of students’ competence in Indonesia. In fact, activating students’ critical thinking is still becoming teachers’ difficulty. Referring to the result of international survey of Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2006, Indonesian students’ reading competence are in the lowest position in East Asia with the literacy score below the average of international standard. Among the 50 countries surveyed, Indonesia is ranked 45. Students failed to understand the whole reading content, they only understood 30% of the text so that they get difficulties to answer reading comprehension and respond the reasoning prompt well (Hayat & Yusuf, 2010).
Current studies on critical thinking based instruction do not view the language phenomenon as the core concern. Some studies stress on improving literacy for better students’ competence which can be done through critical thinking based instruction either in English as First Language or English as Second Language contexts (Bensley, et al., 2010; Hofreiter et al., 2007; McLean & Miller, 2010). While other concern with the critical thinking instruction which is blended in writing course to see the benefits (Deal, 2004; Quitadamo & Kurtz, 2007; Reed, 2008). Critical thinking skills can be taught implicitly through some teaching strategies experimented in some countries (Al-Fadhli & Khalfan, 2009; Crook, 2006; Ernst & Monroe, 2004; Sellnow & Ahlfeldt, 2005). These studies are corroborated with the empirical bases of the implementation of critical thinking based instruction in language classroom.

Promoting critical thinking in language learning through implementing PBL becomes significant in relation to the use of social media. Social media has not been much linked to language learning. Moreover, there are negative perception toward the use of social media such as Facebook or Twitter especially among Madrasah teachers. Social media are mostly linked with ghiba of which The Koran specifies it as part of the varieties of evil speech, which violate the dignity of others and seek to expose their weakness. "O believers! Let not people ridicule other people, perchance the latter may be better than the former, not let women ridicule other women, perchance the latter may be better than the former. Neither find fault with each other, nor insult one another with derisive nicknames” (49:11). This is immediately followed by another passage, which singles out backbiting (ghibah) and depicts its enormity in particularly striking terms: "Spy not and defame not others behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? (Surely) you would abhor it” (49:12). Elsewhere in the Koran is the chapter bearing the title, "The Slanderer" (al-Humazah), begins with a clarion denunciation of every slandering defamer (104:1).

Therefore, this study offers teachers with the type of social media which is helpful for language learning namely Edmodo. It is a free and safe way for students to connect and elaborate which has more benefits. Some of the benefits cover the enhancement of autonomous learning skill as it can be done out of the
class independently, it involves various activities which also can be accessed for group work, and it facilitates both students and teachers to share interesting materials. In addition, the virtual learning environment is more manageable by the teacher as the teacher can control students’ expression, behavior through their utterance and can guide them to reach particular learning goal.

Based on the background explained above, the focus of the research is formulated in the research problem “How is the model of the implementation of project based learning to promote the students’ critical thinking in language learning?” The result of the analysis is to describe the way project based learning using social media promotes the students’ critical thinking in reading and writing.

Methods

The present study employs action research following the Kemmis and McTaggart model (1992) starting from preliminary study to identify the research problem, planning the action, implementing and monitoring the action, and reflecting the action through observation, interview and questionnaire. When the indicator of success is not fulfilled, the cycle is repeated until it reaches the objective of this study as it comes to the concluding remark.

In the planning for the action, the Madrasah teachers join three days tutorial to familiarize them with the use of Edmodo. Then in implementing the action, students will also have the tutorial so that the project accomplishment can be done outside of the class. As the first step, students registered on the site before participating in the Edmodo activities.

The data of this study is in the form of the written project executed in the form of accomplishment of the activities using the Edmodo tool. The activities involved the Madrasah students from some schools in Malang either from the state or private Madrasah Aliyah. The teachers post a new discussion topic and a help forum where students are able to elaborate on the information and interact with each other. The process of critical thinking improvement is observed during this stage. Then the students will also have their project using their own initiated topic. This project is conducted in a collaborative manner to promote social interactions as well as critical thinking.
Project based learning using Edmodo

There are eight projects accomplished during the implementation. Each of the project has different context and purpose with the target language skill involving reading and writing activities.

Project 1: Students’ Responding Jokowi’s Speech in APEC Conference

The students provide different kinds of response regarding Jokowi’s English speech in APEC Conference 2014. A number of students just say “hello” to their friends enjoying their practice communicating using Edmodo. Some of them are even using this media for chatting showing that they did not know what is all about the assignment. In regard to Jokowi’s speech, some students argue that they did know about that, some said that Jokowi’s English was good, but some other argued that his English was not good. Their argument is also completed with some supporting details such as their perspective on the impacts of the speech.

Project 2: Reading text

Students were given a text triggering their critical reading. From the reading questions given, the average score of their answer was 65 which is considered middle achiever. Among the five questions given, the reference question was the one which could be answered correctly by 96% of the students. It can be interpreted that the skill to identify the easiest one because most of the students could answer it correctly. On the other hand, the most difficult question to answer was question on making inference, because there was only 29% of the number of the students who could answer it correctly. The second easiest questions to answer were question on identifying the major details and specific information, where 83% and 71% respectively of the students could answer those questions.

Project 3: Poem Appreciation

There were thirteen poems posted by the students. However, only some of them were responded positively by their peers. The students gave different responses regarding the poem. Some of them claimed that they did not understand
what sort of poem it was. Other stated that it was a good poem, while other felt that it was a sad poem and they asked why the writer wrote such a sad one. None of them gave a substantial response of the poem. Some other poems were commented by very small number of the students. None of them provided constructive comments regarding the message of the poem, but they even accused that the writer copied and pasted the poem from other source. The poem regarding one’s experience was commented by a few numbers of the students. Most of them used that poem as a material of conversation. This happens perhaps because the tone of the poem is just like a conversation, and it is very short.

There had been attempts from the students to give their comments in regard to the students’ poems. The students’ comments mostly were too short and did not substantially express the tone of the poems themselves, instead they used it as materials for free chatting. This happens because (1) perhaps they just began doing their homework by using Edmodo, where they could communicate and shared their ideas online, and (2) the students had no capacity to make a substantial analysis yet. The poems were thought by many students as the result of copy paste from other source.

*Project 4: Responding to Letters*

The instruction of project 4 is to respond on one of the three different letters. The students are assigned to choose one letter and give solution to the problem given by the writers of the letters. However, from the three letters given, no students choose the second letter. They prefer to choose either letter one or letter three.

In responding on letter one, most students have the same idea in giving solution to the writer of the letter (Elton). They disagree if Elton stops his study and job because his job is very important for paying his school fee and also his younger brother’s medication. Furthermore, they said that education is very important for his future life so that he should not drop out from his school.
There are two students who give solutions to Elton to choose which one he prefers to choose. They suggest if Elton chooses to drop out from his school, he should focus on his job and keep his commitment because it is his own choice.

Besides giving solution to Elton, there is an interesting finding that can be found from the students’ responses. All of them give motivation to Elton not to desperate easily and always believe that God is always with us. They also try to find solution that can help Elton to continue his study by pursuing a scholarship.

The responses of the students on the letter three show that all of the students give advice to Teagan to be a good listener for his friend who likes to tell her problem to him. They think that his friend always need Teagan to listen to her story and give his solution because she believes Teagan is not only a good listener but also a good friend who can be trusted. Therefore, Teagan should not refuse to help his friend. On the other hand, if he feels uncomfortable listening to his friend’s problem, he should tell it patiently not to hurt his friend’s feeling.

There are two findings that are interested to be noted from the students’ responses. First, all students give a positive response or think positively in facing a problem. They do not give a solution to Teagan to do a negative thing, on the contrary, they try to find positive solutions. Second, there is a student said that as human beings we need other people and we should help others when they have a problem.

Project 5: Movie Appreciation

In Project 5, the students are assigned to give responses to certain teenage movies have been chosen by the teacher. The instruction is as follows:

Please appreciate these 3 following teenage movies to REVIEW their synopsis in conformity with YOUR or OTHER TEENAGERS' PERSPECTIVES.

Please use the following recommended links to support your ideas, which are the best movie to be watched by most teenagers' viewpoints.
Comment these following THREE movies and choose the best movie to be watched. Write your comments by clicking the icon 'reply' below. Do this movie appreciation within this week


The finding about the responses toward the three films, “Jessabelle”, “Annabelle”, and “Ouija” shows that the first favorite movie is “Ouija”, the second favorite movie is “Annabelle” and the third favorite movie is “Jessabelle”.

a. Students’ Responses on “Ouija” movie

Students like “Ouija” movie because it does not only have an interesting scary movies, but because it also has a moral lesson. The moral lesson of the story is about friendship, helping each other, controlling emotion, and keeping spirit not easily give up when having a problem. “Annabelle” is the second favorite movie chosen by the students. They like watching that film since it has an interesting scary story and good movie in terms of the lighting, plot, setting. They think that an interesting horror movie is a movie that can make them scared and entertain them. The followings are the students’ responses toward “Annabelle” movie:

There are only four students who like watching Jessabelle. They think that it can make them scared and it has different ending that other movies. Even though it is a horror movie, but it has a sad ending. However, the sad ending can make them laugh. The followings are the students’ responses on the letter

Project 6: Responding arguments

The instruction of project 6 is to respond on two different arguments. The arguments are given in the form of conversation. The objective of the instruction is to elicit the students’ viewpoint on the characteristics of good English teacher
based on their experience. They can share their opinion, discuss and comment each other’s viewpoint.

Based on the responses, all of the students agree with the viewpoint on the characteristics of good English teachers as reflected in the conversation. They support their opinion with some reasons such as their experience of learning English with good and qualified teachers. The students also responded to the second questions using various supporting details. Regarding the quality of good English teacher, they can make some inferences which compare good teachers and incompetent teachers.

Project 7: Responding using self reflection

The instruction of this project is similar to the previous project but with a different goal that is to identify the characteristics of a good English learners. The characteristics are implied in a short conversation.

There are different arguments given by the students on the characteristics of good learners. Some of them favor the quality of English learner who is active in class while the rest prefer the respected students. On the second questions, more students realized themselves as being shy learners in class. They prefer to be silent. Sometimes they can tell what was in their mind particularly on the topic which has not been understood. More students feel hesitant to ask questions and give opinions in public. Through this project, the students respond an issue using their own reflection of learning English process.

Project 8: Reflecting on the learning

In this project, the students are supposed to think about the Edmodo class they have been joining. They need to reflect on whether they like the learning through this educative social media or not. They need to give comment on whether Edmodo is suitable to be used in other class or if the program can be suggested to use by other teachers in their school. In addition, they should give their viewpoint on e-learning or virtual class with the situation given below.
Now, let's imagine that we are in 100% internet free connection for 24 hours a day. We can conduct classes only through Edmodo, virtual class. You don't have to get up early in the morning to prepare for school, get busy with the traffic jam, or wear uniform to school. All you need to do is turn on your computer and learn everything in your bedroom. The class is done with skype, video chat or teleconference. All the assignments and discussion are done through Edmodo. In that condition, what do you think? Do you like it or not? Why?

The students responded to the project more actively compared to the previous projects. There are some reasons given on why they like Edmodo as follow:

- The discussion in Edmodo is such a lot of fun! We have more time to learning English. It's good but not for math, physics, and chemistry class because we still need discussion with the other students.

- Discussion in Edmodo is very pleasant. We can do anything in Edmodo like do online test and homework, study together, share our experience and give opinions, chat with other in a different place, and have discussion and socialize. I think that other classes should also use Edmodo, because Edmodo has many benefits and advantages. Edmodo really help us to have discussion together about English lesson.

- Discussion in Edmodo is very fascinating. At Edmodo we can learn outside class but conducted as an actual class. We can study together, ask each other, chat with each other, discuss about something, while online in a social media. To be honest, learning with Edmodo is a good way to learn. But sure, every way there are plus aspect and minus aspect. It’s good to use Edmodo in our class, but I think not all classes should use Edmodo project, especially in exact class, like math, physics, or the other. Maybe it will be difficult to be discussed.

- I like to have discussion in Edmodo because I can do the assignment or chat with each other or share about everything through relaxing way. It will be nice if other classes join in Edmodo too. They can do everything but not for all of the classes like religion class, it will more complicated to use Edmodo.

- I think it is more fun than learning physics or chemistry in lab. We can learn with Edmodo anytime, we can solve our problem here. We can do our English project here with playing game, chatting and other. I think other class should use Edmodo like Bahasa Indonesia, History, Biology, but not for Math, Physics or Chemical. I think we would have difficulty in to discuss it in Edmodo.

- First I don't know learning from Edmodo will be this exciting! I think doing homework in Edmodo is easier and more interesting.
- I like do my homework at edmodo... because i think it's fun, i can browsing to another web like facebook, twitter and the other, and in edmodo we are not bothered with our homework or we don't bring our home work because we've submit it id edmodo, and i think other subjects like physic, chemistry, history, biology should use edmodo, because with edmodo we can connect with our friend and discussing about that homework.

- The discussion is very good, very enjoyable, and very helpful. I like it and I don't feel the pressure, such as learning in class in general. I also feel that Edmodo such as social media. So, I really enjoyed the discussion. So, to other classes, doesn't matter to use Edmodo.

The students have various answers to respond the idea of e-learning. Some of them agree but more students dislike the idea. The various underlying reasons are as the following:

- E-learning is good. but we are not able to socialize. Even we use skype, it is better to socialize directly.

- It's not really good. Because it has positive and negative aspects. I don't really like it. Personally, I prefer to go to school everyday rather than just stay at home to do all the assignment or homework with 100% internet free connection. Although I can chat with other in Edmodo, I prefer talk to talk with face to face. Because it's easier to make us social beings than selfish person.

- Although there are some classes that use Edmodo, I think it’s better if we have meeting class too. It does not mean that we must use internet connection everytime. To be honest, I prefer to get up early in the morning to prepare for school rather than just stay in front of computer to do all lesson at computer all day. It will make us lazy enough, lazy to get up early, lazy to talk with other, lazy to help each other, lazy to walk as part of physical exercise, etc. We must balance between real life and virtual life. Remember that we are a social human, we need help each other, we need interaction face to face too.

- I think e-learning is good but we still have to meet and talk face to face. Because, if we are always dependent on the internet, we would be awkward if one day we meet and will reduce sense of friendship because we only meet via online.

- On the idea about having whole class in Edmodo, I don't like it very much. Because it makes me can't face other students and teacher in real life. I mean, it will be lonely and we can’t have fun together.

- I don't want if Edmodo replaces a classroom. Because in the classroom we can study and play together and we can know each other. But we can use Edmodo to do home works or review.
- Edmodo is good application for studying and sharing anything with friends and teacher. But, I agree that Edmodo makes us can't meet face to face. Well, I think we use Edmodo for an assignment. But when we study and practice speaking, I think will be better at class because we can practice it face to face.

**Discussion**

The use of Edmodo as educative social media for English learning context as shown in this study brings some positive effects. It leads to the development of critical thinking skills involved in this study which cover eight projects. It is in line with the finding of Magolda and Magolda (2011) that social media can subvers higher-order reasoning processes, including the kind of focus concentration and persistence necessary for critical thinking and intellectual development. In this study the implementation is still in short term so that we can predict that the prolonged use of social media is good for exposing students to interactive, repetitive and addictive stimuli that produce permanent changes in the way to learn English language. In fact, the very short critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning needed to honestly appraise the full costs of using social media.

Based on the observation done in this study, the students show high motivation to learn English using online media. Basically, utilizing social media is a part of Computer Assisted Language Learning where students are given autonomy to develop their language skills. In this study, the assignments or the projects are given periodically so that it allows the students to have a social network site. In turn it allows users to construct their own private system helpful in developing their English language learning. This finding is also supported by Elam’s study (2012). This is because of the similar setting namely English as foreign language.

The students gave various reasons on the benefit of using Edmodo. As it is similar to Facebook which allows the administrator to customize the look, the content and the intended assignment, they said that it facilitates English learning. The platform provided in Edmodo allowed students to engage in a wide variety of activities, such as those exposed in the projects given. Students posted poems which can stimulate critical thinking in discussion. They also can do chatting on
various issues related with the given theme. The projects also allow other users to comment directly on the topic given. The way students enjoy the learning is similar with other research, especially the one as practised by Shartika (2013) that using this tool students can develop their English language skills independently with a lot of fun.

The eight projects implemented in this study aims at integrating between what students learn in class and what to do to develop their skill outside of the class. During the class session students learn knowledge and elements of the core curriculum. Yet, they also need to apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter. Using PBL students can take advantage integrating their knowledge on English language into practise. The use of Edmodo as digital tools in this study is expected to produce high quality, collaborative products. This is in line with the finding of Markham (2011) that describes how PBL can refocus education on the student, not the curriculum--a shift mandated by the global world, which rewards intangible assets such as drive, passion, creativity, empathy, and resiliency. These cannot be taught out of a textbook, but must be activated through experience. Based on the response given by the students in this study, it can be inferred that most of them really enjoyed the PBL process through Edmodo.

The core idea of PBL is that real-world problems capture students’ interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. This is as stated in the instruction of each project. The teacher plays the role of facilitator, working with students to frame worthwhile questions, structuring meaningful tasks, coaching both knowledge development and social skills, and carefully assessing what students have learned from the experience. In this study the students have reacted well on the phenomenon to cover for instance in Project six, seven and eight.

Based on the result of the implementation, the projects given show some advantages as it has the following features:

- is organized around an open-ended driving question or challenge.
- creates a need to know essential content and skills.
- requires critical thinking
allows some degree of student voice and choice.
incorporates feedback

Regarding the critical thinking skills as reflected in the students’ responses, to some extent the improvement is obvious. It can be seen if we compare the responses from the first project and the last one. The role of CTS in EFL setting can be seen in both reading and writing activities given in the projects of this study. The students show good ability to analyze and to assess source of information in the text given. They can respond the questions well and can make evaluative judgment to other’s work. Such an analysis and evaluation are parts of higher order thinking based on Bloom taxonomy of cognitive domain which is also supported by Huit (2004).

In the writing process, learners develop their critical thinking skills involved in generating ideas by using exposing their point of view. In doing so, they must employ a range of cognitive and linguistic skills. These will lead learners to identify a purpose, to produce and shape ideas and to refine expression. This is in line with White (1995), as the students show a better expression in the final project compared to the first one.

In accomplishing the tasks, all of the students as seen in the finding of this study operate their critical thinking during the eight projects. These processes operated upon two kinds of information: a representation of the task environment, which consisted of the assignment and the text produced; and knowledge stored in long-term memory. As shown by the result of this study, it goes with the proposition of Flower & Hayes (1980) in which the students responses also consisted of topic knowledge, rules for grammar production and knowledge of text standards for online discussion through Edmodo.

Conclusion & Suggestion

By using Edmodo, the students show high motivation to learn English through the projects which are given periodically so that it allows the students to have a social network site. In turn it allows users to construct their own private
system helpful in developing their English language learning. The students felt at ease to express their critical thinking as the platform provided in Edmodo allowed students to engage in a wide variety of activities, such as those exposed in the projects given. Students posted poems which can stimulate critical thinking in discussion. They also can do chatting on various issues related with the given theme. The projects also allow other users to comment directly on the topic given. The projects aims at integrating between what students learn in class and what to do to develop their skill outside of the class. Using PBL students can take advantage integrating their knowledge on English language into practise. The use of Edmodo as digital tools in this study is expected to produce high quality, collaborative products.

The core idea of PBL is that real-world problems capture students' interest and provoke serious thinking as the students acquire and apply new knowledge in a problem-solving context. This is as stated in the instruction of each project either in reading and writing tasks. Based on the result of the implementation, the projects given show some advantages particularly on how it requires critical thinking, allows some degree of student voice and choice, as well as incorporates feedback.

Exploring the implementation of Project Based Learning using Edmodo to promote students’ critical thinking brings some pedagogical implications. This study recommends that teacher give guidance on how to develop critical thinking autonomously to avoid insignificant bias on the use of social media such as Edmodo. The ease of information access may cause students to get involved with wrong idea and the incorrect justification so that they can share and discuss various matters based on valid data.

As the study found that the students are enthusiastic to develop their critical thinking through online discussion using Edmodo, the students are suggested to read more references relevant to their area of interest so that their discussion will be more meaningful. In this case, the more awareness of the language accuracy and fluency is also needed so that they should learn from each other to express themselves through better language use.
As this study concerns with the use of Edmodo to develop critical thinking skills, it is suggested that other researchers conduct more elaborative study. More empirical bases on different contexts are needed to strengthen the finding of this study concerning the various computer assisted language program that can be utilized to promote students’ critical thinking.

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