The Role of Intercultural Education in Fostering Cross-Cultural Understanding

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Abstract

In today's globalized world mono-cultural societies have been gradually disappearing. A trend towards the creation of multicultural societies began in 1960s. Migration, the impact of globalization and modern technology played decisive role for the creation of multicultural societies. For instance, new multicultural societies were forced by the virtue of new conditions to engage themselves with others. Therefore, people were purposefully trained for quality communication and peaceful coexistence with societies that possessed different cultural traits. For this purpose, the number of international institutions has adopted documents, which became the backbone of new education policy. Therefore, the school systems began to work intensively on the promotion of intercultural values among young people. Schools had to curb all forms of intolerance, discrimination, segregation, xenophobia and racism. Yet nowadays many multicultural nations encounter with difficulties in holding together multicultural diversity and in establishing harmonious interpersonal relationships. Therefore this paper deals with multiculturalism and the role of the education system in fostering cross-cultural understanding. If multiculturalism is accepted as an asset not as a burden, with its proper utilization within the education system, multicultural nations would inevitably continue to benefit from their diversity.

Keywords: intercultural education, values, teaching, competencies, culture, coexistence, tolerance and understanding.

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Introduction

It is worth to mention that multicultural societies have been prospering throughout the history and as such they are not novelty. However, more intensive cultural diversity was accelerated in the past few decades. New multicultural trends were mainly caused by different economic conditions and as a legacy of the colonization and decolonization. The 21st century, a century of diversity, made significant impact on the schools. The schools had new challenge to enable pupils to successfully participate in the democratic and pluralistic societies. New societies had to deal with diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and nationality, color of skin, language, economical status and abilities. Democratic societies ought to allow those who were different to enjoy full rights and freedoms, and to actively and effectively participate in social activities.

Intercultural education represents a key factor for efficient interaction and quality coexistence of members who culturally differ. Therefore, intercultural education plays special role in pluralistic societies. However, unlike the earlier periods, when the colonization, decolonization and migration were the main factors for fostering of cultural diversity, today by the development of digital technology the world has become a global village and almost everyone has an opportunity, most often a necessity, to establish the communication with culturally different people. Therefore, the educational system must develop intercultural competence among young people in order to develop harmonious societal relations. The education system as such is the precondition for quality coexistence within a nation that has different religious, national, ethnic and linguistic identities.

This paper will clearly define the concept of intercultural education based on the international documents. The main purpose of this paper is to determine guidelines and to provide educational policies for intercultural education. Therefore, this paper pays special attention to the promotion of multiculturalism through the educational system at the local and regional levels, respectively in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Balkans. Taking into consideration multicultural gap as a result of the past wars, the promotion of multiculturalism and therefore greater understanding,

respect, appreciation and acceptance of others are inevitable for the future prosperity of the Balkans as a whole.

The Conception of Intercultural Education

Special importance intercultural education gained in the past decades as a result of labor migrations and the population growth. Therefore changes in the world, caused also by globalization, had a significant impact on education around the world (Friedman, 2005). Globalization and migration have increased the racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity in the education systems around the world (Banks, et al, 2007). Thus, the globalization, global competition and new business in the digital world will inevitably contribute furthermore towards the reconsideration of intercultural education (Mahir, 2004).

Before defining the term "intercultural education" it is necessary to introduce to the readers the meaning of the term culture. Culture, defined differently, originated from the Latin word *culture* which means to take care of and to preserve. In general sense it involves any kind of growth and development (Pedagoška Enciklopedija, 1989). Broadly speaking culture can be also defined as a "set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional patterns of a society or group of people, along with their art, literature, lifestyles and ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO - Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001). On the other hand, Hofstede (1991), one of the great experts in the field of intercultural education, believes that culture is more frequently source of conflict than of synergy. According to him, the cultural differences are the source of challenge and often lead to conflict and disaster.

A particular culture is inevitably linked with other cultures. Differences that could be observed among the people and the wider society indicate that culture is very difficult to conceptualize as a term. Similarly intercultural education is diverse as a culture. Therefore, in order to satisfy multicultural needs the intercultural education developed different approaches, programs and requirements for educational institutions. Intercultural education thus attempted to adequately respond to numerous requests, needs and aspirations of different cultural groups.

New conception of the intercultural education held that it is not enough just to transfer knowledge it is necessary to develop constructive relations among people whose cultural background differ. Actually, the constructive relationship is the essence of intercultural education.

Intercultural education encompasses and supports diversity in all areas of human life. Intercultural education makes students sensible to the existence of different ways of life, traditions, customs and worldviews. Multiculturalism is rather presented as an asset not as a liability. Therefore, enriched with multicultural values, intercultural education promotes equality, respect for human rights and ensure equal opportunities for all, while it opposes injustice and discrimination (Gošović, et al, 2007). Actually Falang (1993) holds that intercultural education also includes the education for peace, education for development, education for democratic coexistence and education for human rights. Then, Perotti (1995) believes that intercultural education allows children to manage the relationships with others and broadens their range of experience within the multicultural environment. Intercultural education prepares children to communicate, especially in conflict situations in which relationships are not automatic.

There are diverse objectives of intercultural education. Teaching within the intercultural education emphasizes on tolerance and respect for others. Goals of intercultural education include: promotion of the conditions that lead to pluralism in society by increasing sensitivity towards other cultures and value systems; developing respect for the lifestyles that are different from theirs as to enable children to understand and appreciate one another; cultivation of a commitment to equality as to enable children to act responsibly in making choices and taking actions directed against discrimination and prejudice; and respecting the similarities and differences in terms of value and training all children to speak for themselves and to articulate their culture and history (Gošović, et al, 2007).

Intercultural education integrates all participants equally namely individuals, teachers, students, adolescents, foreign students or immigrants. Therefore, intercultural education is not closed within the categories of state, religion, nation or nationality. It also does not include

specific single culture but all existing cultural elements. Intercultural education emphasizes on ability to cope with cultural diversity in the very form of thought. Therefore, intercultural education is based on the idea of a better and more humane society and the future free from any kind of racism and discrimination.

The Role of International Institutions in the Promotion of Intercultural Education

The international community has attached special attention to education, especially in the part concerning human rights, equal education opportunity and cultural diversity. In the recent past there has been a need for transformation of educational approaches that will promote educational equality. On this basis this paper surveys the number of international documents that promote equality and condemn and prevent all forms of intolerance, discrimination, segregation, xenophobia and racism in education. Since the 1948 a number of documents that contain references for the implementation of intercultural education have been adopted. Most of these documents have been developed within the framework of international organizations like the UN, UNESCO, OSCE and Council of Europe. Although these are legal documents the public at large, teachers and policy makers are often familiar with these materials. However, sometimes due to ignorance and lack of familiarity with these documents discrimination occurs in the education system. The United Nations adopted a number of documents on education. These documents serve to guide educational policies of its member states. The basis for most international documents on education can be found in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948. Article 26.2 strives to ensure intercultural values:

> Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

The above paragraph is very important from the perspective of intercultural education. It encourages the full development of the human personality and the promotion of understanding, tolerance and coexistence among the people. Since 1948 the present provision has been stated and elaborated many times in other international documents, conventions and recommendations.

The United Nations adopted a number of other documents that seek to direct the education policy to promote intercultural values. Some of these documents, which explicitly require the development of intercultural education include: Convention on the *Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (adopted in 1965), *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (adopted in 1966) *Declaration on the Elimination All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief* (adopted in 1981), *The Convention on the Rights of the Child* (adopted in 1989) and *United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education* (adopted in 1994).

Several important texts on the promotion of intercultural education were adopted by UNESCO. In Paris, the 1974th General Conference of UNESCO adopted *the UNESCO Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental freedoms.* Part III of this Recommendation deals with the intercultural education with reference to the educational goals that were set forth in Article 26, paragraph 2 of the Universal Declaration. This document also sets out a list of principles for education policy. One of these principles is to promote understanding and respect for all people, their cultures, civilizations, values and ways of life, including domestic ethnic cultures and cultures of other nations. Detailed ideas on the intercultural education, can also be found in paragraph 17, which states that the member states of UNESCO need to promote, at different stages and in different types of education, the study of different cultures, their mutual influences and ways of life in order to encourage mutual respect and respect for diversity. Paragraph 17 states:

> Member States should promote, at various stages and in various types of education, study of different cultures, their reciprocal influences, their perspectives and ways of life, in order to encourage mutual

> appreciation of the differences between them. Such study should, among other things, give due importance to the teaching of foreign languages, civilizations and cultural heritage as a means of promoting international and inter-cultural understanding.

The Council of Europe has also been very active in promoting the teaching of intercultural values. Documents of the Council of Europe give instructions to member states for the promotion and development of intercultural education. For this purpose, the Council adopted a number of important documents. Such documents protect the rights of immigrants and minority rights. The Council of Europe also made recommendations for the training of teachers who will work on the development of intercultural education. Certainly education can make a major contribution to the development of intercultural dialogue, understanding, respect and tolerance among people from different cultures.

In 1981, the Deceleration Regarding Intolerance was adopted. This document is very important for the promotion of intercultural education. On the basis of this declaration, the Council of Ministers made recommendation for the promotion of awareness of the requirements of human rights and responsibilities of democratic societies. For this purpose, through human rights education, recommendation was made as to encourage creativity in schools from primary level, establishing a climate of active understanding and respect for qualities of other cultures (2.7).

Very important document on education was adopted within the framework of the OSCE. In a document titled "Helsinki Process" (adopted in 1990) the representatives of the participating countries agreed on the need to take effective measures to promote understanding and tolerance, particularly in the fields of education, culture and information. These measures should be in accordance with the constitutional systems at national, regional and local levels. Country representatives were requested to ensure that the goals of education pay special attention to the problem of racial prejudice and hatred, and to develop respect for different civilizations and cultures (3.1).

Due to increased migration during the past few decades a large number of documents were adopted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. Such documents were decisive for the development of intercultural education and religious education (Kodelja, Bassler and Rek, 2007 & Perotti, 1995). Then, after the inclusion of religious education in public schools, expert analysis on effects and character of religious education in Europe has intensified (Schultze, Westerman and Holt, 1996). The development of a culture of peace became the ultimate goal of all the efforts of intercultural society. As a result international institutions continued to strongly emphasize the need for the development of intercultural education. Education can make a distinct contribution to the development of understanding, respect, appreciation and tolerance among people from different cultures. Adopted documents, as mentioned in the above, emphasized the need to respect the rights of all, regardless of race, religion, nationality, skin color, ethnicity, gender and social status.

Intercultural Competences within the Teaching Processes

Multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism is one of the main characteristics of the contemporary world, which brings about a need for intercultural education and the inclusion of all. Multi-religious context is the most common multicultural and multiracial element. Multi-religious context was brought about as the result of migration and various historical, economic and changes at the local and at the global levels. Therefore, phenomenon of appreciation of multiculturalism in education is not novelty. Many multicultural countries such as Germany, England, France, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, USA, Canada and many others emphasize on intercultural education. Besides, the Balkan region has also been emphasizing on intercultural education (Pašalić-Kreso, 1999). In the region multicultural values within the education system have been respected throughout the centuries.

Common agreement among experts is that the school cannot remain neutral and cannot ignore ethnic, social, religious and other characteristics of their students and, as well as the apparent diversity of the society. Therefore, many researchers enriched educational, psychological, and sociological dimensions of intercultural education.

Such education prospects and solutions contributed towards the development of multilingual and multicultural education that emphasizes democratic values, tolerance, unity and mutual respect (Banks, 1999). Multicultural education symbolizes the essence of new educational philosophy that is clearly advocated not only in Europe but also in many other multicultural countries (Perotti, 1995). The intercultural education and training are inevitable for overcoming societal and national differences. Therefore, policy makers, educators and teachers should pay special attention to intercultural education because the global world is multicultural (Milat, 2009).

Certainly if intercultural education is restricted only to support diversity it will not give meaningful results but on the contrary it should also develop the conditions for thriving of the diversity. In order to appreciate other cultures it is not enough just to know them theoretically. For the sake of cultural acceptance it is necessary not only to know cultures but also to develop sympathy towards them. To deepen the knowledge about others it is necessarily to explore people in question both as individuals and at as a group. In this regard being intercultural involves understanding and accepting people from other cultures together with their own cultural identity. According to Piršl (2002) intercultural education means to communicate and listen to the others, regardless of race, nationality, religion, and way of life and accepting the others by recognizing their uniqueness.

According to Perotti (1994) the special feature of intercultural education is the formation of attitudes, skills, feelings and ways of relating to culturally different person. Intercultural educated also emphasizes on communication and to listening well to others. Therefore, intercultural education should not be seen as a transfer of school culture, but as an education that will enrich the culture, which will allow and approve the universal values - values of the person. Such values are common to all, regardless of race, color or the way of life. The first and fundamental value of a person should be directed towards accepting societal diversity. Therefore, accepting societal diversity should become also the essential and integrative part of intercultural curricula. Such

education will bring about societal coexistence, cooperation and cultural integration.

Multicultural education includes at least three factors: the idea or concept, the educational reform movement and the process (Banks, 1999). Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students, regardless of their gender, social class, ethnicity, race or any other cultural specificity should have an equal access to learning. Multicultural education is also a reform movement as it attempts to prepare schools and other educational institutions for all students regardless of their social class, race and ethnicity as to enable them to have an equal chance for success. Multicultural education involves a total change in schools and educational environment and is not limited to changes in the curriculum only. Multicultural education is a process whose goal will never be fully realized. Equality in education, the freedom and fairness are among the ideals that people always aspire to but they are not often fully realized. Racism, sexism and discrimination against certain individuals and targeted groups will always exist to some extent, no matter how hard the education system tries to curb them. When prejudice against one group is eliminated another group is immediately being targeted. Therefore, an absolute goal of multicultural education can never be fully realized and it is essential to continuously work to increase equality, respect and appreciation within the education settings.

Intercultural education pays special attention to the relationships among the students. When interacting with others, the child recognizes personal similarities and differences. Thus, it is not enough to teach or just convey knowledge about others but it is important to cultivate the relationships with others. Children oppose instructions and pre-established identities of parents and teachers. Since individual and collective identities also consist of interacting with others it is not appropriate to teach students only about single culture (Perotti, 1995). Children are constantly faced with different cultural specificities. Children require development of positive relationships with others. This relationship should provide equal opportunities for all and to enable students to function in a multicultural world.

Intercultural education should help the individual to know themselves by the virtue of cultivating a real, genuine sense of a self. However, at the same time it is significant to develop the student as to recognize and to appreciate diversity through building of interpersonal relationships in which differences are accepted as a principle of achieving unity in diversity. In this sense, intercultural education cannot be accomplished if it does not allow different ethnic or societal groups to affirm their identity. Actually an awareness of the importance of their own culture allows them to recognize wider cultural diversity. Confirmation of the rights and values of different cultures do not exclude but rather requires recognizing diversity and respecting of the world community. In order to establish and develop this kind of interpersonal relations, it is necessary to develop intercultural identities. Kim (1991) considers that intercultural identity is reflected in the acceptance of existing and new cultural elements, increasing the width and depth of vision, greater self-understanding, self-acceptance and self-esteem, increased openness and flexibility and enhanced creativity that allows coping with new challenges.

When working with children, the teacher should keep in mind that young people often try to create identities as they are seen by others. However, they sometimes create opposing identities to resist the inferior status created by others and to find alternative solutions to improve their position (Carter, 2005). A particular care should be taken where there are students of minority cultures. People from other cultures need to train and enable them to be active and effective citizens in society without their alienation from their own culture and language (Wong-Fillmore, 2005).

If the teacher aims to develop successfully intercultural competence in children he/she is necessary to be familiar with the principles upon which multiculturalism is based. Banks' dimensions of multicultural education and Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity made a significant contribution to the theory of intercultural education. Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity describes the stages that people go through difficulties when encountering with other cultures (Bennett, 1993). People and society as a whole, differ in their ability to recognize and accept cultural differences. Subtle treatment of

cultural differences could develop from the stage of denying difference to the stages of perception and acceptance of cultural differences, which Bennett called ethno-relativism. Bennett distinguishes three main stages of ethnocentrism (denial, defense and minimization) and three stages ethno-relativism (acceptance, adaptation and integration). Bennett warns that many institutions and organizations strive to build a world where people share the same values and have a common starting ground (Mrše, Petrović, et al, 2007).

Besides Bennets model of intercultural sensitivity, a large contribution to the theory of intercultural education gave Banks. According to Banks (1999) a multicultural education is a broad concept with several important dimensions that teachers should use guidelines while school should make necessary reforms as to accommodate the implementation of multicultural education. These dimensions are: integrated content, the process of constructing knowledge, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, strengthening school culture and social structure. Intercultural education should not be reduced to the content or as a primary source for the development of education. Instead, intercultural education should be defined and understood more widely. Intercultural education should promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among students of different ethnic, racial, ethnic and religious groups. This will not be achieved only through joint sitting and listening to the teacher who stresses that student should be tolerant towards each other. It is necessary to organize different forms of communication, cooperation and to establish real contacts among students (Batelaan and Coomans, 1999).

Schools might have a maximum impact if they set up cooperation with numerous partners outside the school. Education about the relationship cannot be achieved in the narrow class context, among students and teachers. Therefore, the educational community should intervene directly in the role of teachers, parents, associations, organizations and youth movements, representatives of business circles, artists, various cultural communities, universities and scientific institutions. Cultural worlds with which the youth and the old should acquaint with are not immutable entities but a living organism, endowed

with the ability to customize and continuous renewal (Perotti, 1995). Even the culture of immigrant communities, culture of their home countries, often changes as soon as they engage with the local cultures. Immigrants contain the foundation and they can easily fit into their new environment. The contact with the dominant cultures in which they settled is essential. Children are often prone to get involved into new culture because they have very little or no knowledge about local culture and their home country practices. The key to their future will not be found in books but in lively practices and social integration. Young people, therefore, have an access to the dynamics of culture that provides new opportunities.

In addition to accepting diversity, intercultural education must teach young people to take an active role in the society and to fight against all forms of discrimination, segregation and xenophobia. Human rights should also be emphasized among students, educators and researchers. Such universal reference could direct us to transcend ideological differences. According to human rights we should aim to develop the world "without any discrimination based on sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status "(Article 14 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental freedoms, Council of Europe, 1950).

Intercultural education is not novelty but its new methodology attempts to seek new findings within psychological, anthropological, social, economic, historical, political and cultural aspects of life. Therefore, intercultural education as a subject is closely connected with social sciences, humanities and natural sciences. Yet there are no special application areas that are distinctively intercultural. Intercultural approach draws strength from access to individual cases and provides them with incentives. Intercultural education cannot avoid the transfer of useful knowledge for the education of the citizens of multicultural society.

Three key elements of intercultural education according to the Council of Europe include the role and responsibility of schools, history and identity, religious or spiritual dimension of multicultural society

(Maksimović, 2005). There is also a need for the religious or spiritual dimensions of education. In order to live in harmony with their neighbors and among various nations it is necessary to know more about others, to be more sensitive and more open and to know more about other religions and cultures. After September 11, 2001 the special place in intercultural education got a religious education (Jackson, 2009). International institutions and other relevant subjects invested great effort in order to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence through religious education in public and private schools. Many experts believe that learning about other religions contribute to their tolerance and reduce discrimination and that religious education can contribute significantly to world peace. Through religious education in public schools in an efficient way it is possible to develop a respect and appreciation of others.

Cultural Diversity in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Necessity of Interculturalism

Cultural diversity can be one of the greatest assets of a state but at the same time it can be a constant source of various conflicts. The pluralism of different cultures and traditions of the people who live in mutual respect and appreciation is the characteristic of the democratic societies. Balkan is a symbol of ethnic, national, religious and linguistic diversity. Southeast Europe is a place where historically pervaded Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Islam and as well as other denominational traditions. The Balkans also cultivates a rich and diverse religious culture (Koprivica, 2001).

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a multicultural country and its multiculturalism should not be considered as the burden but as an asset. Multiculturalism should be constantly emphasized as an asset of this country that needs to be furthermore nurtured and developed. According to Hall future will depend on the willingness of people to transcend the boundaries of their own culture (Hull, 2001). Bosnia and Herzegovina can be proud of rich diversity that all together constitutes huge cultural treasures. However, this distinction is often misused and is often used as an instrument for achieving certain political gains.

According to Cvitković (2005) Bosnia and Herzegovina is the place in which the relations between Christians (Catholics and Orthodox) and Muslims often turned into conflict, but it is also the place that provides a chance for true solidarity, dialogue and communication. This is the place where religions face, clash, collide and interpenetrate. The history of these relations, particularly during the recent past, is not the best guide to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, people of Bosnia-Herzegovina as members of different nations and religions must share the same space and this requires mutual understanding and tolerance (Cvitković, 2005). Complex distribution of religions in this region is accompanied by ethnic diversity, which may or may not identify with the confessional communities. All this complicates the spatial relationships and gives them one, for the European framework, the specific stamp.

As in any democratic society, one of the key objectives of education is promoting democratic values in the community. The education system must take into account the multicultural character of the society and should strive to actively contribute to the peaceful coexistence and positive interaction among different cultural groups. Diversity seen as richness or diversity seen as challenge is one of the most important topics of intercultural education. At the social level, understanding of diversity as richness contributes to quality of the individual's life in a multiethnic, multicultural society (Husremović, Powell, et al, 2007). Also contemporary religious pedagogy clearly indicates that culturally, politically, religiously, and even racially mixed environment is a future that is already on the verge (Pranjić, 1996).

Taking into account the Balkans history the people of this region should invest much more efforts into the development of tolerance and coexistence. Separation, segregation and all other forms of discrimination will eventually harm all people of the Balkans. Experience tells us that whenever there is a conflict all national or religious communities paid heavy price. It is therefore essential to make every effort to develop intercultural awareness among the citizens, respectively in way to strengthen tolerance, understanding, respect and reconciliation. The best way of achieving these values is education. Young generations need to be educated to tolerate and to accept others.

Conclusion

Due to the mobility of the population and demographic changes societies are changing rapidly. As a result, multiculturalism plays a role of making dynamic and interactive links and relationships among different cultures. It is based on the idea of a better and more humane society and the future in which racism and domination will be eliminated. Therefore, intercultural education emphasizes on empathy, solidarity, recognition and respect for diversity. It is also education that curbs ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism and discrimination.

As this paper indicated, many international organizations like the UN, UNHCR, OSCE and Council of Europe have made significant efforts to ensure the development of multicultural values through education. Besides providing knowledge and skills to students, education emphasizes also on values of tolerance, respect, understanding and acceptance of others. Certainly, the most effective way of spreading these values is through education. International institutions through the adoption of key documents requested nations to eliminate all forms of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance. States should ensure equal rights for everyone under its jurisdiction, regardless of differences such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political affiliation, nation or social origin and economic status.

Bosnia-Herzegovina is richer with ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. By considering such diversity Bosnia should promote intercultural values through the educational system. History has shown that a very low level of tolerance often leads to conflicts and wars as was the case with the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Young people simply must develop intercultural sensitivity and competence since they live in a pluralistic society. Experts in the field of intercultural education believe that, in addition to other forms of education, religious education can contribute significantly to the development of intercultural values and thus improve the quality of coexistence.

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