COMBATING HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE IN AN ONLINE MULTICULTURAL LEADERSHIP COURSE: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF AN INSTRUCTOR AND STUDENT WORKING AT TANDEM FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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This narrative study examines hegemonic discourse in an online multicultural leadership course by translating e-narrative analysis findings into implications for social justice and recommendations for andragogical strategies. These strategies specifically address hegemonic discourse within an online educational environment. The setting for this article is a graduate level class in Multicultural Leadership geared toward Masters' students in an educational leadership program. Through the e-narrative analysis, four themes emerged that characterized the hegemonic discourse: rejecting social justice; wooing white privilege; he oppressive "other," and telling it straight. Based on the findings and implications surrounding the research questions, four andragogical strategies were recommended: engaging in moral conversations; adopting bilateral teaching tools; strategizing for collaborative alliances; and enabling emblematic change.

Keywords: hegemonic discourse, e-narrative, critical pedagogy, social justice

> *My hope is enough! No, my hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly. We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water (Freire 1999, p. 8).*

We are female and male, Middle-Eastern and White, professor and student. While the binaries present in the professional relationship of one professor and one graduate student at a borderland university may in many instances serve as a base of divisiveness and opposition, the two researchers involved in this conversation are allies. Moreover, we have united under the auspice of combating hegemonic discourse in the higher education classroom. This article presents a narrative study that explores online discussions in an educational leadership program's Multicultural Leadership course geared toward graduate students of a Southwestern College of Education at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Through electronic narrative (e-narrative) analysis of the semester-long discussions, four themes emerged: rejecting social justice; wooing white privilege; the oppressive "other," and telling it straight. Based on the findings and implications of the e-narrative analysis, we recommend four andragogical strategies for addressing hegemonic discourse specific to an online educational environment. These strategies are grounded in the theoretical influences of Freire, hooks, and Giroux. More specifically, in order to better understand the crux of the role of the social justice educator as it pertains to combating hegemonic discourse, this research is couched in the philosophical underpinnings of Freire's colloquy on hope and critical pedagogy.

In a year seemingly embraced by the rhetoric of hope, 2009 was also the year we found ourselves marred by hegemonic, and oft racist, discourse. As such, the aim of this research is to deconstruct the factors, roles, and patterns of the upsurge in hegemonic discourse in a multicultural leadership course and contextualize it using the online learning climate. We parlay the shared, yet divergent, experiences of a professor and a student into multidimensional perspectives as we attempt to address hegemonic discourse in a graduate course. The attempts made in this specific course were both successful and unsuccessful. However, after self-reflection, re-examination of dialogue, and review of the data, we are able to offer proposed strategies for addressing similar issues in online courses. These andragogical strategies include engaging in moral conversations, adopting bilateral teaching tools, strategizing for collaborative alliances, and enabling emblematic change.

Important to this research are the terms e-narrative and andragogy. For the purposes of this research, narrative is defined as "a message or story that tells the particulars of an act or occurrence or course of events; presented in writing or drama or cinema or as a radio or television program" (Princeton University, 2010, para. 1). Due to the fact that the narratives took place in an online, or electronic, environment, they are termed e-narratives. E-narratives can be considered as part of the computer-mediated communication that has revolutionized the dissemination of education in the past 20+ years (Hara, Bonk & Angeli, 1998). Andragogy as a concept and philosophy has "taken on distinctly different meaning depending on what part of the world one is discussing" (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005, p. 231). In the North American context, Knowles (1986) called it a "conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory" with regards to the notion that adult learners have different experiences than younger students. According to Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson, andragogy is "a set of assumptions about how adults learn" (2005, p. 59). More specifically, Knowles (1980) put forth six assumptions with regards to andragogy: (1) the learner's need to know; (2) the learner's self-concept; (3) the role of the learner's experience; (4) a student's readiness to learn; (5) the student's orientation towards learning; and (6) the students' motivation to learn. These tenets of andragogy can provide insight with regards to the need for specific teaching tools aimed at an adult learning population in a multicultural leadership course.

The significance of this research is couched in the offering of multiple perspective teaching tools for combating hegemony that are funneled through the examination of the lived experiences of varying perspectives. The professor of record for the course, and first author, is a Middle-Eastern woman who has taught Multicultural Leadership for five non-consecutive semesters at Southwest State University to primarily Master's students in educational leadership programs. The graduate student, and second author, is a White male doctoral student who was invited to co-author this article due largely to include the perspective of a participant in the discourse as a supplement to the perspective of the professor. Both authors of this article are invested in the pursuit of social justice, yet approach it from different sociocultural lenses and demographic confines. These experiences include the confrontation that manifested when students' initial reactions to the concepts of social justice, equity, and white privilege communicated resistance. The upsurge in resistance followed by hegemonic dialogue further necessitates the exploration of tools for professors to create safe spaces wherein students can explore and embrace the conceptual and pedagogical tools of diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice.

HOPE AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AS CONCEPTUAL TOOLS

Hope has been used in education, and other forums, as a conduit to motivate a collective consciousness. In educational theory, Paulo Freire used the concept of hope to underlie his thoughts on the task of the progressive educator. As Freire (1999) stated:

> One of the tasks of the progressive educator…is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope there is little we can do. For hope is an ontological need…the attempt to do without hope in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion. (p. 9)

Freire believed that, without hope, we are hopeless and cannot begin the struggle to change, as hope is based on the need for truth as an ethical quality of the struggle. As such, he described hope as an ontological need; one that should be *anchored in practice* so that it may achieve *historical concreteness* (Freire, 1999, p. 9). Hope and action are inexorably intertwined for Freire, an intermingling of progressive post modern and practice-based struggle. As Freire stated, "the idea that hope alone will transform the world…is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism" (1999, p. 8).

Central to recognizing and combating this struggle are educators who adopt a critical pedagogy. The application of a critical pedagogy is the way for many educators to act in a way that endorses hope, while simultaneously engaging in the struggle for equity. Freire argued that any curriculum that ignores the plights of the oppressed - the racialized and marginalized - merely perpetuates the status quo and reaffirms power dynamics in favor of the hegemonic elite (Freire, 1997). Critical pedagogy endorses an expansion of consciousness and favors action aimed at change. In order to challenge and question systems of domination, educators should employ techniques and tools in the classroom that engage students in critical thinking. As hooks stated, "The heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know—

to understand how life works" (2010, p. 7). However, hooks warned that students do not become critical thinkers quickly, but rather it is a process that first includes embracing the love, power, freedom, and evolution of knowledge. She further put forth that many students "resist the critical thinking process; they are more comfortable with learning that allows them to remain passive" because passivity does not require engagement (2010, p. 10). Moreover, and important to this research, hooks asserted that "keeping an open mind is an essential requirement of critical thinking" (2010, p. 10).

Giroux's thoughts regarding critical thinking and action were similar to Freire and hooks' ideas. "If we think of emancipation as praxis, as both an understanding as well as a form of action designed to overthrow structures of domination, we can begin to illuminate the interplay between historical consciousness, critical thinking, and emancipatory behavior" (1997, p. 26). For Giroux critical thinking as a method of reasoning is obscured in both school and wider society by a culture of positivism, yet he offers that collective communication, critical dialogue, and hermeneutic understanding as strategies for grounding the use of critical thinking as well as delegitimizing institutional arrangements (Giroux, 1997).

As attested to by the three scholars mentioned, hope, action, and critical thinking are powerful tools that can provide conceptual clarification and understanding of hegemonic discourse in the higher education classroom. The collective community that exists within the classroom is certainly affected by these elements. In an online environment, the community is formulated, managed, and experienced in unique ways. Palloff and Pratt (2007) asserted, "key to successful online learning is the formation of an effective learning community as the vehicle through which learning occurs online" (p. 4). One element that is definitively unique to the online learning community is the presence of the technological veil.

The Technological Veil

Palloff and Pratt (2007) explained that fear is what keeps individuals in a community from connecting with each other. Due to the unfamiliar nature of the environment, the online experience is approached with natural and expected anxiety from students new to the setting. In her study surrounding the need for online communications ethics, Deborah Johnson found that online communication has encountered problems during its growth and evolution and "the most disturbing of these involves human behavior" (1997, p. 2). The shared experience of this classroom setting did not seem to shed light on ethical issues surrounding hegemonic discourse. More specifically, the online environment seemed to produce a technological veil that students potentially could hide behind after making contentious and polemical statements. This online shield can make it easier to stand on unsupported platforms because students can pick and choose which responses to address and at the same time ignore evidence or responses that do not support their proposed platforms. In general, discourse that may have remained in silent discord in a traditional environment was prevalent in the presence of the technological veil.

Merryfield found that "my experiences with electronic pedagogy have made me question the use of online courses for required courses in multicultural and global education" (2001, p. 1). She found a paradoxical relationship between the students' ability to be more open in the environment, while at the same time struggling with "knowing the other" (p. 1). Sproull and Kiesler (1991) found that "when people perceive communication to be ephemeral, the stakes of communication seem smaller. People feel less committed to what they say, less concerned about it, and less worried about the social reception they will get" (p. 42). Furthermore, Palloff and Pratt explained that "because students cannot see reactions through facial expression when something is said, they can sometimes be less cautious about what they say and how they say it" (2007, p. 54).

Another concern surrounding this specific scenario is the possibility that groupthink played a role in the passive resistance to the hegemonic discourse. "Groupthink is the subtle and not-so-subtle pressure to conform in thought and action. This kind of oppression can be devastating on a psychological level. When one is experiencing that kind of pressure, the result can be feelings of unease, not belonging, not feeling safe – feelings of being an outsider" (Pallof & Pratt, 2007, p. 52). In terms of understanding the relationship between personal behavior and group phenomena in an electronic forum, it is important to recognize that not only does groupthink come into play (Pallof & Pratt, 2007), but also that the online environment provides a structure that differs from the traditional classroom in a few key areas. These include (1) the ability to post a response without being challenged in real time; (2) the ability to ignore

responses to a post; and (3) the ability to make an assumption of consensus, which can hinder one's motivation for confrontation, based upon the absence of non-verbal communication from fellow classmates in reaction to a posting.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In light of the problem that is being examined and theoretical foundations inherent to this study, the research questions guiding this article are (1) How can educators and students co-create a community of hope in an online learning environment given a surfeit of hegemonic discourse? and (2) How should educators and students address hegemonic discourse, while encouraging hopeful and critical thinking, in an online course?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mission of the College and Department

Both the mission of the college and department drive an overall adherence to diversity, community, and social justice at Southwest State University (SSU). The mission of the College of Education at SSU is "to serve the people of New Mexico through education, research, extension education, and public service with specific emphasis on innovative practices, overcoming barriers to learning, international activities, technology, and literacy for the diverse populations of New Mexico, surrounding states and border communities" (SSU, 2010). Parallel to the spirit of the college's mission, the departmental mission, which was created collectively by the faculty, is "to prepare and graduate capable, skillful and dynamic educational leaders for a diverse society. Through the use of theory and practice we aim to develop change agents and role models for socially-just educational systems" (SSU, 2010).

Online Course Tools

Noticeably different from a traditional to online course is the lack of face-to-face communication. In order to assist students in understanding their role as active, engaged, and courteous participants in the online course, Blackboard Protocol and Codes of Conduct documents are posted to the Blackboard site for students at the beginning of the course as part of the introductory information. Together, these online course tools provide students with information pertaining to (1) active and meaningful participation, including substantive posting and responses, and (2) netiquette, a neologism or morphological blend formed from "Internet etiquette" that acts as a catch-all term for the conventions of politeness and respect recognized on Usenet, in mailing lists, in live chat systems, and on other electronic forums such as Internet message boards (Bovard, 2010). These conventions address the relationship between personal behavior and group phenomena.

Setting and Participants

The course discussed in this article is a graduate level class in Multicultural Leadership geared towards Master's students in a College of Education in an educational leadership and preparation department at Southwest State University. This university is designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, or HSI. The course is a requirement for students obtaining their Master's Degree in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Community College and University Administration. Other courses that are required as part of this program include Higher Education Law, Higher Education Finance and Funding, Higher Education Administration, Management of Student Services in Higher Education, Evaluation Design, Management of Educational Change, Elements of Research, Administration of Adult and Continuing Education, Educational Planning and Management, and Advanced Internship I and II. As such, the Multicultural Leadership course is essentially the only course in the program that explicitly addresses issues of diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice. It is important to note that this department does not include possessing a multicultural disposition as a prerequisite to admittance or entrance into the Master's program, or even course. Instead, students are asked to participate in this course as a degree requirement, bringing in their own preexisting knowledge, ideas, and experiences with relation to multicultural issues and in the hopes of becoming more nurturant towards issues of multicultural leadership.

The duration of the course spanned July 6th through August 7th, 2009, and was primarily conducted in an asynchronous manner over WebCT (web course tools, now owned by Blackboard) with one session over ITV (interactive television). Both are learning management systems used at this university. Twenty-two students were enrolled in the

course, of which 16 were female and six were male. The majority of students, 19 out of 22, in this course were part of a cohort in Educational Administration. The 19 cohort students had by this point taken at least five semesters (including summer) of classes together as part of the cohort-based hybrid distance education program. For these particular students, this course was their last prior to graduation. The other three students who enrolled in the course did so in order to complete degree requirements or credit hours for other programs within the same department.

METHODS

Qualitative research places emphasis on the phenomena and meaning of a socially constructed reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). In order to best understand the reality of the students in the course, the qualitative process impels the researchers to closely examine the electronic narratives. Exploring the meanings underlying the narratives of participants' reactions in this course is essential to understanding and translating these narratives into conduits of change. Once the narratives are thoroughly examined, we can then begin to engage critically and creatively with the narratives (Elliott, 2005; Labov, 1997). This narrative study provides rich sources of data that are organic, student-driven, and didactic.

In a time of competing understandings of what is considered fair, equitable, and just, a variety of narratives abound, each closely linked with personal beliefs, experiences, and ethics. Each narrative becomes a hermeneutic tool for understanding the conceptual foundations that underlie engagement by students. Arnett, Arneson, and Bell (2006) argued the importance of addressing narrative amidst a disputatious climate of diversity and difference. They stated: "Within a multiplicity of narrative structures, the conceptual foundation for a given communication ethic becomes a temporal backdrop for understanding and engaging the foreground issues of communicative implementation and engagement" (p. 79). Moreover, Labov asserted: "[Narrative] is essentially a hermeneutic study, where continual engagement with the discourse as it was delivered gains entrance to the perspective of the speaker and the audience, tracing the transfer of information and experience in a way that deepens our own understandings of what language and social life are all about" (1997, para. 2).

Also important to this study is the dialogue that was created between students. "Dialogue is the methodological heart of the online learning paradigm," and through discussion forums students were able to express themselves through a dialogic performance (Gibbons & Wentworth, 2001, para. 15). "Well-designed discussions are critical thinking and application-based and are relevant to nontraditional learners' current life tasks and problems. Students enthusiastically embrace these activities because they are motivated by their intrinsic pursuit of personal growth and achievement" (Gibbons & Wentworth, 2001, para. 16). Moreover, Nipper (1989) described the successful online learner as one that is active and creative in the learning process. This "noisy learner" parallels the characteristics of the successful dialoging for distance education students, which includes willingness to "speak up" if problems arise, to accept critical thinking and decision making as part of the learning process, and the ability to communicate through writing (Illinois Online Network, 2006, para. 6)

E-Narrative Data and Data Analysis

Data were collected from students through electronic narratives. The permanent records of the data were used as verbatim transcripts and provided an audit trail (Merriam, 1998). A boon of working with e-narrative data is the advantage of automatic transcription of the online communications. Collecting e-narrative data is different from that of traditional narrative data due to the dynamic nature of discussion threads. While individual e-narrative responses provide a concrete record, e-narrative threads are not static due to the flux of comments that can be made to postings and to the permanent availability and visibility of the narrative record. They represent a living record of what the student wrote at that exact moment in time. This is an important adaptation of qualitative research to an online environment insofar as the use of e-narrative distinguishes itself from the traditional use of transcripts. Moreover, e-narratives can be ignored or attended to at the discretion of the reader and are free from the added interpretability of social, physical, and non-verbal cues. For this specific research, e-narrative analysis was the best and most appropriate way to understand the technology-mediated interaction of hegemonic discourse in an online multicultural leadership course. As such, the e-narrative analysis is based solely on the observation of textual discourse, a marked difference from traditional qualitative analysis (Kozinets, 2001).

The e-narratives were yielded using two main forms of response methods. The two types of responses are categorized as prompted question and independent anthology. Prompted question responses were responses students made directly to questions the instructor posted, and independent anthology responses were responses students made to anthology readings. The independent anthology responses were unprompted, as students initiated a response based on their reaction to a multicultural reading. Throughout the duration of the course, three prompted question discussion threads and three independent anthology discussion threads were created. Students were asked to respond to one prompted question and independent anthology each week, as well as offer two thoughtful responses to colleagues' postings. Once the students fulfilled their requirements, they were free to post as much or as little as they liked. Over the course of the six-week summer course, more than 120 pages of data were mined from the WebCT discussion boards based on these six discussion threads. Questions, responses, and readings were grounded in the ideas of multiculturalism, research, experience-based learning, and critical thinking.

Selection of e-narratives was based upon criteria specific to the investigation, as well as preference given to online discussions threads that (1) had a higher "traffic" of responses and postings, (2) higher incidences of rich, descriptive data, and (3) extensive between-student interactions as they pertained to the research questions (Kozinets, 2001).

Bogdan and Bilken defined qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (2006, p. 145). E-narrative data were reviewed eight times each to help determine codes based on smaller units of data that could be organized based on harmonious patterns. Data from the narratives were coded using an extensive open coding and axial coding processes. Open coding allowed for the data to be examined, compared, conceptualized, and taken apart, while axial coding involved sorting the data into emergent themes deemed important (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Axial coding allowed the researchers to build a conceptual understanding of the phenomena that aided in the assembly of the "big picture." Several critical themes emerged from the data using an inductive analysis of the data.

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Through electronic narrative analysis of the semester-long discussions, four themes emerged from the units of data. They were rejecting social justice; wooing white privilege; the oppressive "other;" and telling it straight.

Rejecting Social Justice

The theory and praxis of social justice were openly rejected and challenged numerous times during the course of the semester. Polemics surrounding social justice stemmed from readings, the two types of responses, and reactions of students to each other's postings.

> At best, research exploring issues of social justice can be classified as a pseudo-science and much of the evidence is influenced by perspective, opinion, and speculation. It is difficult to prove direct cause and effect relationships regarding the current perceived inequities among groups of people...I think it is difficult to make the case that there continues to be covert or subconscious marginalization of groups of people based on race, class, and/or gender.

In *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, students were assigned a reading by feminist Audre Lorde entitled "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." This reading sparked commentary on social justice.

> Boy - this reading was tough. It brings out in me the reasons I tend to reject the study of social justice. In my opinion, to end the hatred, to end the oppression, it should become a simple solution. Stop the hatred- in all directions.

In light of the "rejection" response to Lorde's reading the following response was posted:

> I'm not sure why you would "tend to reject the study of social justice" as it is an enterprise designed to help address and potentially rectify historical and institutional inequalities that have persisted in this country, and for the purposes of this class, educational inequalities. Why would one be against rectifying injustice? And while you describe a utopian concept, "let's just stop the hatred," things are obviously not that easy or simple. The institutional and systemic race, class, and gender problems in this society are complex, multifaceted, and multi-layered thus requiring more than nice thoughts; they require social-justice minded action.

The above response was not met with any response. However, the following postings that again challenged the efficacy of social justice concepts, practice, and leadership were started in a new thread.

> To say that "the institutional and systemic race, class, and gender problems in this society are complex, multifaceted, and multi-layered..." is an attempt to over complicate an issue that has a relatively simple solution...rather than to continue to focus on our differences, we should look past our differences and treat each other with equality, fairness, and respect.

> You stated that social justice "is an enterprise designed to call attention to and even rectify (if ever possible) historical and institutional inequalities that have persisted in this country." You then asked the question, "Why would one be against rectifying injustice?" Here is my answer; it is impossible to rectify historical inequities.

> Oh my you 2!!!! As far as I am concerned you hit the nail directly on top!!! I do so agree to both of your opinions. Isn't this one of God's teachings to love unconditionally and love thy neighbor as thyself?

Within this same discussion thread, the response below was posted challenging students to think more critically.

> In a society as diverse as ours, it is important to celebrate the differences (rejecting the antiquated and outdated notion of the melting pot) in order to pay attention to the individualism and particularism engrained in different cultures that reside in this country. Again, while your suggestion of "we should look past our differences and treat each other with equality, fairness, and respect" is nice ideal, how does one put that into practice without theoretical examination that bridge varying thoughts with practical applications? In essence, how do we go about treating each other as you suggested, when for many of us, that doesn't exist? Social justice helps to create those important, timely, and critical conversations.

The comments above were met with no response. However, a new thread was created to address the topic of and concerns over social justice and policy.

> I'm fully in favor of need-based initiatives, but using other immutable characteristics (such as race or gender) seems inherently unfair. I would like to hear someone argue on behalf of race- or gender-based initiatives that are non-inclusive of financial need. If justice is "the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity" (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary), then I have a difficult time understanding how it is "socially just" to create a system that considers immutable qualities such as race, gender, or sexual orientation when constructing policy.

> In an attempt to show evidence-based understanding for performance gaps among students, the author tried to demonstrate that inequitable outcomes often result from systemic organizational practices and policies. In my experience, I find it hard to believe that institutional practices continue to provide barriers to a select group of non-white students. Contrarily, white students are becoming more and more disenfranchised by having to complete with many students who are eligible to receive race-based scholarships simply because they were born of a certain ethnicity. If scholarships were handed out to white student simply because they were white, that would be racist. Several states are either currently (or soon to be) minority-majority states. When the demographics in this country change such that the current minorities become the majority class, what then? Will we need to reverse policy and protect the "new" minority?

And finally, the last comments on the topic of social justice were:

> After reading the assigned chapters, the basic premise of Leadership for Social Justice, is to indoctrinate education leaders to become social justice activists. To accept this activist role, one must agree "we are still at war against the inequities that…may now be covert, subconscious, or even unintentional" (Marshall and Oliva, p. 2). Although there was a time in the United States when a call for civil rights was prudent and necessary, modern society has evolved beyond those past atrocities. Unfortunately, I find it difficult for myself to agree with much of the current social justice activist rhetoric exposed in the readings.

> To argue for social justice is to argue against individual success.

Wooing White Privilege

The concept of white privilege was introduced to students through an article by Peggy McIntosh's article entitled, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," which was in *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. This reading

was guided through the use of instructor notes, supplemental information, and research on white privilege, including the 2010 presidential campaigns. Using the McIntosh article as a vehicle for discussion, students were asked to offer their research based and experiential knowledge with reference to white privilege.

> I don't like the idea that I've had an unearned advantage and I certainly don't like the idea that from birth I've been in a position of dominance relative to people of other races. I am now starting to question my own journey from poverty to success. Is everything I have earned based on my hard work ethic, my own merit (as I have always thought) or had I been born a different color in a similar economic situation, would my journey have been different; would I be less successful than I am now?

> My biggest problem is that this was all McIntosh's opinion rather than based on research. The author (McIntosh) says, "whites are taught to not recognize white privilege" (p 98). I disagree with the author when she alludes to white's standards as "unearned assets", as I think of them more as standards that were set on whites from birth, through society, just like the standards were set on non-whites in this country. It's not an "earning" or a "non-earning" it just IS what it was made by society.

Addressing the comments above the following example is the response to the students' claims that there is essentially no such thing as white privilege.

> Because our nation was founded on the principal that only white men should vote and own Property, white privilege was created. Thanks to the civil rights movements in the 60's and 70's people began discussions around the fact that it might be a good idea to indeed treat all human beings as equals. Due to these discussions there was an uprising and rights were awarded for females and people of color. To this day white men hold more money and power than people of color especially when you frame this comparison around the rising population of minorities. This is to be expected given the prevalence of white power and discrimination in our country's history. I understand that we need to look ahead and that we no longer live in those days. I truly would like to look ahead to the days Dr. King described some 50 years ago. We are so much closer to those days than we were back in the days of slavery and for that I am proud of my country. The path to this future does not lie in complacency. Just because neither you nor I have tangible evidence showing we were aided by white privilege does not mean that it never existed or that it has suddenly vanished. This position is similar to saying that just because I didn't receive an inheritance from a rich uncle that rich uncles must be imaginary. In actuality, I just don't have one (or at least one from whom I received an inheritance). I struggle with the position that social justice has run its course because you cannot put your finger on any benefit you have received from being a white male. In reference to the end point, I'm not sure where it is but I will only start looking for one when no longer hear stories from people like [name omitted] who have witnessed white male dominance first hand. I guess it is hard for me to assume people with these stories are just ignorant or out of touch with their experiences. Thanks again for making me really think through this issue. Your input has truly solidified where I stand.

The statements above were not met with any response. The discussion thread stopped. The last comment on the subject of white privilege began in a different thread. The comment is below.

> I am reminded daily by my mixed Italian/Japanese wife on a daily basis just how much legitimate power I have as a result of me being a white male. I look forward to receiving my allowance next week if I am well behaved.

Both students are open about their personal beliefs; however, the attempt to combat the notion that white privilege is a myth is met with passive resistance.

The Oppressive "Other"

Discussion regarding programming for disenfranchised students was primarily spurred by a chapter in the text that addressed the issue of educational leadership along and around the Southwest borderland. This chapter was specifically selected for student reading, discussion, and response due to the location of SSU as well as the population demographics of the students with whom the educational leaders in this area work.

> I strongly believe that by accommodating immigrants in public schools only seeks to be racist in its own right because these programs should encourage and teach families to adapt and can also provide access to the same opportunity as their White counterparts in other areas of the same city/town they live in. I believe in an American's never say die

attitude, which in may mean never settling only for what is in front of us.

I don't know why I thought of this, because I look at the opportunity my father had compared to the programs for US/Mexico border schools and I tend to not see a great desire by families and students to be something better. What we value as Americans as a culture may not be of value to people of Mexico and I believe sometimes we in the U.S. accommodate immigrants from other countries without providing them the opportunity to themselves accommodate to an American culture or society.

As the discussion progressed, the narrative changed from a conversation on specific programming for borderland students to a more theoretical discourse on racism, discrimination, and higher education policies.

Today I asked if "we at least agree that racism is a 360 degree issue?" I wanted some validation that racism wasn't just about white people oppressing people of other races. I wanted to hear that mean-spiritedness ran both ways. I was struggling with reading past the emotionally impassioned aspect of so many of these cultural awareness essays that seemed to convey a "life's not fair" message. I thought these authors were wearing their emotions too much on their sleeve, publicly displaying a "poor disadvantaged me" message. I was struggling with finding empathy for their perspective, because I too felt disadvantaged. I too have been in situations where I felt like an outsider. People had been mean to me and I had cried about it, but I'm not still crying about it. Why couldn't people just "buck up" and move on to make the best of the cards they were dealt?

I hear you, and I agree that racism is 360 degrees. The Japanese, the Indians, and other races have looked on the Whites as barbarians, with little or no culture. Is that racism? Absolutely! Today, I feel the White people, especially the males, are the ones discriminated against because they are considered the root of all-evil.

We are trying to overcorrect past discrimination. There will always be individuals who will discriminate against others. But, federal and state laws and statutes protect against discrimination and provide opportunities to ethnic minorities--Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans, and Pacific Islanders--not available to others. Some of these programs are not even need-based. I know of many cases where financially well-off families received scholarships based only on race and ethnicity. If this is not reverse discrimination, I don't know what is.

Wow, [name omitted] leave it up to you to say what most of us (me) are thinking. By the way, you delivered it very eloquently!

Intersecting with this theme was Lorde's article, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." It again emerged as a way for students to express their perspectives on oppression and the "other."

In my humble opinion, Ms. Lourde [sic] seems to have a large chip on her shoulder. This reading was a great representation of why, I believe, we have so much hatred in the world. It seems to be blaming everyone else for having a poor opinion about blacks, women, lesbians and more. She begins by discussing oppression, and how the oppressor profits from the oppressed. I am not sure I believe the oppressor can profit from the oppressed, except for some perhaps in an emotional way. I am offended that, once again it is always the whites that are the oppressor against "blacks and third world people."

McIntosh's article on white privilege sparked some interesting comments on gender issues and the relationship between the two sexes.

McIntosh starts out by complaining that men are "over privileged" and this leaves women at a disadvantage. The premise seemed to be on "lessening" all things men in order to "raise" all things women. My challenge with this is: why should women care as long as men are willing to bring women up to the level of men (even if it's a preconceived level)? Just like we don't want to "dummy down" our classes for academically underdeveloped students, why would we want to "dummy down" men in order to "pump up" women?

Overall, the comments regarding the "oppressive other" were prolific and spanned areas of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and immigration.

Telling It Straight

During the course of the semester, the professor introduced an article that was designed to complement a reading

and discussion on issues of education as they pertain to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) community. The article referenced the plans for the Social Justice High School in Chicago. The narrative surrounding this proposed school, which was originally intended to explicitly and specifically address educational issues of the LGBTIQ community, was powerful.

> *Regarding the article from windy city---while trying to do a good thing (making a safe environment) are they not just creating another social injustice? Isn't this discrimination and making the differences more noticeable? Is this really a way to protect? This may a temporary resolution but not treating the real problem. What happened to the inclusive theory here? The way I see it, if you do not want to be seen because of your differences then do not go out of the way to point them out!!!! Life is about finding one's own journey; "negative" energy creates havoc and disharmony, "positive" energies balances the path of your choice.*

> *I agree that differences are OK. I'm just not sure that one's sexual preference is something that needs to be on display for gay or straight. Many people find open and public displays of affection distasteful. I don't think public schools (especially K - 12) should be advocating one way or the other on matters that are private in nature.*

> *I personally do not think that giving them their own school will help solve this issue. I think we would be segregating them and at the same not we are not teaching the LGBTIQ students to really see what is out there. This is the world that we live in and we much know how it works so we can then do something about it. Also it would be like singling them out even more. I think that we need to learn to cope with everyone, it doesn't matter is they are LGBTIQ or different race or whatever the case may be.*

Amidst the negative reactions to the proposed school, a response in favor of the school was voiced:

> *Let me tell you why I think having their own public school would work. There are no areas in this country where gay people can show affection, be themselves and openly express their world like gay bars/clubs, bathhouses, gay sex clubs, gay themed parties. I know these are not the best places to mention but it is true. Now the theme for all of these is gay and yes I attended bars and nightclubs, but not the other areas I mentioned (honest). But I know that I was more comfortable being affectionate with my boyfriend in those places and feeling at ease communicating with my friends so having a school with complete acceptance for gay youth to be at ease is better because it is a public school that can provide mentoring, values and ethics for this youth so that they don't have to search out other "gay" themed areas and risk getting sick (HIV, STD) just to be around other gay men or women. As a start, this would be ideal and it might reduce the stresses of public education.*

The response above from an openly gay student was met with one rebuttal:

> *I appreciate your honesty and know that it must be hard for gays or lesbians to openly be affectionate and express themselves, but I don't think school is the place for this. I understand the point you were trying to make, but I don't think LGBTIQ should be able to "bend" the rules or get away with things just because of their sexual preference. Everyone should be treated as equal and as said before a no tolerance policy should be implemented.*

The discussion on this conversation proceeded via another student's comments, which sparked an e-narrative that advocated for reciprocity to be recognized and societal norms to be upheld.

> *I want to also add in here that it goes the other way also. If you are straight then sometimes there is harassment from LGBTIQs. So the education needs to be across the board for everyone. You can't say to group A you must respect group B and group B doesn't have to respect group A.*

> *When we are discussing children in K - 12, many of those children haven't had the time to develop the abstract concepts involved with LGBTIQ issues. Are there no issues that we can leave to parents to discuss with their children? For many families, LGBTIQ issues are often left to religious doctrine as they may impact moral and ethical upbringing. Educating our youth that there are no societal boundaries may be the agenda of social justice, however, it certainly then seeks to deconstruct societal norms.*

> *I do not agree with the idea of segregating these students into separate schools. I thought we were trying to move away from segregation and towards integration? We should be teaching people to accept and celebrate people's differences, however, just how much time spent on "normalizing" fringe behavior? I know that there may be a genetic predisposi-*

tion for some people, however others may be just confused. As a paramedic, I've ran on several transgender people and compared to the rest of the population at large, those are some strange scenes...people ingesting hormones and going through numerous operations trying to make large "man-bodies" into unattractive "woman-bodies." It always reminds me of the South Park episode where Kyle's dad gets an operation to transform himself into a dolphin. I do agree with the statistics presented that people who fall into these categories are at-risk populations. I've ran [sic] on disproportionately more people with suicidal ideations that have gender/sexual identity issues than those without gender/sexual identity issues. I think it is difficult for LGBTIQ people to cope. As a group, they are a small minority of the overwhelmingly heterosexual majority. I think is difficult to try to normalize something that is so obviously fringe.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the Four Themes

Four primary themes emerged from the data as students navigated the course in multicultural leadership. Again, the four themes are rejecting social justice, wooing white privilege, the oppressive "other," and telling it straight. It is important to note that the students in this course were not all at the same stages of development regarding the issues and processes; subsequently, the information presented is not strictly linear in terms of understanding and growth, but rather captures a wide range of perspectives. The primary limitation of this study is the reliance on a small group of participants in one specific course in a particular context. However, given the paucity of literature in this specific area, the information presented does provide a platform for discussion and dialogue regarding teaching a multicultural leadership course using the online modality. Additionally, this information can provide educators and students with some pre-course considerations regarding the intersection of teaching multicultural subject matter in an online environment.

Rejecting social justice. Overall, students did not value social justice as a viable theory for understanding the experiences of disenfranchised groups and had pre-conceived negative assumptions regarding the term social justice and implications of social justice policy. Moreover, the utopian ideology of "let's just stop all the hatred" permeated discussion. As opposed to addressing social justice from a critical, systemic, and institutionalized manner, students approached social justice from perspectives that were couched in utopian ideals, the overcomplicating of oppression, as a topic that is too difficult to wholly address, as a backlash against individualism, and filtered into discussions of the "new minority" (whites).

Wooing white privilege. Specifically, students had a difficult time understanding their position(s) of privilege; as well as the historical, contextual, and oft-times traumatic experience of the "other" in the United States. Moreover, white students had a particularly difficult time with the concept of "unearned" privilege.

The oppressive "other." Generally, students did not accept the notion of racism as an act solely against people of color. In fact, students were quick to point out the perceived oppression faced by whites in modern times and went so far as to implicitly and explicitly mention discrimination and racism aimed at whites. Students advocated against race-based programs aimed at equity in higher education, stating that like policies were attempting to "overcorrect" past discrimination. Sentiments were also grounded in the ideas that minorities should adapt and assimilate to American culture and that "we" should not accommodate their differences.

Telling it straight. The idea of "privacy" triumphed the topic of sexual orientation. Students believed that this sort of difference was private, not an issue for the public schools to handle, and that this "difference" should not be pointed out to others. The discussions also devolved into conversations on sexual contact and strayed away from the ideas of equity, privilege, and safe spaces as they relate to an over-bullied and stigmatized LGBTIQ community. Finally, students put forth that discussion regarding the differences in sexual orientation was contrary to "societal norms" and that there were moral, ethical, and religious implications in regards to this "fringe" behavior.

When students became offended by notions of their own privilege or troubles by issues outside the scope of what was "normal" for them strong statements were levied against the "other." In fact, a variation of the groupthink mentality was created. The variation is based on the overt negativity of many of the responses. In essence, when one student started a negative rant against social justice and critical thinking, other students joined in quickly to cheer on, congratulate, and perpetuate. The forms of student participation also reveal certain aspects of teaching this material

online.

Findings from the Four Forms of Student Participation

In addition to findings that emerged from the units of data, post hoc examinations of the different forms of student participation were also examined. Based on Zhu's (1998) analysis of the forms of student participation, data were assessed and analyzed for the way in which a student contributed to the discussion thread. In essence, the form of student participation asks, what role did the student take on when posting a response to a prompted question, independent anthology, thoughtful response, or free post? Understanding these different roles helps to elucidate the patterns of hegemonic knowledge construction in the online discussions. The four forms of student participation that emerged from the data were *prodder, perpetuator, cheerleader,* and *stopper*. The galvanizer describes the responder who immediately and strongly challenged the social justice or multicultural integrity of the prompted questions or independent anthology, and who was able to incite others or shut a thread down through a non-responsive acts; the perpetuator describes the responder who waited until another responder, typically the galvanizer, challenged the prompted questions or independent anthology and then engaged with a concomitant attack on the issues pertaining to social justice or multicultural; the cheerleader describes the responder who agree with the other aforementioned responders in a perfunctory manner, but offered no substantive response; and the stopper describers the responder who challenged the postings of the galvanizer, which quickly ended the postings in the thread or was the first to respond to the prompted questions or independent anthology in support of social justice or multiculturalism, which also ended the postings in the thread. In essence, the four forms of student participation were gleaned from three reoccurring patterns of responses emerged:

- Pattern 1: Initial post, GALVANIZER, PERPETUATORS, CHEERLEADER, end of thread
- Pattern 2: Initial post, GALVANIZER, STOPPER, end of thread
- Pattern 3: Initial post, STOPPER, end of thread

Interesting to note, while this study did not include a discourse analysis of responses, a preliminary review of transcriptions showed that, as the course discussions transpired, the responses became more emotionally laden. This was potentially enabled by the fact that the students were able to continually revisit threads and experience a resurgence of emotions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend four andragogical strategies for addressing hegemonic discourse specific to an online educational environment, which are based on the findings and implications of the e-narrative analysis as well as the on theoretical influences of Freire's hope and critical pedagogy.

Engaging in Moral Conversations

Due to the overwhelming inclusion of personal systems of belief, values, and ethics in conversations that address social justice and multiculturalism, it is imperative to continue to engage in and advance moral conversations. Dialogue, disagreement, and deliberative debate are inherent in critical pedagogy. Freire not only valued the importance of dialogue in education, but also insisted that dialogue involves respect. It should not involve one person acting on another, but rather people working with each other (Freire, 1997). Strategies, tools, techniques, and materials should be chosen specifically for their ability to inspire discussions grounded in pluralism, nurturance, and critical self-reflection. Conflict should not be avoided, but rather encouraged so that groupthink does not circumnavigate the learning process. hooks (2003) attested to the dangers of communal thinking when she offered, "In classroom settings I have often listened to groups of students tell me that racism no longer really shapes the contours of our lives, that there is just no such thing as racial difference, that 'we are all just people'" (p. 25). Similar sentiments abounded in this research and thus call attention to the fact that there is more work to be done in the enterprises of social justice and multiculturalism.

In addition, it is also especially important to engage in the textual discourse of moral conversations due to the fact that the non-verbal, gestural, and articulatory cues so apparent and important in face-to-face speech are missing

in the online environment. Palloff and Pratt offered that is it important to "demonstrate effective use of group dynamics and dialogue techniques" as a competency of meaningful online teaching (2007, p. 109). One manner to engage in this process is through the use of critical self-reflection activities, which are especially pertinent for adult learners. As Fidishun stateed, "Their self-identity including habits and biases are determined from their experience" (2010, para. 11). Mezirow also advocated for "reflective learning" (1991, p. 6) in an online environment. As Mezirow stated, "reflective learning involves assessment or reassessment of assumptions" (1991, p. 6), and "reflective learning becomes transformative whenever assumptions or premises are found to be distorting, inauthentic or otherwise invalid" (1991, p. 6). Reflective learning activities take into account that adult learners are a heterogeneous population as well as assist students in examining their values, beliefs, and assumptions while moving them toward a new understanding (Fidishun, 2010) of information, especially as it pertains to multiculturalism and hegemony.

Adopting Bilateral Teaching Tools

In the spirit of creating a classroom that values democratic education, it is essential to encourage experiential discussion (Dewey, 1997, 1997; Freire, 1997; hooks, 1994). Freire's attention to situating educational activity in the lived experience of students has created new avenues for educators to advance educational theory and practice (1997). Important to this educational information sharing is ensuring that type of academic vulnerability is reciprocal. hooks (1994) speaks of the confessional narratives not only as academic development, but also as a tool by which educators can pedagogically engage and empower. She states: "Engaged pedagogy emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively involved committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (p. 15). This calls attention to the notion that teaching is a bilateral endeavor; it involves reciprocity of ideas, thoughts, and exchanges between teacher and student. It is not an undertaking of mere dissemination of information (Freire, 1991), but a more active and dually informed effort.

In order to create a mutually inclusive classroom environment it is helpful to not only choose books and readings based in social justice and multiculturalism, but also to create accompanying activities, experiential logs, and opportunities for continual and critical reflection. This aim can be achieved by using multicultural disposition assessment tools to better gauge where students are at in terms of multiculturalism in the beginning and the end of the course; creating team discussion threads that encourage students to build diversity capacity from multifaceted perspectives; and offering student led lessons in privilege, power, and justice that enable students to "unpack" their own "invisible knapsacks."

Strategizing for Collaborative Alliances

Gray defined collaboration as "A process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (1991, p. 4). Collaboration can further the processes of shared decision-making, creation of new information, and trust. In an effort to build collaborative alliances amongst students and between students and the instructor it is imperative to establish a genuine sense of community based on trust (hooks, 2010, p. 109). Furthermore hooks asserted, "it is the absence of a feeling of safety that often promotes prolonged silence or a lack of student engagement" (1994, p. 39). By constructing a safe community grounded in trust, students will have the ability to become more involved in the collaborative efforts and the co-construction of knowledge as related to this course. Simply stated, students will want to learn.

Knowles explains that adults become ready to learn when, "they experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks or problems" (1980, p. 44). Adult learners want to know that what they are learning will have real-life applications (Fidishun, 2010). Fidishun (2010) further elaborated that for adult learners internal priorities are most important; especially as they are related to increased job satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life. Parallel to this idea, Palloff and Pratt (2007) advocated for "creating a learning community that is intellectually exciting and challenging; and encourage learners to perform to the best of their abilities in all aspects" (2007, pp. 109). Keeping these efforts in mind, instructors can solicit ongoing feedback about the importance and relevance of on-going activities based in multiculturalism; have students attest to times when they have felt oppressed, as the "other," or marginalized; incorporate activities that ask students to step out of the bounds of their own zones of privilege and put themselves situations in which they are the minority; and have students co-construct projects based on

real-world applications of multicultural campaigns.

Enabling Emblematic Change

As educational leaders and students it is imperative that we continue to examine and explore opportunities for enabling emblematic change in consciences, classrooms, and communities. The change we need to effect should be emblematic of equity, diversity, and social justice. We need to remind ourselves that our vocation is one that intermingles the revolving synergy of hope and change. hooks views teaching as a prophetic vocation invested in the ideas of hope, spirituality, inclusiveness, and integrity. She stated (1994):

> To educate, as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)

As educators we take on the responsibility of helping to transform lives through an oft-times difficult process of growth. We are committed to nurturing intellectual development; and that enterprise requires hope. Hope that change and transformation are possible. Hope that past discomfort and pain is intellectual development. And hope that we can be conduits of this revolution. As hooks (2003) believed "My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness. As teachers we believe that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know" (p. xiv).

CONCLUSION

In general, this research reveals that books and readings in multiculturalism and social justice are not enough to help transform students from one intellectual place to another and that multicultural leadership can be difficult subject matter to teach online. To investigate these phenomena further, this is one narrative study that is part of a larger qualitative study that will be conducted each summer. As two researchers engaged you in this work, we thought it appropriate that two researchers provide individual final thoughts.

Comments from the Student

From a student perspective, it is both liberating and fulfilling to discover tools and andragogical strategies that will undoubtabley enhance my ability to combat hegemonic discourse both as a student and an educational leader. Metacognition enables the curious mind to delve into the process of what makes a person curious. Living one's life in a culture of cultures enables the curious soul to delve into what makes this soul unique and simultaneously homogenous. The ability of a citizen to learn to first recognize and then to grow to affirm the diversity present within our society is both a salient and empowering goal of any educational program. The themes that emerged through this e-narrative analysis show that by forgetting the past and focusing on the present, as the majority of the students wished to do, we ignore the role diversity plays in the here and now by making the assumption that history does not affect the present. The dialogue that ensued in this setting further defines the need for specific andragogical strategies surrounding multicultural education. As with any qualitative approach to research, the findings from the data lend to further questions: Is the technological veil a positive entity because it lends itself to providing a glimpse into just how pervasive hegemony and racist discourse is in modern society? Can racist discourse that would previously have lain latent in a brick and mortar setting now be addressed head on with the use of specific andragogical strategies in an online environment? And, when there is an upsurge in hope is there a competing and parallel spike in incivility?

Comments from the Professor

It is interesting to note that the formal student evaluations for this course were overwhelmingly very positive. In fact, for overall performance I received a 4.8 on a scale of 5.0. Some comments from the formal evaluations included, "I liked this class very much. It made me think about things in a new and different way. In ways I have never been taught

before"; "This class should be a requirement for everyone. Especially because the assignments made me think about my position in the world"; and "While I didn't always agree with the instructor, I found this class to be one of the best of my program. The material was thought-provoking and the discussion were really interesting, even though they made me mad at times."

However, the class had a few curious notes. Due to my ethnic sounding and gender non-specific name, one student asked if I could send her a video sample before the course got underway so she could gauge my level of proficiency with the English language as well as determine to what extent the presence of an accent would impact her ability to learn. For the record, I am American born with no discernible accent. Two other students emailed me after our first Interactive Television (ITV) session (nearly four weeks into the course) to let me know how happy they were to have an ITV session. "I hope you don't mind us saying this, but we didn't think you were a female. So glad we had the ITV session!" ([name omitted], personal email communication, August 1, 2009). In spite of the difficult subject matter and other considerations, the students very much liked the course. Additionally, this sort of professional testimony can also help to alter the course landscape.

Indicative of the spirit of hope and change we aim to put forth, professional testimony is an important endeavor with regards to teaching for educational leadership grounded in multiculturalism. As English (2006) explained, life and professional histories and other forms of life writing can provide insights into educational leadership and administrative practice and were once considered vital sources of information on leadership. He goes on to state, "A postmodern perspective about life writing is not what it reveals regarding the continuities involved in leadership that are valuable, but rather it is the discontinuities, the ruptures and the dissimilarities which are of most importance because that is where solutions to the novel problems of times may be found" (English, 2006, p. 142).

While we do not offer concrete solutions, we do offer recommendations grounded in critical change that take into consideration the adult learner, multiculturalism, and hope. It is in this vein that we offer the need for a revitalized education of hope; one that is especially needed now. "A pedagogy of hope offers practical wisdom about what we do and can do to make the classroom a place that is life-sustaining and mind-expanding, a place of liberating mutuality where the teacher and student work together in partnership. I hope to recover our collective awareness of the spirit of community that is always present when we are truly teaching and learning" (hooks, 2003, p. xv).

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