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**COLORFUL DIALOGUE:
TALKING TOWARDS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

BY
KATE OLSON

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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Colorful Dialogue: Talking Towards Civic Engagement
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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis committee.

Dr. Jeffrey Bumgarner, Chairperson

Dr. Fred Slocum

Dr. Michael Fagin

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Abstract

Title: Colorful Dialogue: Talking Towards Civic Engagement

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Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2011

Noticing a need in the Mankato, Minnesota area to link new immigrants and refugees with the greater Mankato community, the YWCA Mankato started the Walking in Two Worlds program. The Colorful Dialogue, a part of the Walking in Two Worlds program, is a monthly community forum where long-time residents and newcomers, including immigrants and refugees, meet to discuss topics important for community building. The purpose of this research is to evaluate the program as a form of civic engagement.

Two main questions shape the research: (1) Is the YWCA program, Colorful Dialogue an effective method of civic engagement? (2) Is cross-cultural dialogue important and/or necessary in a demographically changing community? To answer these questions, qualitative research methods are used, including interviews and participant observation. Results show that interviewees find cross-cultural dialogue important, judging the effectiveness of the Colorful Dialogue as a form of civic engagement, however, was more difficult. Participation in the event could be considered civic engagement, but it did not appear that the Colorful Dialogue is used as a stepping stone for increased civic engagement. Respondents think the Colorful Dialogue is important for English language learners to practice their language in a practical setting; for immigrants and refugees to be able to connect with people in the community and learn the norms of

living here, but also for those in the community to connect with *all* people living in Mankato, Minnesota.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Demographic changes in Mankato, Minnesota led the YWCA to start the Walking in Two Worlds program to work with immigrant and refugee women new to the area. This program's goal is to help connect these newcomers with the larger community. The Colorful Dialogue is an aspect of the Walking in Two Worlds program. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact Colorful Dialogue has on civic engagement. This will be done through interviews and participant observation.

The context of the study area and the general situation is presented below. This section gives an overview of the study area, a brief history of the YWCA and notes some recent changes in Minnesota. Concluding Chapter One, an overview of the paper as a whole is given.

Context

This study is situated in Mankato, Minnesota. Mankato is a small city of 39,309 residents located in the Minnesota River valley in Blue Earth County.¹ The Greater Mankato area² has more than 96,000 residents (Greater Mankato Growth, Inc, 2010), while Minnesota in total has 5,303,925 inhabitants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). In order to see where the study area is located, please refer to Appendix A for a map denoting Blue Earth County and Mankato.

¹ The population in Blue Earth County is 64,013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

² The Greater Mankato Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) includes Mankato, North Mankato and surrounding communities, including portions of Blue Earth and Nicollet Counties (Guide to Greater Mankato, 2011; Hentges & Zierdt, 2009).

Over the years, the face of Mankato has changed from a sacred Native American ground to an agricultural area to now a thriving metro hub in the region. In addition, who the immigrants are today, are not the same as who they were in previous immigration waves to the area. Their stories of adaptation and integration may, however, still be similar. Demographic changes in an area can, at times, lead to conflict or misunderstanding. Misunderstandings have the potential to divide a community and make the community seem unwelcoming.

A few years ago, the Mankato YWCA recognized changes in the Mankato area and proactively sought to link established, long-term residents with newcomers, often immigrants and refugees. The YWCA started the Walking in Two Worlds program to work as a bridge for these two sections of the Mankato community. The Walking in Two Worlds program works with young immigrant and refugee women and focuses on empowerment, development of leadership skills and career paths, as well as on strong family and cultural connections (YWCA Mankato, 2011a). These goals are also important to the YWCA's mission and dedication to "eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all" (YWCA Mankato, 2010). The Walking in Two Worlds program "covers the gaps- the gaping hole between the immigrants' cultures in their homeland and western culture and technology" (YWCA Mankato, 2007). The Colorful Dialogue, a part of the Walking in Two Worlds program, is a monthly community forum where long-time residents and newcomers meet to discuss

topics important for building community.³ The Colorful Dialogue is the main focus of this research.

It got started when we were working with the Walking in Two Worlds program and looking at ways to work with immigrants but not in a way that keeps them isolated. We were looking for ways to connect immigrants and Americans to other community members and as we were trying to do that we realized that community members didn't know anything about immigrants and there wasn't any way or vehicle for people to connect unless somebody really went out of their way to make a connection (Interview A. Ganey, Executive Director YWCA, March 18, 2011).

The YWCA Mankato has a long tradition in this area, active in the community since 1926. The YWCA has roots in the Christian faith, and strives to be inclusive of and strengthened by diverse beliefs and values in the community. The “YWCA draws together members who strive to create opportunities for women's growth, leadership, and power in order to attain a common vision: peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all people” (YWCA Mankato, 2011b).

The YWCA in Mankato is a small organization and funding for the Walking in Two Worlds program, including and specifically the Colorful Dialogue can be a questionable resource. Discontinuing the Colorful Dialogue has been considered because of limited staff resources and because funding is coming from the reserves of the non-profit. This is one of the reasons this study is important.

³ “Past conversations have included what [participants] like about our community, what challenges immigrants and refugees face, including the largest barrier, language; what has brought people to Mankato and values and traditions” (YWCA Mankato, 2011c).

Changes in Minnesota.

Within the American context, mobility and migration are not new phenomena. Minnesota, in the heartland of the United States, is no exception. People emigrate(d) from their home country in search of a better life, settle(d) in Minnesota, some stay(ed) and others continue(d) their migration. This could be a statement commenting on Minnesota's historical situation, but could just as easily be reflecting the current situation. Modern globalization brings the outside world closer to local rural areas and thus changes the identities of these places and impacts the people who live there.

The first 'settlers' in Minnesota (after the Native Americans) were European, mostly white, coming from countries such as: Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Scandinavia, and Ireland (Amato, 1997). In the 1850s, a large influx of immigrants moved into the Minnesota area. The cheap farmland and the growing industrial base attracted people to this area. In the 1890s, the foreign born population in the United States was 15%, while in Minnesota it was 40% (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006a). These immigrants came from different situations in their homeland and left for different reasons. Regardless of their situation, they all had something in common: they left their homeland to come to the United States to make a better life for themselves and their families. At the turn of the 20th century, election instructions in Minnesota were written in nine languages (English, German, Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, French, Czech, Italian and Polish) (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006a). Currently, shortly after the turn of the 21st century, information from the Twin Cities metro area public schools show that there are more than 100 different languages spoken there (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006a). In Mankato, 31 different languages are spoken in the public schools (T. Miller, personal communication, February 24, 2011).

The majority of new immigrants in Minnesota today come from Latin America, Africa and Asia (Gonzalez, 2009; Owen, Meyerson & Otteson, 2010) and many new immigrants in Minnesota are refugees. According to the U.S. Census definition, an immigrant is someone who is born in a foreign country. An immigrant can include “U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (such as foreign students), humanitarian migrants (such as refugees), and people illegally present in the United States” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). A refugee, according to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (2011), is someone who “demonstrates that they were persecuted or fear persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group.” Just over five percent of those living in Minnesota are foreign born. Nationally, 12% of the population is foreign born and another 11% has one foreign born parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c), much different than the picture from the 1850s. Of those five percent foreign born Minnesotans, about two percent have become naturalized citizens. In Blue Earth County, only three percent of the population is foreign born and 1.2% of this population are new Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a).

Some characteristics framing the immigration picture in Minnesota include: a recent yet rapid growth of immigrants settling in Minnesota; a larger percentage of those foreign born settling in Minnesota are refugees (Fennelly & Huart, 2009). In 2007, 23% of Minnesota’s immigrants were refugees or asylum seekers. Nationally, the number of immigrants entering as refugees is about 17% (Fennelly & Huart, 2009; Owen, Meyerson & Otteson, 2010). One recent refugee group to Minnesota, aided by Minnesota churches, arrived in the 1980s from Southeast Asia. They made their home in Minnesota and today

Minnesota has the largest Hmong population in the world outside of Asia. Minnesota is home to the largest Somali population in the United States, the largest Oromo population of Ethiopians outside of Ethiopia, and Minnesota has the second largest group of Tibetans in the United States (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006a).

While Mankato is considered a metro area in the region, it is located in south central Minnesota, traditionally a rural farming community. Many rural areas, these days, are experiencing outmigration as well as an aging population (Amato & Meyer, 1993; Fennelly & Huart, 2009). At the same time, the American population is growing and Mankato is too. Mankato experienced a 21% growth between 2000 and 2010. In 2000, Mankato had a population of 32,427 and in 2010 there were 39,309 inhabitants (Minnesota Department of Administration, 2010a). Table one below gives an example of the changing population in the Greater Mankato area including the three closest counties incorporated in the Mankato-North Mankato Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Table 1: Minnesota population change by county 1990-2010, Blue Earth and surrounding counties

County	1990	2000	2010	% Change 1990- 2000	% Change 2000- 2010	2010 Minority Population	% Minority
Le Sueur County	23,239	25,426	27,703	9.40%	9.00%	2,012	7.30%
Nicollet County	28,076	29,771	32,727	6.00%	9.90%	2,783	8.50%
Blue Earth County	54,044	55,941	64,013	3.50%	14.40%	5,619	8.80%
Minnesota	4,375,099	4,919,492	5,303,925	12.40%	7.80%	898,783	16.90%

Source: Minnesota Department of Administration, 2010b.

Some communities have tried very hard to work together with local organizations to make newcomers feel ‘at home’, while others have left them to their own devices (Amato, 1997). Joseph Amato (1999; 1997; 1993; 1990), a rural historian situated in southwest Minnesota, emphasizes the need for communities to open up a dialogue where

voices can be heard and stories told. Community leaders are the ones the community looks to for guidance in dealing with these fast-paced changes. In the course of this paper, the idea of community dialogue through the Colorful Dialogue program is discussed.

Many Americans are descendants of immigrants who came to this land seeking a better life. Colorful Dialogue is based on the premise that, as new people enter the area there is an opportunity to work together to create a community where each can feel 'at home' and safe. There is thus the possibility to give these newcomers the experience we wish our forefathers had (Amato, 1997). The white population in Minnesota is predicted to grow about 9% in the coming 30 years whereas the total minority population is expected to grow 112% (Gonzalez, 2009). This demographic shift is already starting to appear: in 2000, those identifying themselves as non-Hispanic white and of only one race were 92.6% of the Mankato population.⁴ In 2010, 89.9%⁵ of the population in Mankato identified themselves as non-Hispanic white and of one race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010d).

Overview of the Research

This study is focused on one aspect of dealing with the demographic change in Mankato, Minnesota. The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the YWCA program, Colorful Dialogue as a form of civic engagement. Two main questions shape the research: (1) Is the YWCA program, Colorful Dialogue an effective method of civic

⁴ In 2000, the total Mankato population was 32,427 where 30,011 people identified themselves as non-Hispanic white and of one race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b).

⁵ The Mankato 2010 population is 39,309 people. Of these people, 34,656 identified themselves as non-Hispanic white only and of only one race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010c).

engagement? (2) Is cross-cultural dialogue important and/or necessary in a demographically changing community?

The next chapter of this thesis consists of a literature review covering concepts such as diversity, civic engagement and social capital. In the past 20-30 years, scholars such as Robert Putnam and Robert Bellah have directed the conversation on civic engagement towards the importance of social capital. Social capital is often considered the glue of connections within a community. As communities are changing and newcomers enter (or are excluded from) the community and civic sphere, the importance and meanings of concepts such as cross-cultural dialogue, civic engagement and social capital, change. Chapter Two begins by defining terms important in this study and continues with a discussion of multiculturalism leading into the discussion on civic engagement and social capital.

Chapter Three describes the methodologies employed in this research. Qualitative research methods were used and semi-structured interviews form the basis of the results. In Chapter Four, the results of the study are discussed. Here the two research questions are revisited and are sought to be answered through the voices of the interviewees. A discussion chapter will conclude this research connecting portions of the theory with the results from the study.

Chapter II: Literature Review

I believe we can change the world if we start listening to one another again. Simple, honest, human conversation. Not mediation, negotiation, problem-solving, debate, or public meetings. Simple, truthful conversation where we each have a chance to speak, we each feel heard, and we each listen well (Wheatley, 2002, p. 3).

In light of this specific research, as explained in the introduction, two specific questions were selected to study: (1) Is the YWCA program, Colorful Dialogue an effective method of civic engagement? (2) Is cross-cultural dialogue important and/or necessary in a demographically changing community? In order to reflect on these questions in a larger theoretical context, the works of Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton (1996), Portes and Landolt (1996), Putnam (1995; 2005; 2010), and Silka (2007), among others, were used.

The first section of this chapter outlines some definitions of terms that will be used throughout the study. From there, Fennelly and Huart (2009), Hayes and Dowds (2006), and Côté and Erickson (2009) frame the section on 'Multiculturalism and Diversity'. Fennelly and Huart's study on the economic impact of immigrants in the state of Minnesota highlight different aspects of diversity relating to immigration in Minnesota. Hayes and Dowds as well as Côté and Erickson studied some aspects of the social contact hypothesis and social exposure as a way to build tolerance in

communities.⁶ Social exposure links to social capital because of one's networks and the people one needs to know in order to establish those networks. Putnam's work from his 1995 article, "Bowling alone: America's declining social capital" is a main focus in the section on 'Civic Engagement and Social Capital'. Putnam and others notice a shift away from civic engagement. This has consequences on both social trust and social capital. Putnam advocates for increasing social capital as a way to better communities. Portes and Landolt (1996) critique Putnam's take on social capital because they do not view it as a "cure-all" and as something solely positive. Another criticism of Putnam's work is the lack of social and historical context regarding the impact and effects of social capital. Bellah et al. (1996) studied different aspects of American public and private life. The section on 'Civic Participation and Responsibility' links the importance of people within a community, friendship and dialogue. Talking, through various forms of conversation can have transforming effects because it lets you get to know people and get past any potential fears of those you do not know. This is the main idea behind Wheatley's (2002) work and will be elaborated upon in the section 'Communication'. Discussing various types of communication in this section leads into more information regarding the Colorful Dialogue, which is the final section of this chapter and is the study of this research.

Definition of Terms

Civic engagement, according to the American Democracy Project, has two components: one is to work "to make a difference in the civic life of our communities" and the second part is to develop "the combination of knowledge, skills, values and

⁶ See also Allport, G.W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*, for more on social contact hypothesis and social exposure.

motivation to make that difference” (Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi). Together, these two factors promote a higher quality of community life because of the inherent involvement implied in civic engagement. Responsibility to be “a member of a larger social fabric” to take action when necessary are also pieces of civic engagement (Ehrlich, 2000, p. xxvi). In recent decades, one cannot have a conversation about civic engagement without including the concept of social capital. Social capital, according to Putnam (2000 as quoted in Caiazza & Putnam, 2005), “refers to connections among individuals –social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p.70-1). Field (2003) summed up social capital in two words, “relationships matter” and continued “the more people you know, and the more you share a common outlook with them, the richer you are in social capital” (p. 1).

Community is an integral part of both civic engagement and social capital. To enhance social capital and increase civic engagement, one may look to community building techniques. Community building, means “the process of improving the quality of life in a neighborhood by strengthening the capacity of neighborhood residents, associations, and organizations to identify priorities and opportunities to work, individually and collectively, to foster and sustain positive neighborhood change” (The Aspen Institute Roundtable on CCIs, 1999). To partake in these processes of change, methods of communication are necessary. Communication needs to be correctly interpreted across and through different cultures where understanding may vary. Cross-cultural communication is often used to explain the comparison of cultural worldviews, whereas intercultural communication means communicating between groups from different cultures or sub-cultures (Jandt, 2007, p. 426 & 430). When involved in cross-

cultural or intercultural communication, it means that the participants of the conversation may come from a variety of backgrounds and thus differing methods of understanding. The people may come from a multitude of cultures and in some cases a multitude of countries. To explain these differences, the term diversity is often used. Diversity simply means variety or difference. There are, however varying dimensions of diversity including: age; gender; sexual orientation; education; mental or physical abilities; various experiences; upbringing; income; religion; native language and so on (Shusta et al., 2011). Multiculturalism may also be used to explain a variety of cultures present. Jandt (2007) defines multiculturalism as “understanding, acceptance, and constructive relations among people of many different cultures and subcultures” (p. 432). When dealing with multiculturalism within a community, one may at times encounter ethnocentrism, where one judges based on the norms of their own culture, seeing those norms as superior to others. One may also encounter xenophobia, meaning a fear or even hatred of foreigners (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2011). Xenophobic or ethnocentric feelings limit openness and acceptance and can lead to prejudice or discrimination. Prejudice means an opinion or prejudgment based on insufficient information, feelings or stereotypes (Lau Chin, 2010). Discrimination means “treating people differently...through prejudice, ...race, ethnicity, age, religion or gender” (Allport, 1954 as quoted in Lau Chin, 2010, p. vii).

Multiculturalism and Diversity

If fragmentation and separation are the problem, how is it possible that our uniqueness could bring us back together? It seems that everywhere we use diversity to further separate from one another. We are organizing against each

other, using ethnicity, gender, tightly-bound identities. Even when we aren't warring with each other, we increasingly define ourselves by labels. We stick labels on ourselves, we ask others what theirs are. ... We assume we know each other the moment we hear the label (Wheatley, 2002, p. 114).

In society, we depend greatly on labels to understand each other and to categorize situations. These labels are often stereotypes based on perception, not fact. Allport (1954 as in Lau Chin, 2010) considered the nature of prejudice to be structured by these categorizations and stereotypes and also influenced by different social contexts. These social contexts include various cultural contexts one finds in a multicultural society. Immigrants contribute to changing social contexts through the multinational influences they bring, thus defining multiculturalism as "the functional equivalent of multinationalism" (Hollifield, 2008, p. 210). When a community changes as newcomers settle in the area, a potential backlash from the "native population" can occur because "immigration is a transformative force, producing profound and unanticipated social changes (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006 as quoted in Silka, 2007, p. 77). In certain areas experiencing low population growth, immigrants "are very important to the process [of community preservation] and bring many new ideas and new strategies that they have used in their home countries" (Silka & Eady, 2007, p. 34).

People who prefer things to stay the same generally prefer that new immigrants assimilate. Assimilation, however, as a form of adaptation for newcomers, has been more or less rejected because it inherently means one needs to reject one's own culture and uniqueness to fit in the new culture. Integration, on the other hand, allows people to

maintain their roots and parts of their identity while integrating parts of their life with the new culture.

Regardless of the method of acculturation and adaptation, social inclusion is not an automatic occurrence (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006b). Newcomers have to work hard to establish roots and connections in the new home location. Integrating into a new country is not always easy; there is a new language to learn and new cultural traits to understand. Because of these barriers, an immigrant's high level of education may prove useless in the new country, thus affecting one's self confidence. One may come from being a lawyer in their home country, to flipping burgers at Hardee's just to have a job (Ojanpa, 2010). How newcomers integrate into their new community depends on many things. According to Portes and Borocz (1989, p. 615), three things influence this integration, conditions of exit from the immigrant's home country, class origin, and the contexts of their reception into the new community. While we cannot go into each of these aspects in detail, what we do recognize is that the new "home" community does have an impact on integration. Investments in different social programs aid newcomers and facilitate their self-sufficiency as well as integration. The community must commit to developing opportunities (such as youth and adult educational programs, neighborhood investments, promotion of civic engagement and cross-cultural communication and work oriented skills) and help new immigrants settle in the community thus maximizing integration and success (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006b; Slocum & Lee, 2010).

Strong community support systems are necessary in rural areas to avoid a marginalized immigrant population and frictions between new and long-term residents. Regardless of where immigrants are settling, the communities they

inhabit can expect greater social, political and economic returns from policies and investments that support integration (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006b).

These types of support are important in order to avoid a demographic balkanization, meaning avoiding disparities between white and non-white populations geographically within a community (Hardwick, 2008). This is important because diversity, in all its facets, including the labor force, schools and in the communities, “brings energy, ideas, and skills that spark innovation and that will help Minnesotans prepare to live in a globalized world” (Fennelly & Huart, 2009, p. 38).

Various hypotheses seek to predict tolerance and acceptance towards newcomers. Côté and Erickson (2009) and Hayes and Dowds (2006), for example, discuss the social contact hypothesis, the competition hypothesis and the learning hypothesis. The social contact hypothesis states that where there is increased contact with minority or immigrant populations, this contact may impact one’s attitude or tolerance. The competition hypothesis is where the level of competition affects one’s attitudes towards newcomers. With the learning hypothesis, the higher one’s education, the higher the level of acceptance of diversity and so on. The social contact hypothesis best meets our model of dialogic interaction.

Social contact and exposure, in whatever form, is important in promoting acceptance within a community. The idea behind the social contact hypothesis is that as contact with a group increases, so do the positive orientations towards that group. In Hayes and Dowds’ (2006) study of attitudes towards immigrants in Northern Ireland, they found that the most important predictor of attitudes was social exposure or friendship with immigrants. “People who have been previously exposed to immigrants,

either as personal friends or in a work or residential situation, are more likely to demonstrate pro-immigrant attitudes than those who have not” (Hayes & Dowds, 2006, p. 466). Those with immigrant friends were very likely to welcome immigrants and be open and accepting if an immigrant boss was appointed or a family member married an immigrant. Putnam (2000 in Côté & Erickson, 2009) and Côté and Erickson (2009) argue, however, that judging based on close relationships is too specific and may not relate to one’s opinion of a group as a whole. “If one has a best friend from a minority group, one can easily define that friend as unique, esteeming that friend while derogating the group” (Côté & Erickson, 2009, p. 1666). Nonetheless, the social exposure theory is important to our study because it shows the importance of social capital through social contact. Social contact promotes acceptance and tolerance in communities *as long as* the contact is with diversified groups including minorities and immigrants (Hayes & Dowds, 2006). The social context in which the interaction takes place is essential to change one’s perceptions of themselves and others (Mirille, Rohrbacker & Kim, 2004). It is within this positive social context where the ability to reinforce positive stereotypes of people and individuals, as well as group members takes place (Mirille, Rohrbacker & Kim, 2004).

Taking this a step further, Côté and Erickson (2009) try to “Untangle the Roots of Tolerance” by trying to unpack and study social capital, networks, and education. In their study, they note that social capital through social networks (thus social exposure) can produce positively valued outcomes, such as tolerance: “If people have the right kind of contact with minorities, their orientations toward minorities should become more positive” (Côté & Erickson, 2009, p. 1665). Côté and Erickson find strong evidence that a social influence on network diversity exists, but not all forms of network diversity lead to

tolerance. Diversity varies and influences the level of tolerance. Allport (1954 in Mirille, Rohrbacker & Kim, 2004) offers four key components for positive intergroup contact within the social context: equal status, common goals, cooperative relations, and institutional support. Pettigrew (1998 in Mirille, Rohrbacker & Kim, 2004) elaborated on these four components and describes processes to attain positive attitudes during social contact. The four components consist of: learning about the out-group with accurate information; interacting with the 'diverse other;' making friends with people from different groups; and reappraising one's in-group to come to the conclusion that more than one worldview is acceptable. Where the in-group is the group of people one feels most comfortable around and may be most like. The out-group is the group on the outside. These terms can be attributed to an "us" (in-group) and "them" (out-group) situation. The type of network diversity and the type of contact are important and for successful intergroup contact, the contact has to be sustained and repeated (Mirille, Rohrbacker & Kim, 2004). One-time contact is not likely to be as successful as repeated contact. Repeated contact builds and maintains relationships and within small groups, those individual relationships matter "because one individual's action has a perceptible effect on any other member" (Olson, 1971, p. 42).

Associations are important in building social capital. The outcome from these types of membership, however, may lead to an increase in a limited range of social capital and may not lead to tolerance. "Associations with well-educated members or a relatively high proportion of minority members look good for tolerance because they include kinds of people disposed to tolerance. Associations with poorly educated memberships look bad [for increasing tolerance]" (Côté & Erickson, 2009, p. 1685). Côté

and Erickson (2009) find that associational activities have remarkable effects on tolerance even when controlling for other factors. They suspect this is due to the “intense, direct discussion of related issues in an engaged or even emotional way” (Côté & Erickson, 2009, p. 1685) that takes place in associational settings. The Colorful Dialogue is a space for conversation, but participants do not necessarily engage in these kinds of intense discussions. Could the Colorful Dialogue increase levels of tolerance if the discussions were intense, direct, more engaged and emotional? Côté and Erickson also note the influence social capital has on tolerance. Social capital varies greatly depending on experiences and “promotes tolerance, erodes it, or leaves it unaffected, depending on the form of social capital” (Côté & Erickson, 2009, p. 1685).

Nonetheless, people are prone to favor traits found in their own group and stereotype those who are not part of their group (Hodson, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). These subtle actions can lead to prejudice. While not all prejudgments are bad, there is potential that they lead to stronger prejudice and discrimination in the form of racism. It is not necessarily the goal to free ourselves from all prejudice, it is, however, important to study where those prejudices came from and change the things that limit the efforts to understand others (Schwandt, 1994). Racism has changed over the years, “the blatant signs⁷ are gone, but in many places and for many individuals, prejudicial attitudes persist, sometimes in sly and subtle forms. On other occasions they are overt and repulsive” (Trimble, 2004, p. viii). With these subtleties it is difficult to recognize and thus difficult to ‘fight’. One way to manage this is for the community to promote positive interracial

⁷ The “blatant signs” in the text refer to a sign in South Dakota at a shop across from an Indian reservation. The sign read “No dogs or Indians allowed.” In this instance, one knows whether or not he or she is welcome there (Trimble, 2004, p.viii).

contact (Hodson, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). The Colorful Dialogue is doing just that, promoting positive interracial and intercultural contact. To judge whether the Colorful Dialogue is considered a form of civic engagement, the next section focuses on the theories defining civic engagement and social capital.

Civic Engagement and Social Capital

In the mid-1990s, Putnam (1995) published his study on civic engagement, or the lack thereof, in American social life. He found that Americans were bowling more than ever, but as opposed to bowling in groups or leagues, they were bowling alone (Putnam, 1995). Putnam's research was also groundbreaking in terms of social capital. Social capital deals with people's relationships to each other, what they give and take from each other, and the level of trust they have in each other. Social trust and civic engagement are two facets of social capital and are strongly correlated. Social capital is used to understand the complex mechanisms linking civic engagement and social connectedness (Putnam, 1995). The idea is: if you know your community, you have better knowledge to judge situations; this gives you a better foundation for trusting those in your community.

Community connectedness is not just about warm fuzzy tales of civic triumph. In measurable⁸ and well-documented ways, social capital makes an enormous difference in our lives...social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy (Putnam, 2000 as quoted in Caiazza & Putnam, 2005, p. 69-70).

Social capital is thus an important aspect of civic engagement and community building.

What happens, however, when the sense of community is undermined?

⁸ To measure social capital, one generally uses participation in community activities, political engagement and social trust (Brooks, 2005).

These trends of decreasing civic engagement and social capital threaten one's sense of solidarity. Solidarity is understood as a "sense of connection, shared fate, mutual responsibility, [and] community. ...It is solidarity, trust, and mutual responsibility that allows human communities to deal with threats and take advantage of opportunities" (Bellah et al., 1996, p. xxx). To be confident in oneself, one needs to have social contact, places where one trusts and feels trusted and where one feels they belong. Membership within civic organizations "points to that critical intersection of personal identity with social identity. If we face a crisis of civic identity, it is not just a social crisis, it is a personal crisis as well" (Bellah et al., 1996, p. xi). Individualism, bowling alone, for example, instead of in leagues, may tempt people to disengage from the larger society. This threatens not only a loss of social capital, but also personal identity because of the greater social connections necessary to form that identity (Bellah et al., 1996).

If it is true, that, "no democracy, and indeed no society, can be healthy without at least a modicum of this resource [social capital]" (Sander & Putnam, 2010, p. 9), then it seems if we just improve our social capital, our quality of life would improve. Improving social capital without taking the context of the situation into consideration, however, potentially allows structural inequalities to broaden with the increase of social capital (Bedolla, 2007; Côté & Erickson, 2009; Jennings, 2007; Portes & Landolt, 1996). The context can include, for example, the historical or local context of a given place or situation; meaning structural, social, political or economical inequalities. In these situations, people may be included or excluded. Without critical examination, one cannot know what lies behind the inclusion or exclusion. These inequalities impact social

opportunities and networks which in turn impacts the potential level and positive impact of one's social capital.

In 1996, Alejandro Portes and Patricia Landolt wrote an article titled, "The Downside of Social Capital." The authors trace the origins of social capital back to the roots of sociology and consider social capital to be, "as an individual resource" comparable to "other individual assets" (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 19). Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman first used the term social capital concerning certain advantages to membership in a certain community and the resources available to certain people because of their social ties (Portes & Landolt, 1996). In the 1980s, Bourdieu expanded his concept of social capital in a larger spectrum of social order and social relations, yet still maintained the belief that social capital is an asset mostly used by elites (Field, 2003). Coleman, on the other hand, looked at the benefits of social capital reaching beyond the powerful and elite to poor and marginalized communities. Coleman sought to link economics and sociology⁹ and considered social capital through social interactions as a form of exchange (Field, 2003). Portes and Landolt's critique regarding social capital is that social capital cannot be altogether favorable without any negative aspects. The authors refer to examples where the costs of belonging to a community full of social capital were so high that certain people left that community. In Ecuador, for example, some businessmen convert from Catholicism to Protestantism in order to become a 'stranger' in their community to protect them and their finances from the social and monetary obligations of the Catholic Church (Portes & Landolt, 1996). Or the opposite, lack of adequate social connections makes one lose out on certain business deals because

⁹ Coleman's focus was within the sphere of education and he was looking to explain correlations between socio-economic status and academic achievement (Field, 2003, p. 22).

“I can’t play golf or go on boats with people” (an entrepreneur in New York City as quoted in Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 20). Roger Waldinger and Adam Smith both give examples where people are restricted or left out because they are “outsiders” excluded from the networks of “insiders” (Portes & Landolt, 1996; see also Field, 2003).

Regardless, these relationships with one another, sustained over time, allow people to “work together to achieve things that they either could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty” (Field, 2003, p. 1; see also Mirille, Rohrbacker & Kim, 2004). This concept stems from the Durkheimian idea that “members are united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the short moments during which the exchange is made” (Durkheim, 1933 as quoted in Field, 2003, p. 11). In other words, people should be connected with something with a lasting effect remaining after the initial moment has passed.

Putnam (1995), in his work mentions many different kinds of civic organizations. Many of these organizations that he touts as rich in social capital and community building are organizations that historically banned women and people of color (i.e. the Kiwanis and Rotary Club). These organizations still have a strong influence on the communities they belong to. Bedolla (2007) purports that “race and race policies are intimately related to the creation and maintenance of community level social capital in the United States” (p. 10). The feminist voice is another voice more or less missing in the social capital literature (Field, 2003). Putnam hypothesized that an increase of women in the work place could have an effect on lower social capital. Women, however “fare better where civic engagement is greater, and they fare worse where people are isolated and disconnected from their communities” (Caiazza & Putnam, 2005, p. 82). This is

reaffirmed in Caiazza and Putnam's (2005) study through the strong relationship between women's social status and their social capital. In order to increase women's status, engaging more women in various civic activities may help. Research has shown that social capital makes all citizens, in general, "happier and healthier, reduces crime, makes government more responsive and honest and improves economic productivity" (Sander & Putnam, 2010, p. 9).

Social capital is promoted in community development and community building discussions. These historical contexts are, therefore, important in order to realize what "kind" of social capital is being promoted (Turcotte & Silka, 2007). Public policies striving to increase social capital, excluding the situational and historical context, hold an underlying assumption that, "poor people and children must be exposed to normal, middle-class values and living styles so that they can have models upon which to improve their status" (Jennings, 2007, p. 3). In these romantic ideas of social capital as a "cure-all", the realities of social oppression and exclusion are excluded (Jennings, 2007). These spaces of inclusion and exclusion may be a place where newcomers fall through the cracks because of the potential disadvantages regarding social capital, language skills and social networks.

Bellah et al. (1996) also note the difficulties involved in civic membership limiting social capital. "Unlike some sectors of the elite [who have chosen their way out of civic membership], the underclass has suffered a crisis of civic membership not because its members have opted out but because they have been pushed out—denied

civic membership—by economic and political forces” (Bellah et al., 1996, p. xiv).¹⁰

These kinds of ethnocentric responses to societal dynamics deny membership to those who may have a differing worldview or cultural context. If social capital is promoted in this fashion, a sort of elitism may become established, such as “haves” and “have-nots”.

One suggested method of increasing civic engagement is to teach youth to get more involved (Saguaro Seminar, 2009). A consequence of this increased youth involvement, however, is that “haves” have more social trust than the “have-nots”. Sander and Putnam (2010) studied civic engagement post 9/11. Their results show that upper middle class high school students were more involved than their working or lower class counterparts. If the findings in this report are true, and these types of social gaps are not addressed, classism can potentially increase. Consequences of this can be seen in limitations of social mobility and opportunities as well as more segregation—all things that often accompany class differences (Orfield, 2011; Sander & Putnam, 2010). In this scenario, those with (potentially) less social capital to begin with, continue to lose out. This encourages situations of “haves” and “have-nots” with the consequences thereof, such as ethnocentrism, xenophobia, prejudice, segregation and racism. Ethnocentrism has no place in a multicultural society because of the mosaic of “norms” present. If networks are built upon a norm excluding others, xenophobia may grow, thus opening the venue for strong prejudices and potential discrimination against those outside of the “accepted” network.

¹⁰ The concept of the *underclass* comes from Swedish social analyst, Gunnar Myrdal in 1963, to denote those who suffer from poverty and segregation. The term became widely known by the late 1970s (Bellah et al., 1996, p. xiii).

Another venue outside of “accepted” networks may be inner cities. Portes and Landolt (1996) posited that “Putnam echoes the common view that the inner city is short on sociability” (p. 20). There is an assumption that inner cities have apathy, low civic engagement, and little to no existence of social capital. Studies, however, show that other forms of civic engagement may be present but not recognized (Turcotte & Silka, p. 2007). For example, “in poor areas, many people rely on their social and family ties for economic survival,” and we should not exclude the fact that “inner-city youth gangs are also social networks that provide access to resources and enforce conformity” (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 3). Gangs, mafia, and criminal rings are all examples of social capital, but one may not consider them because, according to mainstream culture, they do not contribute to a positive society and the well-being of the greater community.

Originally, the concept of social capital was nothing more than an elegant term to call attention to the possible individual and family benefits of sociability. That usage is entirely compatible with a nuanced understanding of the pros and cons of groups and communities. Unfortunately, that understanding is absent from the spate of recent articles that seek to popularize the idea and make it a basis of policy. Stretching the concept does not only lead to circular or banal statements, harmless in their own way, but to policy recommendations that can be dangerous (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 21).

Some communities may already be rich in social capital. Structural inequalities, however, may limit the capacity of the community to improve upon the situation. Structural inequalities can include things such as government negligence or high level interest groups lobbying for certain types of development initiatives. For example, “praising

immigrant groups for their stock of social capital while continuing policies and institutional practices that undermine economic opportunities” (Jennings, 2007, p. 5) is not only a contradiction, but allows room for government insensitivities and negligence towards these groups. As mentioned above, it is important to be consciously aware of the norms when working with social capital. For example, if Anglo-European norms are used in a minority community, the norms within that minority group may be smothered. This could limit the development of social capital within that group (Turcotte & Silka, 2007). Examples of these limitations and structural inequalities are plentiful at this moment in time. Listed below are a few examples of such policies:

- In Lino Lakes, Minnesota, controversial English only laws were recently introduced as the official government language. Some people agree with these types of laws and think it is time communities “took back OUR country.” Those who disagree say “the idea made him sick to his stomach and was a symptom of something much worse” and others do not fully understand what is meant by the law and may not understand what it consists of, “everything's included and nothing's included” (Yuen, 2010). While in and of itself, these English only laws may not present themselves as a challenge to those in the community. They do, however, represent a structural inequality for those who do not have English as their native language and create limitations for these people to expand networks and social capital.
- The Arizona immigration law is another example of a structural inequality for, generally speaking, nonwhite immigrants. The law has been called the strongest immigration law in the states with the aim to “identify, prosecute and deport

illegal immigrants” (Archibold, 2010). This law is criticized because it undermines American freedoms, but also the important level of trust between police and local communities. The Arizona immigration law has since been blocked by a federal appeals court because immigration is a federal issue.

Supporters of the Arizona immigration law believe, however, that states “have a sovereign right and obligation to protect their citizens and enforce immigration law in accordance with federal statute” (Associated Press, 2011).

- The DREAM Act is another example of legislature with the purpose to allow those without documentation to attend institutions of higher education. The DREAM Act stands for: “Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act” (National Immigration Law Center, 2010). About 65,000 youth graduate high school each year, but because of their undocumented status (and this is, in general, not of their own choosing), they are inhibited from pursuing a higher education (Dream Portal Act, 2011). Some against the DREAM Act, such as Senator Lindsey Graham and Representative Gresham Barrett, both Republicans representing South Carolina, see it as a disaster because it invites people to come to the United States illegally and unfair to those who have followed the ‘proper protocols’ (Rosen, 2010). Prohibiting a population to pursue higher education, however, also has the potential to create an underclass, continuing a class system of “haves” and “have-nots,” further limiting opportunities, especially those for building social capital.
- One last example of structural inequalities can be found in the academic performance of immigrant and minority children. The numbers of white children

are decreasing or staying the same, while minority populations (especially Latinos and Asians, as well as those of mixed race) are growing (Frey, 2011). Segregation of and within schools, poverty and school zoning are all things potentially contributing to the lower performance of minorities and immigrants (in particular Latinos and Blacks) (Haskins & Tienda, 2011; Orfield, 2011; Richwine, 2011). This discrepancy seriously limits those with lower educational performance in their future opportunities and possibilities for networking.

Is social capital an important concept? Or is it just a label insinuating that “communities that are poorly integrated ([i.e.] low in “social capital,” [and] low in “trust,” ...) are more problem ridden and less well governed than those where the opposite conditions prevail” (Portes & Landolt, 1996, p. 4). Social capital is an important concept and both individuals and communities can benefit from it. Nevertheless, levels of inclusion and exclusion, who is included or excluded, and the demands involved when judging the influences from social capital need to be recognized (Portes & Landolt, 1996).

Civic Participation and Responsibility

Bellah et al. (1996) are noted for their work on American civic participation.

Their study focused on middle-class American’s public and private life. Intense participant observation was included and the study encompassed more than 200 interviews from the years 1979-1984 (Bellah et al., 1996, p. xliii-iv). The authors wanted to know how Americans made sense of their lives, how they felt about themselves, the greater society and how they related their ideas to their actions or inactions.

Individualism is a strong theme throughout Bellah et al.’s (1996) work. It is often paired with the feeling from many Americans that something is lacking or missing in

their lives (Bellah et al., 1996). Sander and Putnam (2010) found a similar deficiency, they note that people are better able to relate with television characters than with actual people. One-quarter of respondents in a 2004 poll reported they did not have a close friend to talk to (Sander & Putnam, 2010). This affects the larger society because “everybody has a story, and everybody wants to tell their story in order to connect. If no one listens, we tell it to ourselves and then we go mad” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 89). Wheatley (2002) rationalized this because, “Our natural state is to be together. Though we keep moving away from each other, we haven’t lost the need to be in relationship” (p. 89). To create those relationships, and thus increase social capital, one can, for example: wave, smile or say hello to someone you recognize; turn off the TV and talk to people; or sign up and take a class (Saguaro Seminar, 2009; Sander & Putnam, 2010).

Here we have a conundrum: Many Americans love and thrive upon their individualism and self-reliance. At the same time, many Americans may not have close friends and feel something is missing in their lives. In the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was concerned about maintaining freedom in a society where, in order to fulfill their needs, people were increasingly dependent on one another (Bertram, 2011). In the nineteenth century, the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson were similar. Emerson did not want to be responsible or feel necessity for solidarity with his fellow countrymen: “Then again, do not tell me, as a good man did today, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they my poor?” (Emerson as quoted in Bellah et al., 1996, p. 56). Many in the United States today want to maintain their freedoms separate from social responsibilities. Despite feelings and desire for individualism, many Americans in Bellah et al.’s (1996) study “do not imagine that a good life can be lived alone” and

agreed that feeling connected to people in areas of “work, love, and community is essential to happiness, self-esteem, and moral worth” (p. 84).

To find these key components to a good life, we circle back to the importance of involvement, dialogue and social capital. In order to build these networks of capital, one needs to have some friends. Bellah et al. (1996) tracks the concept of friendship from Aristotle into a Christian context. According to Aristotle there are three components of friendship: “Friends must enjoy one another’s company ... They must be useful to one another ... [and] They must share a common commitment to the good” (Bellah et al. 1996, p. 115).

This last element, a moral commitment to the common good, was most important for Aristotle to justify a friendship. This moral commitment to a common good is also the basis of a moral society. For friendship to be real, one should be able to uphold a standard for a friend in order to encourage each other to be better people. This relates with Pettigrew’s (1998 in Mirille, Rohrbacker & Kim, 2004) factors for positive social interaction. Emotional attachments (friendships) are important and one’s in-group should be reappraised to accept multiple perspectives. Nowadays, encouraging friends to be better people is often overlooked and most people are together solely because they enjoy each other’s company. Enjoyment of a friend’s company is important, nonetheless, discourse is also important to challenge and better understand one another, but also to engage in something lasting longer than the moment itself.

Communication

Margaret Wheatley (2002), in her book, *Turning to one another: Simple conversations to restore hope to the future*, promotes conversation as a very simple

method to cultivate change. Sharing conversations allows people to understand, discover and see that they share common concerns. By seeing that the worries and cares are similar and united, transformation can occur.

Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change—personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change. If we can sit together and talk about what’s important to us, we begin to come alive. We share what we see, what we feel, and we listen to what other’s see and feel (Wheatley, 2002, p. 3).

Communication can help build social capital by facilitating connections and relationships between people. These conversations could take place within associations or informal social networks.

Fear of what we do not know, may, at times, hold us back. If we have fear of those living within our community, our quality of life and the quality of some within the community diminishes because it is the “fear of each other [which] also keeps us apart” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 5). Psychologists believe that a person judges a stranger within the first three seconds of meeting the person (Flora, 2004). This is not a long time to judge similarities, differences or common interests. Yet these perceptions are what divide us, not the actual differences in our lifestyle or opinions. In this way, xenophobic ideas abound throughout the world. They are not new ideas and are not likely to change (Rydgren, 2003 in Hayes & Dowds, 2006). Throughout history, *perceived* differences have led to persecution and denigration of different groups (Hayes & Dowds, 2006). Preconceived ideas, without grounding in fact can lead to stereotypes. Negative

stereotypes about a group can lead to prejudice and turn into discrimination. Therefore interaction and conversation are important to dispel some of these misperceptions.

Curiosity about one another and listening to each other's stories are two methods to unite people (Wheatley, 2002). If someone comes to the dialogue, however, with a feeling of superiority, words may be used to manipulate and people may be treated as objects, as a means to an end as opposed to the end itself. When we realize that we are equal, regardless of our starting place, "we stop misusing people" (Wheatley, 2002, p. 141). Another principle to maintain communication is to stay curious about one another and listen to each other, "not listening creates fragmentation, and fragmentation always causes more suffering" (Wheatley, 2002, p. 90). This fragmentation relates to our identity and the need for social contact to form that identity. Intercultural conversations take patience. Sometimes, one may be "too busy, too certain" and/or "too stressed to listen" (Wheatley, 2002, p. 29). One may also disagree with something said and have the tendency to tune out. When this happens, it is important to focus on similarities in order to foster the dialogue (Daughtry et al., 2004). One may not utilize patience to really hear what the person is saying for several reasons. At times one's choice of words is different than we are comfortable with or language levels vary thus making conversation more complex. For this reason, a fourth principle to follow is to slow down during conversations, especially cross-cultural conversations. These tricks to communication help us encourage each other, maintain our common goals and connect with each other because "language gives us the means to know each other better" (Wheatley, 2002, p. 32).

Language also gives us a means to convey our perspectives. Perspectives are very important because one's perspective is one's reality. Communities facing an influx of refugee and immigrant populations face a paradox of community perspectives where there are, for instance, reports of community struggles because of the influx of immigrants and refugees. For example, struggles to fund social services for these newcomers (Silka & Eady, 2007), or, reacting to these changes: Arizona's immigration law, English only laws such as in Lino Lakes, and the DREAM Act to offer undocumented students the opportunity to get a higher education. Other reports highlight the vitality that immigrants and refugees bring to otherwise stagnant areas. This is seen in works such as: Amato and Meyer (1993) *The Decline of Rural Minnesota*, and Fennelly and Huart's 2009 article "The Economic Impact of Immigrants in Minnesota." Other examples include: Advocates for Human Rights, 2006a; Gonzalez, 2009; Silka and Eady, 2007; and Turcotte and Silka, 2007. The community perspective towards newcomers in the area (i.e. the sense that immigrants are welcome or unwelcome) should also predict the level of tolerance towards those new in the community (Turcotte & Silka, 2007). This tolerance affects where immigrants choose to reside. If a community is welcoming and tolerant, more people may choose to call that place 'home.' But the reality is that some people, when relocating due to war or other such situations, do not have much choice.

One manner of opening perspectives for better understanding is through cross-cultural dialogue. A manager from AmeriPride in Mankato, Minnesota also sees the importance of dialogue: "There are cultural divides, but...they can be crossed with good communication" (Linehan, 2010). Some communities and individuals experience anxiety about losing their own cultural and community identity. For this reason they may resist

immigration. Safe and neutral places to talk and dispel myths and address very real concerns of those in the community appear to be lacking (Owen, Meyerson & Otteson, 2010). But in Mankato, Minnesota, such a place exists.

Colorful Dialogue

“The practice of conversation takes courage, faith, and time” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 33).

The Colorful Dialogue is a community forum giving community members a monthly space to gather and discuss issues concerning them. It is a space where people from any background can share their story. In this space, the purpose is for people to connect through conversations. “Good conversation connects us at a deeper level. As we share our different human experiences, we rediscover a sense of unity. We remember we are part of a greater whole” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 28). Being part of the ‘greater whole’ means being involved with the community and society at large, i.e. civic engagement. The Colorful Dialogue could be a venue opening doors to civic engagement, for newcomers and perhaps longtime residents alike.

As civic engagement has decreased over time, “things that were simple, like neighborly conversation, have become a technique, like intergenerational, cross-cultural dialogue” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 20). Things *have* become technical and organized. There is now a specific time and place for conversations that, perhaps, in the past were held on the street or in one’s back yard. Finding common ground and a starting point is not always easy to get back to those ‘simple neighborly conversations’.

The Mankato Free Press is making concerted efforts to focus on diversity in Mankato in a positive light. They have done interviews with immigrants living in Mankato and also cover special events, for example, the Somali special envoy visiting

Mankato and the Calling Mankato Home event (Murray, 2010; Ojanpa, 2010; Kent, 2010; Spear, 2010). One Mankato Free Press article, for example, used the heading “DIALOGUE: Meetings aid assimilation” (Kent, 2010) inferring that through these conversations at the Colorful Dialogue, one is better able to integrate into the norms of the community.

In October 2010, The Mankato Free Press and Minnesota Public Radio held a community forum, Calling Mankato Home. The purpose of this event is similar to the Colorful Dialogue, to encourage dialogue, except on a much larger scale. Joe Spear (2010) writes that “language and culture can be barriers, as well as the lack of knowledge from mostly white employers ... We can understand diverse people if we just listen to them a bit.” In another article prefacing the Calling Mankato Home event, Bukata Hayes from the Greater Mankato Diversity Council said, “It would be great if we could have formal spaces for cross-cultural dialogue, be it cultural centers or wherever. Just a place where people have an open opportunity to talk, maybe a different topic each week” (Krohn, 2010). Although not named in the article, this is just what Colorful Dialogue aims to do on a monthly basis: create a formal space for cross-cultural dialogue; promoting positive interracial contact and exposure, while gaining knowledge and information.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

“Understanding is participative, conversational, and dialogic...Moreover, understanding is something that is produced in that dialogue, not something reproduced by an interpreter through an analysis of that which he or she seeks to understand.” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 195)

Purpose of research

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Colorful Dialogue program as a form of civic engagement. This research will analyze the effectiveness of this specific program to: (1) meet the YWCA mission of eliminating racism and empowering women and (2) act as a community forum aiding in discussions of community building for long time residents and newcomers. As well as to answer the research questions: (1) Is the YWCA program, Colorful Dialogue an effective method of civic engagement? (2) Is cross-cultural dialogue important and/or necessary in a demographically changing community?

In order to conduct the research, qualitative research methods were used, including participant observation and interviews. The research took place from February 2011 until April 2011. Prior to the initiation of this study, some information was informally collected due to the researcher’s involvement with the program.

Qualitative research methods

This research strayed away from conventional quantitative survey methods because the researcher wanted to incorporate people and their stories. This kind of analysis is difficult within a positivist quantitative methodology. The Colorful Dialogue

is an inclusive environment including English speakers, non-native English speakers and English language learners, new Americans as well as long-time Americans. Presenting a survey in a situation where education and language levels vary, can potentially raise fear and/or apprehension and creates a possibility for misunderstandings to arise. For these reasons, qualitative methods of data collection were used for this research: participant-observation; semi-structured personal and group interviews as well as informal conversations. A consequence of not using quantitative methods is that various demographic characteristics were not recorded.

Qualitative inquiry started in the 1970s in reaction to positivist philosophy. Positivist research favors “experimental, quasi-experimental, correlational, and survey research strategies” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 189). In qualitative research, both “acting and thinking, [and] practice and theory, are linked in a continuous process of critical reflection and transformation” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 190). This process of critical reflection is also referred to as the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle allows for reflection, interpretation, and reassessment of the research goals and hypothesis during the course of the research. The researcher’s involvement cannot be negated because the researcher interprets human actions and words instead of offering causal explanations of physical, social and behavioral events (Schwandt, 1994, p. 190). With this interpretivist epistemology, all knowledge is relative to the person knowing, and can only be understood from the subjective point of view of the person involved. Truth, in this perspective, is socially constructed with multiple interpretations and constantly changes (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). “Research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but

an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 5).

Issues of validity and reliability are often debated in interpretive research because the data is difficult to reproduce due to its subjective nature. Following Wolcott’s (1994) three modes of qualitative data gathering, this research involves “participant observation (experiencing), interviewing (inquiring), and studying materials prepared by others (examining)” (p. 10), the last of these is discussed in Chapter Two. The researcher takes into account an inherent risk of her subjectivity affecting the analysis, this may not be as apparent with quantitative methods.

Talking to people gives one a chance to understand the perceptions that make up their reality. During the interviewing phase of the research, “the purpose of each interview is to record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee’s perspective” (Patton, 2001, p. 380). For this reason, interviewing was the key method of data collection. “Interviewing is not all that difficult, but interviewing in which people tell you how they really think about things you are interested in learning, or how they think about the things that are important to them, is a delicate art” (Wolcott, 1995, p. 105). Within qualitative research, risks for ambiguity may be present due to researcher bias and influence. If the researcher does not ask a clear question, the question may not be understood in its full context, resulting in bias of information from the interviewee. The researcher also acknowledges that some interviews were cross-cultural and thus may have additional levels of complexity than otherwise would exist. In cross-cultural inquiries, “possibility for misunderstandings are increased significantly as documented in materials and training schemes aimed at cross-cultural sensitization” (Patton, 2001, p.

391). In complex situations, opportunities for pre-judgments also arise. In light of this, it is important for the researcher to reflect on her preconceived notions so the bias does not affect the research.

A stakeholder analysis was not conducted in the scope of this research. As the program of study is considered a form of community building, those at stake are community members as well as the YWCA. Community members include business owners, the local newspaper, public safety, politicians and local organizations. But most importantly, community members consist of those living within a community.

Data Collection

The first set of data was gathered at the Colorful Dialogue event on February 28th, 2011. The researcher facilitated the program and asked participants to reflect on some questions and discuss them in small groups. The second format of data collection included personal or small group interviews. Interviewees were not randomly sampled but strategically selected because of their participation in the Colorful Dialogue, YWCA or other community engagement.

The researcher facilitated the event and informed participants of the research taking place that evening. The participants had the opportunity to decline participation, if so desired. Participants were not recruited to for this event, those attending came of their free choice. The researcher read the Survey Consent Form and offered a copy to participants. After this initial introduction, participants broke into small groups of about four participants per group and discussed questions such as:

- “Why is Colorful Dialogue important/Why is it important to be here?”
- “What would happen if the Colorful Dialogue were to stop tomorrow?”

- “Do you feel like you belong in Mankato?” and
- “When you leave here tonight, what are you going to take with you?”

The small groups then reported back to the larger group. During this event, the researcher took some notes and a note-taker was also present recording participant feedback.

The first question was asked to understand why participants choose to come to the Colorful Dialogue and why participants think it is important that the Colorful Dialogue exists. Question two also had to do with the importance of the program. This question was trying to understand the reaction of participants in case the program no longer existed. As outlined in Chapter Two, belonging is an important component of civic engagement. For that reason, participants were asked question three: “Do you feel like you belong here in Mankato?” The fourth question was to get an overall sense of people’s perception when they leave the Colorful Dialogue event: Do they feel happy or ambivalent? Are they motivated to be more involved in their community? What is their feeling when they leave the event?

This portion of the data analysis consisted of group conversation. In any group setting, there is the possibility for group bias or group influence. As some of the participants are non-native speakers, their language level may be lower than other participants. The researcher acknowledges the possibility that those with lower language comprehension may agree with the dominant view as opposed to forming their own opinion. Those who were not feeling well on this day or did not feel like vocalizing their opinion are also voices potentially missed in this portion of the study.

In order to provide more specific and in-depth information, additional in-depth interviews were used in the research. The researcher strategically chose interviewees and

requested an interview from them. When possible and in agreement with the interviewee, the researcher recorded the interviews and then transcribed them. When recording was not possible, the researcher took extensive notes during the interview. Included in this research is feedback from 35 people: nine in-depth interviews, one group interview at an English language learning class and information from the 28 participants at the Colorful Dialogue in February. Voices of Colorful Dialogue participants were sought out for this study; therefore random sampling was not employed. Participants include English language students from Lincoln Community Center and other community members. The interviewees were Mankato area adults active in their community. The subjects included Americans, Mankato residents, students, immigrants, refugees, and English language learners. An attempt was made to represent the Mankato population (thus not all one race nor one gender). Three things were kept in mind while selecting interviewees:

1. The purpose of the study (to evaluate if the Colorful Dialogue is an effective form of civic engagement)
2. Who the study is intended to help (the study is intended to help the YWCA evaluate their program, but it is also intended to contribute to the discussion related to civic engagement and community building) and
3. Who the result of the study is intended for (the result of this study is intended, in the end to fulfill the requirements of a thesis in Public Administration, but also to be useful to the YWCA as it deals with one of their programs) (Schensul et al., 1999).

Limitations of study

As with every study, there are limitations affecting the results. This study is no different. Some limitations of the study are discussed below.

This research setting was neither new nor neutral ground for the researcher. This aided the research, but is also a limiting factor. As an intern, the researcher coordinated the Colorful Dialogue program for one semester and before interning with the YWCA, was an active participant of the Colorful Dialogue. This previous knowledge helped with this research because of previous participation. With this in mind, the researcher tried not to let her own biases guide the research. The hermeneutic circle was used to systematically revisit the research questions and reflect on the role of the researcher. Some interviews were cross-cultural and therefore had additional levels of complexity within the interview and “possibility for misunderstandings are increased significantly” (Patton, 2001, p. 391).

This study is limited because it only includes qualitative research methods. In order to balance quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study could have incorporated a survey to quantify some information in order to analyze the results in a variety of ways. Including a survey in this study, however, could also harm the research because the results may be questionable when working with non-native speakers. Nonetheless, had a survey been used, more demographic information would have been collected. Analyzing demographic data is very interesting and useful, especially when the goal of the research is to compare and contrast information. Another consequence of qualitative methods is the time-consuming nature of interviews; this study only contains nine in-depth interviews. The limited number of interviews, however, in the scope of this study denotes the strategic and specific targeting of interviewees.

As discussed above, researcher bias is a risk when dealing with qualitative data. In a future study, a third independent party could be used to conduct interviews or do the research. This, however, opens up a different sort of researcher bias. In this study, the researcher is not neutral to the program because she was involved in it through an internship and has participated in it in the past. The researcher has a bias towards the importance of the program, but is searching to find out if the community also feels the same way. When conducting group interviews or sessions, there is always the risk of some level of group bias. This was discussed briefly above. In order to counteract this group bias, triangulation could be done in a subsequent study.

Chapter IV: Results

“Data interpretation and analysis involve making sense out of what people have said, looking for patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and integrating what different people have said” (Patton, 2001, p. 380).

Analysis of Results

In this chapter, the research results will be analyzed and discussed in relation to the two research questions framing this study: (1) Is the YWCA program, the Colorful Dialogue an effective method of civic engagement? (2) Is cross-cultural dialogue important and/or necessary in a demographically changing community? Quotes, information and feedback from the interviews and the February 28th Colorful Dialogue event will be used to outline the findings. Results from this study are grounded in respondents' answers. Feedback from 35 people is included in this analysis. This includes nine in-depth interviews, one group interview of an English language class and 28 participants from the Colorful Dialogue event. Of the nine in-depth interviews, there were six females and three males. The English language class had seven people present, six females and one male. At the Colorful Dialogue, there were six males and 22 females and a variety of age groups present. There was, more or less, an even number of past participants and people who were at the Colorful Dialogue for the first time. There were 14 participants who attended the Colorful Dialogue in the past and 10 or 11 who were new that evening. The discrepancy in the number may be a result of participants not

understanding the question, not raising their hands, or YWCA staff abstaining from the ‘vote’.

This evening was also special because students from a Minnesota State University, Mankato communications class were present and recording sound bytes. This is important to note because the researcher’s presence and the presence of these people may have impacted the responses of some participants. Overall, however, on the surface, these factors did not seem to inhibit anybody from voicing their opinions. Past participants of the Colorful Dialogue include people from: Burkina Faso; Japan; Mexico; Pakistan; Philippines; Somalia; Sudan; USA (Minnesota and other states); and Vietnam among other places. These are all people who call Mankato home. This chapter begins with the general results of the research. After the general results, we will discuss certain themes more in-depth.

Most respondents recognized me from previous Colorful Dialogue events and the YWCA. From this association, there is potential for bias in the way interviewees may respond to questions. Wording of the questions, especially non-native English speakers, is also a place for potential bias. When engaging in cross-cultural research with English language learners, usage of a consent form presents a barrier for the researcher and poses space for mistrust to enter the dialogue.

The definition used for civic engagement in Chapter Two was two-fold: one was “to make a difference in the civic life of our communities” and the second was to develop “the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference” (Ehrlich, 2000, p. vi). Furthermore, it is important to take action when necessary, thus involvement is inherent in the term. Establishing a conclusion to the first research

question (Is the YWCA program, the Colorful Dialogue an effective method of civic engagement?) was somewhat difficult because of the complex nature of civic engagement. If civic engagement is defined simply as involvement, the Colorful Dialogue is a form of civic engagement because people come and participate, they are involved. One component of the Colorful Dialogue is to connect people in the community, including politicians; it is therefore a form of civic engagement. Community members are able to connect with a civic and political aspect of the community. The English language students mentioned they wrote a letter to their State Representative and saw in the news after the elections who had won. This is of interest because the students, and others who were at the event, had met the candidates. These special guests, who come to the Colorful Dialogue from time to time, especially politicians and those involved in the Mankato city governance, make the political process accessible; not only for newcomers to the area and to the country, but for long-time residents as well. It also gives an opportunity for “those in charge” to see who they represent in an informal, face-to-face environment. From the interviews, however, it does not seem that the Colorful Dialogue promotes more engagement outside of the event itself. Whether or not it is a springboard for increased civic engagement within the community presents an opportunity for additional research, discussed further in Chapter Five.

In regards to the second question (Is cross-cultural dialogue important and/or necessary in a demographically changing community?), nobody contested the importance of cross-cultural dialogue. That is to say, all interviewees, in one form or another said that cross-cultural dialogue, in some way, is important. The level of importance and the approaches of how to go about this cross-cultural dialogue, however, varied. One person,

in an informal conversation, said that these types of conversations need to “come naturally.” But how it is to come naturally is vague. Do we just walk up to someone in the grocery store and say hi? Where and how do these conversations start? These questions are difficult to answer unless there is a set venue for these types of conversations, a community center, for example, or other safe and neutral space. Another respondent said that cross-cultural dialogue “need[s] to happen on a small scale, and if it touches 3, 4, or 5 people, that is already a start” (Interviewee 041105¹¹). In that sense, one can say that the Colorful Dialogue is effective, because at the very least, it is touching a few members of the community each month.

The YWCA is a very small organization with only about 6 staff members, and not all full time. The difficulty of managing this program was mentioned during the interview with the YWCA Executive Director, Anne Ganey (March 18, 2011): “It fits with the YW mission...and that is why we are doing it. Even though it is sort of an add-on and it can be difficult to do when we are all busy and there is nobody devoted to it. But it is important.” The importance of the Walking in Two Worlds program¹² was also highlighted in the 2007 program evaluation: “Loss of the program would have a definite impact on the community’s ability to welcome and network the immigrant community who live here” (Filipovitch, 2007). The program evaluation also expected that “the community’s need for this program can only be expected to increase in the future as the trend is for increased immigration into the area” (Filipovitch, 2007). This trend of increased immigration was highlighted in Chapter One of this work.

¹¹ See Appendix B for the Interview Coding.

¹² The Colorful Dialogue falls under the scope of the YWCA Mankato’s Walking in Two Worlds program.

During the focus group evaluation, the Walking in Two Worlds program was seen to have an impact on the community by creating a dialogue between people who otherwise may not necessarily be talking to one another (Filipovitch, 2007). A challenge the program faced in 2007, is similar to a trend found throughout interviews: a lack of awareness. In 2007, the focus group found it difficult to spread information about immigrants to the broader community (Filipovitch, 2007). In the findings of this research, it appears that community members also have a lack of awareness of the Colorful Dialogue. Even if they know about the program, the purpose of the event and who the event is intended for is unclear. After speaking to some English language students, it appears that many of them did not really know where they were going or what to expect from the Colorful Dialogue. For example, some students did not know the name of the event and others asked for clarification what the event was all about. One student mentioned the shock she felt walking into the Twin Rivers Center for the Arts and did not know what to think about the pictures of naked women on the walls.¹³

The first time when we entered the room, and looking at those pictures, I was thinking “oh my God what is this?” like, weird naked ladies. ... I was just surprised. Are we going to talk about these ladies or what are we gonna do? That was a surprise. But when I sat down and relaxed, and understand why the pictures were there. And I thought ok, we are not even going to talk about it, it’s fine (Interviewee 04117).

¹³ The Colorful Dialogue is held at the Twin Rivers Center for the Arts, an art gallery. At one Colorful Dialogue in the past, the exhibit contained pictures of naked women on the wall.

Another possibility, as opposed to lack of awareness, however, could be that community members are aware of the program but do not see the importance of the event; do not have time in their schedules to attend such an event; or do not see it as a priority.

Diversity, multiculturalism and cross-cultural dialogue

“If you don’t hear but one voice, but one thing, you miss the other part of the population. You got to be able to hear what are the needs of different populations” (Interviewee 041106).

If the purpose of the Colorful Dialogue is to build cross-cultural community, it is vital that “new Americans” as well as “old Americans” are present at the conversation (Interview A. Ganey, March 18, 2011). Another interviewee stated the importance of the Colorful Dialogue because of its nonthreatening environment and space for storytelling: “One where people can come and tell their story and it is one that is good for Americans who have been here for a while to hear...face to face and in their own words, the stories of those who want to be part of our community” (Interviewee 041102). “Colorful Dialogue helps build those relationships [with people in the community] and creates those connections; it gives a space to break the ice” (Interviewee 041104). This respondent saw the importance of the Colorful Dialogue to link key community members together with the English language students at Lincoln, but not only those who are “already on board” but also people who may be somewhat hesitant. One respondent focused on the importance of cross-cultural dialogue because of the people using businesses and government services, for example, “there are people who are taxpayers, they are using the businesses...they may be easily offended if they go into a business that

doesn't know how to relate to, communicate with or deal with newcomers" (Interviewee 041103). And this idea goes both ways, also for newcomer entrepreneurs in the community, for example local nail salons, restaurants, convenient shops or other immigrant owned business.

"Once people understand each other, or understand where someone came from, it explains a whole lot more...when you hear people's stories and understand where they are starting from, you have to have more patience to understand that" (Interviewee 031101).

For people of color in a majority white community,¹⁴ finding opportunities to see a "like face" is difficult (Interviewee 041106). This interviewee appreciates the Colorful Dialogue as a venue to connect with others in the community (Interviewee 041106). Some feedback from those at the Colorful Dialogue echoed this idea. Some participants thought that there are some closed circles in Mankato that are difficult to break through. For this reason, having a space like the Colorful Dialogue makes it easier to network with people (Interviewee 021128). Another interviewee thought it was important to talk to people from different places because, for example, he had to be able to talk with his boss (Interviewee 041109).

One of the small groups during the Colorful Dialogue in February was comprised of predominantly non-Hispanic white people. One person in this group mentioned that their group did not have any "diversity" (Interviewee 021128). This is a reflection of how some people may define or interpret this concept. If we define diversity as difference, in any group, diversity will exist. There are, however, several dimensions of diversity

¹⁴ Nearly 90% of the Mankato population consider themselves non-Hispanic white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b).

stemming from race or ethnicity ranging to military experience, education, gender and age (Loden, 1996 in Shusta et al., 2011).¹⁵ Interviewee 041105, when discussing diversity, said that “the value of diversity is to expose different viewpoints and perspectives.” Another respondent said about diversity, “I think it’s an ongoing conversation and an ongoing effort” (Interviewee 041102), there is no handbook or prescription to follow and then “poof” diversity is there. This interviewee continued to say that, because of the dynamic involved in a community: people moving in, young people growing up and older people who possibly have never experienced diversity, programs such as the Colorful Dialogue are important. These kinds of programs “allow people, whenever and wherever they need, to attend. And people would hopefully be motivated to want to learn and we have to kind of give them reasons to do that sometimes” (Interviewee 041102). It is also important how events like the Colorful Dialogue are framed, to avoid misconceptions that no diversity exists if there is no “color” in a group.

In reaction to the question on belonging,¹⁶ there was a variety of reactions. Some people felt they very much belong in Mankato, whereas others (mostly students from Minnesota State University, Mankato) felt that they were “visitors” even though they may have lived here for four or five years. Other participants shared their experience that when they first arrived, they had no intention of staying, but have been here for 10 or

¹⁵ Loden and Associates (1996 in Shusta et al., 2011) developed a diversity wheel encompassing a primary and secondary dimension of diversity. The primary dimension of diversity includes: sexual orientation; ethnic background; race; mental or physical abilities and characteristics; gender; and age. The secondary dimension includes: geographic location; military experience; work experience; income; religion; native language; organizational role and level; communication style; family status; work style; and education. This shows the complexity of the term “diversity.”

¹⁶ “Do you feel like you belong in Mankato?”

more years. A crucial aspect of belonging is to feel “safe.” One group mentioned they discussed that some of their group members felt that they belong in Mankato because their kids are safe and this takes a lot off of their mind. This is especially important for refugee populations coming from unstable and dangerous situations. A couple of interviewees mentioned Mankato as a community which has unconsciously resisted diversifying. These interviewees thought this way because they have seen minorities move into the area, but move on again after a few years (Interviewee 031101; 041106; and 041102). One of these interviewees expects that immigration will be what diversifies Mankato, “people who come here from war-torn Africa, think, finally, I’m safe. And they like the size of the community, they like the quiet community” (Interviewee 031101).

In the course of one interview, the idea of cross-cultural dialogue coming naturally was also addressed along with the limitations: dialogue cannot come naturally without first making some connections. “Yes, it needs to come natural. But first, this [Colorful Dialogue] is a place where you can build that comfort” and those connections (Interviewee 041106). In building these connections, you are able to hear the multiple voices present in the community and engage with each other, and in time, perhaps realize increased civic engagement. This question of engagement, however, is an ongoing challenge and no interviewees had a solution. One respondent said, “I don’t know [how to get people to come]. Like, a letter: “please come,” something like that. But you cannot make them do that. If you write a letter, [you have to say] if you want to come it is ok, if they don’t want to come it’s fine. You cannot [say]: “You must go” [You] can’t do like that” (Interviewee 041108). The conversation continued, talking about the Lincoln school:

Sometimes when I see people I ask, why don't you go to school? If they don't have too many people [in the classrooms], class will be closed." Researcher: "So you are trying to get people to come to school?" Respondent: "yes, you know sometimes, you go to Wal-Mart, [and see somebody who] came before and quit coming, and I'm like, hey you got to go to school. But she says, by 5:30 I'm done working, I'm hungry, I'm tired. [So], what can you do, right? I say, please come or the school will be closed. Sometimes one person is only in one class. Where is everybody? (Interviewee 041108).

The number of people attending the English classes also affects the number of people present at the Colorful Dialogue. The number of those attending the Colorful Dialogue varies. Some evenings, one may ask the same question, "Where is everybody?" and the next time the room may be overflowing.

A few interviewees, when talking about cross-cultural dialogue and diversity, brought up the history of the United States. They stated that participation in these kinds of intercultural conversations are part of the nature of this democratic country. "The nature of our country has always been about how successful we've been at cross-cultural dialogue" (Interviewee 041102). This interviewee went on to discuss how cross-cultural dialogue can prevent bad things from happening by preventing misunderstandings. Cross-cultural dialogue also has potential to prevent "a shutting down of communication which is never good in a democracy" (Interviewee 041102). Another view from an interviewee is that the United States, from the beginning has been a country of immigrants. But that now, as a country, "we have this very egotistical view... And if you are different from us at all in any way, shape or form, then 'we gotta change ya'. And I don't think that is

appropriate” (Interviewee 041107). The interviewee continued stating the importance of assimilation and integration, yet also the importance of keeping one’s own identity.

Civic Engagement

“It’s being a participant in the life of the city, the county the state, beyond just being a citizen. But being an active participant in something” (Interviewee 041106).

“It is a citizen’s responsibility to be involved” (Interviewee 041105).

One’s identity is important as it helps establish oneself within the larger society. In order to take full advantage of that identity, engagement in the society is vital; one aspect of this engagement is within the political process: civic engagement. When respondents were asked what civic engagement meant to them, the main response was “involvement,” “to get involved in the community.” This is especially important in order to know what is going on, know where to go or who to ask when you need something (Interviewee 041103; 041104).

When looking at the Colorful Dialogue as a form of civic engagement, one group at the February event mentioned that it is a good program because the guest speakers have relevant information and it enables newcomers in Mankato to learn about how the town works (Interviewee 021128). Another respondent, when talking about when politicians were at the event, told how they wrote to their State Representative in their class, “I cannot say, “Dear Kathy”, but I can say “Dear Senator”, because we are not best friends. She is really nice. I saw her one time or two times. And I said, “Thank you for having school for us” (Interviewee 041108). Some respondents mentioned other activities they are involved in, these ranged from playing soccer or other sports with a club to church membership to being on the board of an organization. When asked what they got

out of the Colorful Dialogue or if the event helped them at all, one respondent answered, “for me now, it is just a place to go” (Interviewee 041109), while another respondent said, “They help me, they say some stuff you can do this like that. You can listen when people talk to you” (Interviewee 041108).

At the February Colorful Dialogue, the participants were very interested in talking in the small groups. As the facilitator of the evening, the attempt was made to keep some of the groups on track to talk about the questions at hand. Yet, as the purpose of the Colorful Dialogue is to come together and talk, intrusion on groups’ conversations was minimal. With the last question, “When you leave here tonight, what are you going to take with you?” not all participants were able to answer because time ran out. But some reflections from participants included, for example, the English language instructors enjoyed the evening because they were able to see their students interacting in a different light than they usually do. Others, in particular Minnesota State University, Mankato students who attended that evening, took away the idea to be mindful of other students (at Minnesota State University, Minnesota) who may be from different cultures or backgrounds. Another participant thought that meetings like the Colorful Dialogue do have an influence on people and that there is a greater level of respect. While respect and consideration of others is not a direct example of civic engagement, these are building blocks of social trust and social capital.

Evaluation of the Colorful Dialogue

It’s not culture specific. It is people specific. Everybody at one time was a child. What did you do? Everybody has a mom, everybody has a dad. Most people have brothers or sisters or relatives. And so the questions are relative for everyone. It

doesn't specify a religion, race, color creed. Anything like that (Interviewee 041107).

In order to evaluate this program, the strengths and weaknesses will be highlighted. According to respondents, strengths of the Colorful Dialogue include:

- A neutral community space (it is located in an art gallery in downtown Mankato, Twin Rivers Center for the Arts);
- Exposure to those living in the community;
- Helps build relationships and understanding;
- A space for people to mingle, not worry about money (the event is free), and get a snack;
- A place for people to tell their story;
- Opens the community's doors and exposes people to cultures they otherwise may not be exposed to and thus helps break down stereotypes;
- Encourages students from Lincoln to learn the norms of the city and community;
- Allows women a space to speak their mind;
- Gives a space for non-native English speakers to practice the language in a real setting with real people (this is at times is a challenge for English language learners because of the accent and speed while talking used by native speakers);
- A space 'just to talk.'

Some criticisms of the Colorful Dialogue include:

- The general community is not represented/only a portion of the community is engaged (many of those attending are associated with or representing one group association or another);

- More outreach in the community is needed, there is a lack of awareness of the event;
- Childcare issues for some people inhibit them from participating (this is not specific for the Colorful Dialogue event alone, but for other community events as well);
- Rides for those coming from Lincoln school are difficult, especially in bad weather conditions;
- Trust may be a problem to getting people engaged;
- More involvement from area businesses (get a representative from the banks to attend since they are the ones giving people loans, but also representatives from both the public and private sectors);
- No real evaluation of the event to find methods of change or improvement;
- If the time does not work well for someone, it is only once a month;
- Many English language students did not like when the politicians came because they could not understand what they were saying.

Some basic recommendations include:

- Ask participants to invite somebody along the next time, for example, at each meeting place emphasis that “if you enjoyed this and found it beneficial, invite a couple of people next time;”
- Connect or find ways to connect with other community events, to show a presence and share more information about the Colorful Dialogue. A limitation of this recommendation is that the YWCA does not have the resources;

- Try to attract students from Ethnic Studies, Business, Nonprofit Management, or other related majors to intern at the YWCA with this program and promote it;
- Form a committee responsible for the Colorful Dialogue and other such events. One aspect of this could be asking participants to bring food, for example asking Lincoln students ahead of time if they could bring some food;
- Partner with other people or organizations. Having a space, neutral venue for cross-cultural dialogue is a community responsibility, therefore partnerships are important;
- Invite a strong figure, such as a community leader from different groups to draw a following from that group. In this way introduce those new people to the event.

Some problems with addressing these issues, is that the YWCA is small and a staff member is not primarily dedicated to the event itself. From the interviewees, better publicity, explaining what the Colorful Dialogue is and who it is intended for could help people understand what it is all about. This means publicity to all living in the community, not only specific groups and not only the immigrant and refugees.

The community also has to be on board to work together to improve cross-cultural dialogue in the community as well as to develop other methods to include people at a community level. The Colorful Dialogue presents one venue, but the question remains how can those be reached who do not work well in a setting such as the Colorful Dialogue? How can those be reached who may be hesitant or against attending such a meeting? And also, how can people be reached to convince them to attend the Colorful Dialogue?

Chapter V: Discussion

Many questions still remain as far as how to, with limited staff, increase awareness of the Colorful Dialogue and structure the event to reach its highest potential. Most of the comments at the Colorful Dialogue event and from interviews were positively oriented and not very critical. Just one participant said that they would like to see the Colorful Dialogue experience be taken to another level in terms of problem solving. The fact that much feedback was positively oriented could mean that people really and truly did enjoy the evening and they did get something out of the experience. The positive orientations, could, however, also be due to the presence of group bias or from participants trying to say the easiest and least controversial things. This trend may also be present in the interviews as with qualitative research, we cannot control for this unless the research is expanded to include triangulation.¹⁷

The term ‘social capital,’ as expected, did not come up in any of the interviews. This is not surprising, given the specificity of the term within academic circles. What is of interest, however, was the theme present in interviews about the need to know people to know where to go when you need something. This is what one respondent said when asked about civic engagement, “if you don’t know anybody, you are shy to ask because you don’t know how people feel about it and to find out where or who to ask” (Interviewee 041103). Social capital is important because when you want something to happen, “many people ignore these formal procedures and responsibilities, and set off to talk to someone they know” (Field, 2003, p. 2).

¹⁷ Triangulation is when multiple researchers ask the same questions to the interviewees to try to account for bias on the side of the interviewees or researcher.

A limitation for some people to attend the Colorful Dialogue may also be that people are too busy to take time to set aside for activities where they do not know what direct and tangible benefit they will receive. The problem of time to engage in civic engagement was also present in Putnam's (1995) work.

If we look at the strengths and weaknesses of the Colorful Dialogue, as well as the other data presented above, we can still say that the Colorful Dialogue is a passive form of civic engagement, if such a thing exists. Catalyzing it into an effective, proactive method of civic engagement may mean, as a respondent mentioned, pushing and asking harder questions. Or, as another respondent suggested, asking key players from the different communities in Mankato to come as a guest speaker, and for those speakers to invite people to come as an entrance point for varying groups. English language learners are not the only "newcomers" in the community. Expanding the framework of who falls into the category of newcomer could also bring in a population of people. Newcomer does not only mean those foreign born, but one who is new to the community. So far, the Colorful Dialogue does not appear to be effectively reaching these populations. Nonetheless, people appear to be very interested in talking, meeting new people and expanding their networks. Interviewees confirmed the importance of dialogue, and given the changes in the community, the importance of cross-cultural dialogue in order to overcome misconceptions and fear.

With limitations to this study, there is potential for more research and more discussion. These will be discussed further in this chapter.

As stated in Chapter One, the face of Mankato has changed. As changes can lead to tension, having a space to dispel myths and tell those stories is relevant. The YWCA's

mission is focused on “eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all” (YWCA Mankato, 2010). The YWCA’s Walking in Two Worlds program fits within their mission because it helps to bridge new immigrants and refugees with the Mankato community and culture. As a subset of this program, the Colorful Dialogue seeks to create a space for conversation between newcomers in the community and long time residents. It is, however, important to define the word newcomer to include all people new in the community, not only new immigrants or refugees, some of whom have lived in Mankato for a substantial amount of time. As noted in the introduction of this thesis, some communities in Minnesota have worked hard to collaborate with local organizations to help integrate those new to the area and to help them feel ‘at home.’ Throughout his works, the rural historian, Joseph Amato (1999; 1997; 1993; 1990), promotes the need for communities to open up a dialogue where voices can be heard and stories told and in this way, according to Amato, give the new immigrants today the experience we wish our forefathers had. Along these lines, Wheatley (2002) advocates for sharing conversations in order for people to understand, discover and see their similarities. The social contact hypothesis also advocates for social exposure and contact with people different than oneself in order to increase tolerance.

The Colorful Dialogue was the focus of this study as one aspect of dealing with the demographic change in Mankato, Minnesota. Chapter Four of this thesis dealt with the results, answering the two research questions that framed the research.¹⁸

The main findings included that the Colorful Dialogue is relevant and is a safe space for newcomers and long time residents to tell their stories. Colorful Dialogue is a

¹⁸ (1) Is the YWCA program, Colorful Dialogue an effective method of civic engagement? (2) Is cross-cultural dialogue important and/or necessary in a demographically changing community?

form of civic engagement but faces several limitations which were discussed more in detail in Chapter Four. The interviewees shared their opinions that cross-cultural dialogue and the Colorful Dialogue are important and people enjoy going there. Also seen in the results is that cross-cultural dialogue is important in order to bridge some unknowns which may have the potential to lead to fear or discrimination.

The social contact hypothesis from Chapter Two links with social capital because various forms of social contact have the potential to promote acceptance and tolerance in communities as long as the contact includes various groups with various backgrounds. As stated in Chapter Two: “If people have the right kind of contact with minorities, their orientations toward minorities should become more positive” (Côté & Erickson, 2009, p. 1665). Since both the types of networks and the types of diversity within a network matter, it is important that at the Colorful Dialogue, participants are subject to “intense, direct discussion of related issues in an engaged or even emotional way” (Côté & Erickson, 2009, p. 1685) in order to somehow “control” that the event has a lasting impact on its participants. Leaving the event “with a good feeling” may be good for some people, even, perhaps all the participants. The lasting effect, however, may not stay if that is the only thing one leaves the event with. This relates to the Durkheimian idea where members of groups are more united by ties that extend beyond the exchange itself. The feelings one has when leaving the Colorful Dialogue promotes feelings of cohesion with the people as well as the potential for future action. Building networks through people at the Colorful Dialogue has the potential to increase participants’ social capital. But the

form of social capital built, whether it is with acceptance or taking a person as a token member of the group, can affect how tolerance is played out at a larger societal level¹⁹.

Social contact and social capital can increase acceptance and tolerance as well as opportunities, if given the proper circumstances. If you talk with people and find common ground, there is potential to decrease fear and increase social trust. In theory, conversations at the Colorful Dialogue have the potential to increase community involvement because of the social contact. According to the theory, this can increase the quality of life within the community because if you talk with people and find common ground, decrease fear, and increase social capital; it increases one's quality of life.

Some questions regarding the effectiveness of the Colorful Dialogue program, however, still remain: Does the Colorful Dialogue meet the YWCA's mission? Is the Colorful Dialogue more than a forum for English language learners to practice their language? Is the Colorful Dialogue effective in engaging people in the community?

The mission of the YWCA deals with eliminating racism and empowering women. One element of empowerment is the ability to use your voice. If there are limitations because of a language barrier, the Colorful Dialogue helps empower people with limited language skills, including women. When looking at the gender of Colorful Dialogue attendees, one can see more females than males. With this information, one can say yes, it helps empower women. But it is important to question this. One explanation for more female presence could be because it is a YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) sponsored event and people may think it is an event for women.

¹⁹ See discussion in Chapter Two and Côté and Erickson (2009)

Racism, on the other hand, is a loaded term, and one that many people do not want to deal with. Does the Colorful Dialogue help eliminate racism? Racism is considered discrimination against someone because of their race, but also includes attitudes and stereotypes not necessarily leading to discrimination but to an overall, perhaps underlying, environment of prejudice. Racism has changed from a direct and conventional prejudice towards indirect actions, ambivalence and “pro-in-group biases” (Hodson, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010, p. 9). Hodson, Dovidio and Gaertner (2010) call this aversive racism: difficult to recognize and thus difficult to remedy. The Colorful Dialogue is a place for conversation. According to Wheatley (2002) conversation dispels fear, brings people together and offers a starting point for understanding. If, as one participant mentioned, one feels there is no ‘diversity’ in their group because no immigrant, English language learner or someone different from their race or ethnic background is present; than people are more objectified as a means to an end as opposed to an end in themselves. This objectification of people and defining diversity in such narrow terms defies the purpose of the Colorful Dialogue event to bring people together. If more than one participant feels this way, is the Colorful Dialogue then promoting “peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all people” as their mission states or is it promoting more of an “us and them” attitude? If it is the latter, the Colorful Dialogue is not eliminating racism. The perceptions of these interracial contacts may need to be improved. Re-categorizing social norms and cultural practices to expand the in-group identification may be what is needed before racism can be fully addressed (Hodson, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). When people understand where people come from, and are not afraid of them and do not note their differences explicitly, there is potential for racism

to be eliminated. It may mean that participants also need to understand diversity in a much larger context, as previously discussed, outside of the color, race and ethnicity box. Conceptualizing diversity in this broader context, however, is perhaps difficult in Southern Minnesota.

Many of the results above discuss ‘potential’. The Colorful Dialogue has a lot of potential to, in theory, propel many things into action (for example, help eliminate racism, empower women and promote increased civic engagement). The results, however, do not allow me to state with certainty that the Colorful Dialogue is effective in doing these things. In Chapter Four, one can see that interviewees find this event important and think cross-cultural dialogue is also important. Following some of the recommendations listed in Chapter Four may help increase Colorful Dialogue’s effectiveness, but more research is necessary to follow up on this evaluation.

The limitations encountered in this study, create opportunities for further research. Here are some examples where this study could act as a basis for more research:

- This research was very focused on the Colorful Dialogue program and did not take a broader look at community relations. Future research could take a larger demographic perspective to take all people represented in Mankato into consideration and ensure voices from each of these groups are heard including their opinions about Mankato, whether or not they feel welcome, and some ways these people may be inclined to get more involved in the community.
- Another potential expansion of this research could study Mankato census tracts and see where concentrations of people live, including race, socio-economic class, educational levels and so on. From here, one could study if these various

populations are represented in the Colorful Dialogue. Another approach would be to go into these communities and interview people to find out their suggestions for increased involvement.

- More focus on the history of immigration to this area compared with a recent history could give this study a more thorough background. This could include what draws people to Mankato.
- Additional, in-depth research is also necessary to evaluate the Colorful Dialogue and civic engagement and to determine the extent to which the Colorful Dialogue is a springboard for increased civic engagement within the community. This could include, for example, ‘pre’ and ‘post’ interviews with participants of the Colorful Dialogue over a period of time.
- This study could also be comparative looking at multiple towns with similar programs and the effects on community. One such study could include the YWCA Minneapolis’ program “It’s time to talk” a forum on race.
- Could the Colorful Dialogue increase effectiveness in increasing tolerance if the discussions were more “intense, direct discussion of related issues in an engaged or even emotional way” (Côté & Erickson, 2009, p. 1685)? A before and after approach could be implemented to measure if any change occurs.
- This research could also be enhanced through the use of multiple research methods, for example, including both quantitative and qualitative methods.

While there are limitations to this study and program evaluation, one cannot negate its importance. In order to build community, people living in the community need to know each other and they need to talk. The Colorful Dialogue may not be a perfect venue for

increasing civic engagement; it is, however, a start. People come to the event and people like to talk. Sometimes the facilitator cannot get them to stop. People like to tell their stories. Challenges do remain as well, for example: How does one encourage people that such a venue is important? How does one reach those in the community who are not engaged or those who are difficult to be reached? If the YWCA discontinues funding the Colorful Dialogue program, a neutral, safe space for conversation will be eliminated from Mankato. At this moment, it does not appear that a different event or location will spontaneously take its place. Increased cooperation, partnership and participation with the community, area businesses and the schools and universities in Mankato are important for the Colorful Dialogue to reach its full potential.

The conversation regarding demographic change and the integration of new immigrants and refugees will likely not go away, certainly not in the near future. These are pressing issues for local governments and communities alike throughout the United States and locally in Mankato, Minnesota. Demographic shifts are occurring and in the future, the majority white population will be in the minority and minority populations the majority. While this demographic shift will take more time to occur in Mankato than in other areas of the nation, it is also a reality here in America's heartland. Finding ways to live, talk, laugh and do business with one another is something that will remain important for continued positive and meaningful coexistence. And so the conversation continues.

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Appendix B: Interview Coding

Code	Date Interview	Female	Male
Interviewee 031101	18-Mar	F	
Interviewee 041102	24-Mar		M
Interviewee 041103	21-Mar	F	
Interviewee 041104	21-Mar	F	
Interviewee 041105	25-Mar		M
Interviewee 041106	1-Apr	F	
Interviewee 041107	4-Apr	F	
Interviewee 041108	4-Apr	F	
Interviewee 041109	4-Apr		M
Interviewee 04117	4-Apr	6F	1M
Interviewee 021128	28-Feb	22F	6M