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What Constitutes a Welcoming Community? Mankato Leaders Go Beyond the 'Welcome Wagon' for New Immigrants

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What Constitutes a Welcoming Community?
Mankato Leaders Go Beyond the ‘Welcome Wagon’ for New Immigrants

Student Presenters: Sarah Lieske (Elementary Education), Sadie Leidall (Elementary Education), Philip Munkvold (Elementary Education)
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Elizabeth Sandell (Elementary Education)

Undergraduate Research Symposium
Mankato, MN - April 21, 2014
Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand how leaders responded to the community’s increasing diversity and how newcomers experienced the community response.
### 1990-2010
Blue Earth County Population Shifts
{Race as a proxy of diversity}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blue Earth County</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>% change calc. between 1990 &amp; 2010</th>
<th>% change 2010 from 1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>54,044</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>64,013</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(64,013 - 54,044) / 54,044         | +18.45  |
| White             | 52,648 | 97.42 | 59,400 | 92.79 | 
(59,400 - 52,648) / 52,648         | +12.82  |
| Minority/ not-White| 2,396  | 2.58  | 5,619  | 8.77  | 
(5,619 - 2,396) / 2,396            | +135.51 |
| Black             | 251    | .46   | 1,741  | 2.72  | 
(1,741 - 251) / 251               | +593.62 |
Research Questions

- How do leaders and newcomers conceptualize the ideas of diversity and welcoming?
- What are the leaders’ goals for creating a community that welcomes non-European Americans?
- How do the leaders operationalize their concepts of diversity and welcoming?
- How do newcomers experience the welcoming efforts of the community?
Community as an Ecological Environment

“The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the other like a set of Russian dolls.”

~ Urie Bronfenbrenner
Or perhaps more like an onion…
Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory of Human Development
Microsystem

Mesosystem
Chronosystem

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory

- Macrosystem
  - Exosystem
  - Mesosystem
  - Micorsystem
  - You

- Family, School, Peers, Workplace, and Neighbors
- Religious Affiliation
- Overarching beliefs and values
- Dimension of Time

You
Methodology

- Review by Institutional Review Board for Research with Human Subjects (exempt status)
- Determine “convenience” sample
- Request informed consent from interviewees
- Conduct interviews with 2 community informants and 2 newcomers
- Transcribe interviews into text documents
- Code transcribed interviews according to systems identified by Bronfenbrenner
- Analyze interviews for themes, similarities and differences
Interview Questions

- What do you think of when you hear the word ‘diversity’?
- Has your understanding of that term changed over time?
- Can you point to any specific instances that have had an impact on you or changed your idea about diversity?
- Many Mankato leaders talk about making a “welcoming community” here … How do you understand that?
- What programs or images do you think community leaders have put into place that help that transition happen in a positive way?
- Do you think there was any key person or incident that changed the direction in Mankato?
- What do you think is still needed to help all residents feel welcome in Mankato?
- Can you tell me about any cultural initiatives that you are involved in?
- What goals do you have for your parts of the community?
- Is there anything you want to say that we haven’t touched on?
Informants

- “Alice,” Italian & Dutch American, female, between 45 and 55 years old, grandparent, director of private, non-profit organization

- “Clarice,” European American, female, between 35 and 45 years old, married, parent, teaches English as a second language
Newcomers

- “Irina,” Ukrainian American, female, between 25 and 35 years old, married to U.S. citizen, 2 children under age 3 years old

- “Svetlana,” Russian American, female, between 35 and 45 years old, married to U.S. citizen, naturalized U.S. citizen, 1 school-aged son
Informant Themes

- Microsystem Level Planning

“A place where people can find housing, find a way to meet your goals, to meet your family goals to some degree anyway.” ~ Clarice
Informant Themes

- Macrosystem Level Awareness
  “We have areas where they [Mankato residents] don’t understand it [diversity], they don’t want to understand it, they are afraid of it. People fear what they don’t understand.” ~ Alice

- Exosystem Level Action
  “[When I go to] conferences and state meetings, [I notice] that in Mankato people we [agency staff members] communicate with each other. We all know what each other is doing…people are amazed that we have collaboration.” ~ Clarice
Newcomer Themes

• Microsystem Level Goals
  “Kind of survival. This is really hard part of life. Probably for many people.” ~ Svetlana

• Microsystem Level Needs
  “Providing people from different countries or different backgrounds with a support system or just supporting them in trying to make friends here or trying to find a job or trying to get a driver’s license.” ~ Irina
A Good Disconnect

“We as a nation need to be re-educated about the necessary and sufficient conditions for making human beings human. We need to be re-educated not as parents – but as workers, neighbors, and friends; and as members of the organizations, committees, boards – and, especially, the informal networks that control our social institutions and thereby determine the conditions of life for our families and their children.”

~ Urie Bronfenbrenner
Future Research Possibilities

- Conduct more interviews to see community-wide themes and possibilities
- Compare Mankato with other communities in Minnesota and across the country
- Compare university communities with communities that do not have universities
Acknowledgements

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- MSU’s Center for Excellence in Scholarship and Research
Resources


THANK YOU!!