Construind Viitorul Lor Propriu / Building Their Own Futures:

Making Youth Leadership Development Work in the Republic of Moldova

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Abstract

Since its break with the Soviet Union, the Republic of Moldova has faced a rocky path towards establishing a democracy and an active civil society. Although many international aid organizations have stepped in to help, the country's own youth have remained a mostly untapped resource in the process of rebuilding. The youth development approach recognizes youth as an asset to positive change at the community level. With that in mind, a ten session "Practical Leadership Course" was developed for the youth of a small Moldovan town. The course focused on essential skills for community activism and leadership, and was based on the principles of non-formal education and the "small wins theory." The purpose of this project was to: 1) increase youth's capacity to affect change in their local community, 2) increase youth self-efficacy, and 3) positively influence the beliefs that youth held about the future of their community and their country. Surveys measuring youth beliefs and community involvement were administered pre- and post intervention, as well as at follow-up, one year later. Results show that by developing and using community-based leadership competencies to create positive social change, youth increased their self-efficacy and became increasingly involved in their community. Finally, several "real world" results of the course are discussed, including structural changes to community life that support youth involvement and leadership post graduation from the course.

Keywords: positive youth development, youth leadership, community change

Republica Moldova a trecut printr-o perioada dificila in urma destramarii Uniunii Sovietice, urmind directia stabilirii unui stat democratic cu o societate civila activa. In procesul reconstruirii, tineretul ramine a fi o sursa nevalorificata cu toate ca multe organizatii internationale au acordat un anumit ajutor la nivel organizational. Dezvoltarea tinerilor presupune recunoasterea acestui grup ca o valoare in procesul instituirii anumitor schimbari pozitive la nivel comunitar. Luind in cosideratie aceasta realitate, cursul de "Liderism Practic" a fost elaborat pentru tinerii din localicatile rurale ale Moldovei. Obiectivele cursului s-au axat in jurul abilitatilor esentiale pentru activismul comunitar, avind la baza educatia non-formala si teoria de "cistig minim". Scopul acestui proiect a fost de a spori: 1) capacitatea tinerilor de a influenta schimbari in propriile comunitati, 2) eficacitatea proprie, 3) increderea tinerilor de a influenta pozitiv viitorul comunitatii si a tarii in care locuiesc. Studiu cercetare evaluind opinia tinerilor si a participarii acestora in viata comunitatii a fost efectuat anterior si post interventiei, cit si dupa un an. Rezultatele studiului arata o crestere a eficacitatii tinerilor si implicarii acestora in comunitate in urma dezvoltarii si utilizarii competentelor liderismului comunitar pentru a institui schimbari sociale pozitive. La sfirsit sunt prezentate rezultatele reale ale cursului, cuprinzind scmibari la nivel de structura a vietii comunitare care promoveaza implicarea tinerilor in urma absolvirii cursului.

Cuvinte chee: dezvoltarea pozitiva a tinerilor, liderismul tinerilor, schimbare comunitara

Youth development is an important goal for communities. Including youth as contributors to community-wide development processes recognizes them as assets, and highlights the important role that they will have in the community's future. Localized development approaches aimed at improving conditions within a specific community recognize that people, youth included, have the "potential and capacity" to transform both themselves and their own situations when given a chance to develop the skills to do so (Benard, 2007).

Moldova: A Developing Civil Society

The focus of this study is a small town in the Republic of Moldova. Moldova is located in Eastern Europe, landlocked between present day Romania and Ukraine. Since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Moldova has faced a rising tide of social problems including increases in poverty (it is currently the poorest country in Europe), negative health indicators, and human trafficking (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2009, United Nations Development Programme, 2011; Winrock International, 2005). In the beginning of its independence, Moldova's newly formed democratic government was not equipped to handle these escalating problems, as minimal civic structure existed.

Today many Moldovan citizens face constant economic pressure; migration abroad (legally and illegally) to find work is common. The country has

one of the highest net-migration rates in the world (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). In 2010, almost a quarter (23.2%) of Moldova's GDP came from remittances (World Bank, 2010). Although the remittances may help the country economically, there are strong social, societal and developmental costs to having such a high percentage of the country's working age population living abroad (Mansoor & Bryce, 2007). One specific by-product of this economic situation, relevant to the current project, is the number of children growing up with less than adequate parental support and supervision. Children, especially in rural areas, are increasingly being raised by grandparents, siblings, or other family members while their parents work abroad. A 2008 qualitative study conducted by UNICEF illustrated that there are significant gaps between adults' and children's views of the situations: adults see themselves as providing for the economic wellbeing of their family, while children experience a strong sense of non-economic deprivation (loss of social and emotional support).

As a country, Moldova has a long history of being dominated by other nations; the beginning of its existence saw rule by the Romans, Byzantine and Ottomans. Some scholars cite this continued external locus of control in governance as having a critical impact on the nation's culture; today, many of Moldova's citizens can be characterized by a sense of learned helplessness (King, 2000). This is especially true of older generations. Citizen attitudes towards the poor living conditions and persistence of corruption in the government are often summarized by the common saying "Aşa e Moldova," or "That's Moldova" (Transparency International, 2011). The underlying sentiment is acceptance, an expression of the belief that things will not change for the better.

From the Ground Up: A Focus on Youth and Local Ownership

The students currently in high school in Moldova are the first generation to grow up in a democracy. Because they are the first, they have few established avenues for interacting with their newly democratic government, and could benefit from local models of active community engagement to guide their involvement (current and future) and interaction with the government. In fact, in many communities, the same people who were in power during the Communist times still hold powerful offices today. Without the development and practice of civic leadership behaviors, there is little reason to believe that youth will become civically engaged as adults (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Smith, 1999; Youniss et al., 2003).

Recognizing the need to show youth the paths that exist towards involvement in their local community, equip them with the skills to take action, and allow them the chance to develop the confidence to assert themselves, community members from the rural town of Sîngerei came together to discuss what could be done. In the beginning the group had many focuses: starting a non-profit organization for youth, increasing attendance at the regional high school, reaching out to parents, changing community attitudes, etc. This "interest group" was formed by word of mouth, and included young people who had gone to college and returned to the community, parents of high school students, a few local teachers, and a Peace Corps volunteer. Eventually, the group consulted with an already established Moldovan youth development non-profit (O.N.G. Geronimo) located near Moldova's capital city, and arrived at a common, worthwhile goal: youth leadership development.

A Positive Youth Development Approach

Through focus groups conducted at the local high schools (n = 52) it was determined that youth in Sîngerei were pessimistic about their future in Moldova and about the state of affairs in their town, and felt like they could not change anything. (The phrase "Aşa e Moldova," or "That's Moldova" was mentioned frequently). Over 40% of them had at least one parent currently working abroad; 20% had not seen either of their parents in the past five years.

The goal of this project was to determine if we could positively influence the youth's attitudes about their future and the future of their communities by developing their capacity to affect change locally. Therefore we created an intervention aimed at providing youth the opportunity to learn and practice leadership skills, which we hypothesized would enable the youth to participate more actively in their community. Our intervention, called the "Practical Leadership Course," was designed and led by three young adults (members of the original group that came together to discuss youth issues in Sîngerei) with continued consultation from youth members of the O.N.G. Geronimo; the other members (teachers, parents, etc.) of the original "interest group" remained informed, but not involved. By teaching youth practical leadership skills, and showing them where they could use them in their local communities, schools, and day-to-day life, we hoped to convince them that change was possible, and more importantly, that they themselves were capable of bringing about the changes they desired.

The ten week "Practical Leadership Course" was based on non-formal education, which incorporated

learning-by-doing, recognizing that not all youth succeed in the structure of formal education, and not all talents can be developed in a formal setting (UNESCO, 2006). The intervention itself was driven by the need to be locally oriented, community sustained, replicable, and undertaken for a budget that was reasonable for the community. The leadership skills selected for youth to learn were based on the servant-leader model, encouraging service to others and one's community, as well as understanding leadership as a behavior, not a position (Greenleaf, 1970). Integrated into the "Practical Leadership Course" was the theory of "Small Wins," the idea that small tangible victories can encourage long term participation, continued community activism, and a commitment to further leadership development (Weick, 1984). As a part of our intervention, small (less than $10) grants were provided for youth-driven community-based projects to allow participants a chance to test their newly acquired skills within the supportive class environment.

With this intervention, we hypothesized that acquiring competencies in core community leadership areas would lead youth to increased community participation, a more positive view of their future and the future of their community, and a higher sense of self-efficacy. Lastly, we as organizers, viewed the youth as potential "change-agents" who, once equipped by the skills, could actively shape the future of their community.

Methods

Participants

Thirty-five Moldovan youth completed the "Practical Leadership Course" (out of the 38 who started the course). Of the 35 participants, 22 were female and 13 were male, ranging in age from 14 to 18. Thirty of the 35 were high school students, the other five were not attending high school and had not received their high school diploma. Participants were from two different high schools within 10 miles of the town of Sîngerei. All were Moldovan citizens, although four individuals self-identified as Russian over Moldovan. Youth were not compensated for their participation; nor did they have to pay to attend the "Practical Leadership Course."

Setting

Sîngerei is a small, rural town of 4,000 people in the north of Moldova. Although its official census is 4,000, approximately one-third of its residents (ages 18-64) are living abroad at any given time (Mayor Georghe Broshavoski, personal communication, April 1st, 2007). It is isolated from larger cities and transportation to and from the village is limited. Agriculture is the main source of income, but most of what is produced is consumed rather than sold or traded. The majority of the adult population works in two factories at the edges of the town.

Sîngerei was once thriving under the Soviet Union but is now struggling. Many older residents wish for a return to the days of the Soviet Union and the town's current public authority has a Communist party orientation. Cooperation with the local government for this project was difficult as they were not sold on the idea or methods, nor did they see it as a priority; eventually they allowed us to stage our intervention in the government-owned public library, which was not being used over the summer. This represents the limit of institutional support for our intervention during the first year of its implementation.

Intervention

Practical Leadership Course. The "Practical Leadership Course" was based on both service-learning and learning-by-doing models. Its content and design was adapted from various sources including international youth empowerment guides published by UNESCO, as well as techniques used by other Moldovan non-profits who work with youth. Despite these resources, it is important to stress that the development of the course was bottom-up; we intentionally chose not to use a pre-established course because we wanted to present lessons that were both culturally applicable to the youth in our town, as well as grounded in the local context. The course itself consisted of ten interactive sessions covering topics such as teamwork, planning, community mapping, public speaking, problem solving, asset finding, and advocacy (for a full list of topics, see Table 1; for a detailed example of how the individual lessons were designed and run, please see Appendix A.)

Table 1. Practical Leadership Course: Session Topic(s) and Objective(s)

Session	Topic(s)	Objective(s)
1	Introduction to Course, Each Other	To increase understanding of the goals of the course
		To allow participants to get to know each other
2	What is a Leader?	To familiarize participants with leadership as a behavior
		To allow them to see themselves as future leaders
3	Team Work, Group Work and Team Building	To develop a sense of community within participants
		To teach participants the ins-and-outs of group dynamics and roles
4	Fundraising	To introduce participants to fundraising techniques, sources of funding and resources in their own communities
5	The Development of a Project: Ideas and Locating Resources	To develop an idea for youth community-based projects
		To understand the brainstorming process for turning an idea into a project
6	The Development of a Project: Planning and Implementing	To establish a process of turning an idea into an action plan
7	The Community: Local Public Administration, Existing Organizations, and Community Members	To gain knowledge related to working within the system, with existing community organs, and attracting others to one's cause
8	Communication Techniques, Public Speaking and Networking	To learn how to public speak, persuade, and relate to others.
9	Engaging Others and the Concept of Volunteering; Advocacy; How to Conduct an Evaluation	To understand the different types of volunteer work
		To develop knowledge and skills for organizing and working with volunteers
		To explore the idea of advocacy
		To gain knowledge about project evaluation
10	Evaluations of Community-Based Projects; Coursework	To gain experience evaluating others' projects
		To have a chance to receive feedback for improving the projects implemented.

Throughout the course, students were given homework tasks, "real world assignments" to complete in their local communities and report back on. These included surveying the population, observing behavior in public spaces, interviewing local leaders, and implementing small outreach activities as a class. They were asked to report back on these assignments; student experiences were incorporated into weekly lessons.

For each session, youth participants were broken into small groups (with the groups changing every time) in order to enable course facilitators to give more personal attention to participants. Two facilitators led all 10 sessions of the class. One facilitator was native to the town Sîngerei and the other was an American Peace Corps Volunteer. Both had previous experience in youth development work and were further trained by a Moldovan non-governmental organization (NGO) in civic action and leadership within the current Moldovan political climate; additionally guest facilitators were brought in as well. All lessons were conducted in Romanian, which was the first language of 90% of the participants.

Although it was a large undertaking, the course itself had no direct funding; rather it operated on in-kind donations and volunteer hours. Because of this, resources (printed materials, office supplies, props for lessons) were intentionally kept to a minimum. Serving lunch to participants over the four hour course was our biggest economic challenge; this was initially covered by volunteers cooking at home and bringing food to the library, but as the course progressed and we made ourselves known in the community, several local businesses offered to provide snacks at no cost. While the overall volunteer hours needed to plan and implement the "Practical Leadership Course" were not specifically recorded, we estimate that it took the equivalent of one full time employee during the four-month implementation period, and a half-time employee for the month leading into, and following the course.

Community-Based Projects. As the capstone of the "Practical Leadership Course," community-based projects were assigned to allow youth to directly apply their newly developed competencies to issues that matter to them in their local communities. The theory behind this aspect of the course was "small wins" — if the youth could successfully implement small community initiatives with the support of their classmates and facilitators, then they would be more likely to continue engaging in leadership initiatives in their communities in the future.

To initiate the community-based project development process, participants were given a form for documenting and describing a problem in their community. During class sessions, participants used these forms to work on practical solutions, identify funding (if needed) for their proposed solutions, evaluate which community members and partners would be interested in contributing to the project, and develop volunteer recruitment strategies. Action plans were created individually by students with the support of course facilitators; projects that were beyond the scope of our course were discouraged and participants were given guidance on finding a new, more realistic project. Students helped one another with project implementation. Examples of community-based projects that participants completed include installing garbage cans in parks, a positive graffiti campaign, and the creation of a regional youth newspaper. "Grant Funding" for selected community based projects that students completed came from the Centru Raional (equivalent to a county government body in the United States).

Instrument

Youth Development Questionnaire. This self-report measure, developed specifically for our intervention, consisted of 28 questions. The items on this questionnaire were developed by the course facilitators with the intention of assessing the potential impact of the "Practical Leadership Course" on participants' abilities and beliefs; the items were reviewed for clarity and purpose by members of the Moldovan youth development non-profit, O.N.G Geronimo. The Youth Development Questionnaire was designed and administered in Romanian; the 28 items were grouped evenly into four categories: 1) participants' beliefs about the future of their country (Moldova; $\alpha = .74$), 2) participants' beliefs about the future of their community (local; $\alpha = .83$), 3) participants' assessment of their own leadership skills ($\alpha = .87$), and 4) participants' belief in their own ability to affect change in their surroundings ($\alpha = .69$). Examples of items included: "I see a future for myself in Moldova," "I can make positive changes in my school," and "I consider myself capable of being a leader." All items used Likert-type scaling ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Reverse scoring was used when appropriate, with higher values indicating a more positive outcome.

Additionally, there were items assessing participants' current level of community involvement and volunteer activity.

Procedure

Our intervention, the "Practical Leadership Course," took place in the Sîngerei town library. Participants self-selected, responding to flyers and

announcements posted in Sîngerei in the schools, at the discotec, the bar, and at the one Internet cafe. A one-page application was required, however, all who applied were selected. There were no formal incentives for completing this program, but youth were alerted to the fact that through this course, they would have opportunities to meet with and interact with other youth in the community.

The group met once a week on Sundays. The first time the group met, introductions were made and a Youth Development Questionnaire was administered. On each subsequent Sunday the group met and went through one session/skill within the course. No technology was involved in the teaching, and all course materials for lessons and demonstrations were common objects, to keep the cost of the course down. At the end of every session there was time for feedback and evaluation. Methods for collecting feedback included "vote with your feet," "highs and lows" and "If I could change one thing, I would...". Because of the cost, and lack of access to a printer or copy machine, written evaluations were kept to a minimum.

Facilitators took the feedback into consideration when planning future sessions, and re-covered topics that were not fully grasped by participants. Homework assignments required the students to go out into their community between classes. Examples of homework assignments include interviewing their neighbors about community problems, and making a map of the best parts of their community. The intervention was implemented in four months, from May to September, and overlapped with the academic year by one week on both sides of the summer. Two Sundays were skipped for cultural and religious observations. The sessions ran from 9am to 1pm; lunch was provided for students. Attrition occurred between the first and second sessions (3 students never returned; an attrition rate of 7.9%). No formal follow up was done to see why students dropped out of the course; informal discussions led us to believe that household obligations, religious observances, and distance traveled were all factors in attrition. Attendance was mandatory at nine out of ten sessions in order to be included in this study.

Community-based projects, the practical application of the coursework, were implemented starting with the 6th session of the Leadership Course, and extended, in some cases, up to two weeks beyond the course. The Youth Development Questionnaire was given a second time (post-test) to the entire group on the day of their graduation ceremony, which took place at the beginning of the school year, after the completion of both the course and the community-

based projects. Also, an overall evaluation of the program (qualitative) was administered on the last day of the course, giving students a chance to critique the classes and techniques, and make suggestions for the future.

The Youth Development Questionnaire was given a third time (follow-up) to participants one year after completing the "Practical Leadership Course" to determine if changes to beliefs and behaviors were sustained.

Results

Paired samples t tests were conducted to evaluate the following hypotheses: after engaging in leadership training, Moldovan youth (n = 35) would 1) view themselves as more capable leaders, 2) have higher levels of perceived self-efficacy, 3) hold more positive beliefs about the future of their community, and 4) hold more positive views about the future of their country.

After completing the "Practical Leadership Course," students rated their own leadership abilities significantly higher, $t(34) = 2.11$, $p < .05$, and experienced a significant increase in perceived self-efficacy, which was operationally defined as "belief in my own ability to make change locally," $t(34) = 3.01$, $p < .01$. While there was a slight positive change in the average belief about the future of the community, it did not represent a statistically significant, nor a meaningful, change. Neither was there a noticeable change in participants' attitudes towards the future of Moldova as a whole.

Table 2.
Results from the Youth Development Questionnaire, three separate administrations.

	Pre	Post	Follow Up
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Self Assessed Leadership Abilities	2.5 (3.5)	4.1 (2.8)	4.4 (3.1)
Perception of Ability to Affect Change	2.6 (2.9)	4.7 (3.2)	4.8 (2.8)
Positive Beliefs about the Future of my Community	2.8 (1.2)	3.0 (2.5)	3.0 (1.3)
Positive Beliefs about the Future of Moldova	2.5 (1.4)	2.4 (1.6)	2.2 (1.8)

A follow up survey one year later (n = 28) showed that graduates of the Leadership Class reported a high level of community involvement (78% self reported that they spent 3-9 hours on average, per week, involved in community activities). Pre-intervention, only one of the students reported spending any time engaged in "community activities or volunteering." A McNemar test was run to assess the significance of these changes in volunteering habits, X2 = 20.05, p<.01.

Of the 78% who now reported being active in their community, 100% acknowledged that their community involvement was mainly through the newly created Youth Leadership Council, discussed in detail as a "real world result" of the leadership course below. Sixty-seven percent of course graduates surveyed indicated that they had recruited more youth (that had not graduated from the class) to help with their community work. Additionally, one year later, 34% of students (12 individuals) who completed the class volunteered to come back and help run the second iteration of the "Practical Leadership Course."

In general, the findings supported our hypothesis that youth could obtain essential, community-based leadership competencies through the "Practical Leadership Course," and that these competencies would enhance their perceived self-efficacy/ability to affect change locally. However, the experience was not strong enough to alter their attitudes regarding the future of their community or country. Further, the competencies taught in the intervention acted to enable and encourage higher levels of community involvement on the part of the youth.

Discussion

After completing our "Practical Leadership Course" and implementing their own community-based projects, students felt strongly that they could have a positive influence on their communities, knew specific ways in which they could make a difference, and were actively working to make that happen. Our results demonstrate that development of leadership skills, coupled with opportunities to engage in community activities, can positively influence youth's self-perceptions. This is beneficial as increased participation in community activities not only leads to more informed citizens, higher levels of social capital, and better communities, but actually helps those doing the volunteering themselves as well (Kaye, 2001). Additionally, previous research has found that skills, knowledge and attitudes developed within youth development programs like the "Practical Leadership Course" will continue to influence the youth's lives as stronger attitudes and

beliefs will develop only over time with "on-going learning and practice" (Holdsworth et al., 2005).

Although participation in the "Practical Leadership Course" led to improved self efficacy, it did not significantly increase the participants' views on the future of their community or country. It was our hope that increased self-efficacy would translate into the belief that an individual can shape his/her future in a positive way. However, it seems like the intervention, although powerful, was not strong enough to influence commonly held cultural beliefs (e.g. Moldova will never change), a shared sense of learned-helplessness, or perceptions as to how bad the state of things in the country actually was. Looking at these results, we found an interesting trend. In response to the question "Can you see your future as an adult in Moldova?," more participants answered in a negative manner after completing the leadership course. Our interpretation of this result is that youth, now empowered and active, believe that they do not fit into the current structure of Moldova's society, one that does not value activism nor citizen participation beyond the act of voting (King, 2000).

The path that our intervention took: providing youth with a safe space and the tools to develop the skills they need to become active citizens, fits into an already established framework which demonstrates that marginalized or disenfranchised populations can be made to be and feel essential to society if they are provided with support to do so (Ersing, 2008). The "small wins" approach we took with youth, supporting them as they completed manageable tasks that bettered their communities (the community-based projects) allowed the youth to succeed, as well as gave the surrounding community a reason to start recognizing the youth's potential, and viewing them as assets. One of the biggest challenges we had during this project was community-buy in; while they youth who participated were on board, their parents, and other community members constantly questioned the value of the course, and interrupted community-based homework assignments to see what they were about. Participants handled the situation well, patiently explaining the course and its purpose, over and over, to the citizens of the community who were slower to recognize its merit, and were not used to seeing this type of leadership activities.

Besides the changes in perceived self-efficacy listed in the results section, this project created several tangible by-products, worth discussing here. These "real world results" including the development of a "Local Youth Council" and the implementation of a "Training for Facilitators," were unplanned by facilitators at the beginning of the course, and reflect

the extent to which youth participants were energized to create positive community change throughout the intervention. One could argue that these participant-initiated "real world results" underscore a limitation of the course itself: we focused on developing the skills and competencies of each individual youth, and did nothing to change the environment in which the youth lived. We energized them and encouraged them to participate in local government, but failed to attempt any ecological level changes that would have allowed the youth a place to utilize their skills in the real world. Those in power in the town of Sîngerei viewed the youth's enthusiasm to help suspiciously, and an ageist attitude prevailed. Therefore, graduates of the course acting as change agents, having been initially barred from formal systems within the town, opted to create their own spaces to use their newly acquired skills.

Local Youth Council

After participation in the first "Practical Leadership Course" in Sîngerei, twenty of the thirty-five graduates formed a "local youth council" with the goal of representing and organizing the youth of their town. They recruited other youth who had not completed the course to join in the council as well. The youth council, now in its third year of existence, uses both advocacy and volunteering to raise the profile of social issues in their community and to attempt to change the predominant apathetic attitude of their parents' generation.

Our follow up survey showed that one year after participants graduated from the Practical Leadership Class, youth continued to be involved in a meaningful way in their communities. A large majority of the graduates of our Leadership Class (78%) were now volunteering, on average, 3 - 9 hours per week as opposed to the pre-intervention average of 0-2 hours per month; the majority of those hours reflect activities under the guise of the Local Youth Council.

Further, youth demonstrated that they had incorporated ideas from the course content through the type of work their Youth Council was focused on, one year later: reaching across sectors for collaboration, energizing others, and finding resources in their community. Students were now participating in higher level, issue-driven work (e.g. anti-littering campaigns) as opposed to surface level activities (e.g., neighborhood clean-ups, collecting toys for handicapped children) typical of new volunteers, which shows a well developed understanding of the principles of advocacy and community change.

Training for Facilitators

As a result of this sustained and enthusiastic community involvement and leadership on the part of the youth, a "Training for Facilitators" Course was designed to teach interested course graduates how to run the future sessions of the "Practical Leadership Course." In this training course, session topics were covered in more detail with deeper theoretical backgrounds, and logistical planning and organizing were taught as well. Twelve students (graduates of the leadership course) elected to go through this training in its first implementation. This training course has the goal of making the "Practical Leadership Course" sustainable by ensuring it has a body of trained and competent facilitators and providing new participants with actual, accessible examples of youth community leaders. Its effectiveness has yet to be evaluated, however, students who are past-graduates of the leadership course and who completed the "Training for Facilitators" Course are now essential in the process of putting on the "Practical Leadership Course," which is currently in its fourth iteration.

Conclusion

These results, however specific to the Moldovan village we worked in, allow us to draw some conclusions about the benefits of participatory-based positive youth development. Our original intentions in this community were to increase youth involvement and volunteering. Although many national and international efforts in Moldova are focused on strengthening its democracy, few take the competency building approach, and fewer focus on youth — citizens who are not even eligible to vote yet. By taking a competency development approach and providing opportunities to directly apply their skills, the "Practical Leadership Course" allowed participants to develop the confidence and ability to not only become engaged in community efforts, but to initiate their own. Recognizing youth as resources, with unique perspectives and assets, will aid community transformation efforts. Helping people work towards solutions for their own problems ensures that positive development takes place, regardless of the immediate progress being made.

Limitations

Having tailored our intervention for rural Moldovan youth, we cannot generalize these findings to other populations, nor can we assert that our model will work in other communities. However, others doing similar community work may benefit from our study and the lessons we learned about how to make youth participation work on a practical level.

Our intervention, the ten sessions of the leadership class including youth led community-based projects, is currently being recreated in three different places across Moldova: one small city, one village, and again in Sîngerei (under the leadership of past-graduates). While the implementers will be different (we think it is important for the implementers to be in the community they are serving the entire ten week project, because a lot of the learning and student support happens outside the class period, and relationships with local public authorities are of the utmost importance), effort went into ensuring that the structure of the program would remain similar. Before starting round two of this intervention, implementers met together to share materials, talk about the results of the course, and talk to youth who had completed it already. The theme of the discussion was "lessons learned," having dual aims of insuring the intervention was successfully replicated and allowing the facilitators to actively make improvements and adaptations to the course, according to the youth feedback we had gathered, as well as the mood of their specific town.

Future Research

The "Practical Leadership Course" was an innovative, community-driven project aimed at increasing the leadership abilities and practices of youth in a small town in Moldova. Now that it has been piloted, and the original "graduates" are running the course for a new generation of students, the timing is right for a more controlled study of the effectiveness of this intervention.

Additionally, future studies with this population could examine the emergence of the idea that newly empowered youth report that they cannot see their future, as adults, in Moldova. Research questions could look at what changes youth believe need to happen in order for them to be happy living and working in Moldova. The gap between the possibilities that exist for them and the possibilities that youth desire needs to be explored in a more detailed manner. This is especially crucial if Moldova wants to end its exodus, and start retaining its youth as they age into adulthood.

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Appendix A.
Example outline for "Practical Leadership Course" sessions.

Session 3: Teamwork, Group Work, and Team Building		
Time	**Topic/Activity**	**Materials/Setting**
9am – 9:15 am	Warm Up: Team Number Punch Team-building activity that works on communication, coordination, and cooperation.	Outside – on library lawn 2 pieces of rope, single pieces of paper with the numbers from 1-30 written on each (one number per sheet of paper). Two sets of numbers. Divide students into two groups
9:15 – 9:45 am	Facilitated Brainstorm: What makes a good teammate?	Chalkboard/Chalk Divide students into three groups for conversations
9:45 – 10:00 am	Self Reflection: What "teams" or "groups" am I part of? What have my roles been? Are certain groups/teams easier to work with?	Allow students to spread out into individual spaces.
10:00 – 10:30 am	Student Report Back: Sharing personal insights	Group students into pairs, start with one-on-one reporting. Then add groups of pairs together, so groups of four share, and so on, so that everyone becomes involved in the conversation. Facilitators roam room.
10:30 – 10:45 am	Snack Break	
10:45 – 11:10 am	Activity: "Pen Chute" Groups have to transport a pen using just sheets of paper, across a field. Before the game starts, instruct one student from each team to be "uncooperative" in achieving the team's goals. Debrief this at the end.	Sheets of plain paper (one for each person), 2 pens Divide students into two or three groups, depending on number of participants.
11:10am – 11:35	Different Hats: Discuss the different roles individuals can play within a group/team. Examples include leader, facilitator, time-keeper, task-manager, devil's advocate, optimist, pessimist. Provide students with sample scenarios and allow them to play/act them out, rotating roles with each scenario.	Hats/Head Pieces as props (not necessary, but fun) Divide students into three small groups; one facilitator per group
11:35 – 12:15	Discussion: Benefits/Drawbacks to Group Work	Large Group Together Blackboard/Chalk
12:15 – 12:30	Snack Break	
12:30 – 12:45	Team-Building: The Blind Jedi Students take turns being the "Jedi" – teams have to direct blindfolded Jedi to find his/her weapon and successfully "mark" the other team's Jedi.	Two "soft" sticks (nerf-like) Two cloths that can be used as blindfolds Outside – large field
12:45 – 1pm	Evaluation: Best, Worst, Most Useful Students share their evaluations of the course/lessons for the day.	Allow students to stand in large circle