Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect with Youth: Youth Relationship Educators' Perceptions of Success During the Coronavirus Pandemic

By

Lindsey Almond

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
August 6, 2022

Keywords: andragogy, coronavirus pandemic, interpretive grounded theory, online, success, youth relationship education

Approved by

Silvia Vilches, Chair, Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science
Francesca Adler-Baeder, Professor of Human Development and Family Science
Elif Dede Yildirim, Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Science
Mallory Lucier-Greer, Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Science

Abstract

This study considered the experiences of youth-focused relationship educators as they transitioned to online education due to the coronavirus pandemic. The aim was to understand the process and impact of these experiences on educators' determination of success when transitioning online. Youth relationship education (YRE) programs are generally considered prevention programs aimed at providing youth with knowledge and skills to support healthy romantic relationships both now and in the future. YRE has previously been provided mainly through in-person delivery modalities; however, the coronavirus pandemic was an unprecedented historical event that led to a drastic shift in programming practice. Research is scarce on relationship educators' perceptions of their teaching and implementation, but especially so during a time of unpredictability and quick changes in order to continue conducting YRE programming. Through an interpretive grounded theory approach, focus groups and interviews were conducted with 12 diverse community-based youth relationship educators who had implemented programming in-person and online. The analysis revealed a core grounded theory of Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect, showing the process and elements of arriving at the determination of success for YRE educators. Three categories, made up of sub-categories and codes, encompass the core grounded theory category. These categories include Choosing to Continue, Building and Maintaining Connections, and Moving Forward for Success. From across the categories within the findings, five influential topics to consider about the way YRE educators perceive success were found: (i.) connecting with youth to make an impact, (ii.) having supportive partnerships through which to reinforce the process of meaningfully connecting, (iii.) adapting to promote inclusivity, (iv.) getting to know youth on a deeper level to encourage connections and engagement, and (v.) reconsidering what success is through connections and

engagement. YRE educators in this study perceive themselves as being able to make real, meaningful changes in their youths' lives through their work. Implications based on the findings from this work are indicated through practice and future research.

Acknowledgements

In this great achievement, I would like to thank and acknowledge those who have supported me throughout my doctoral studies. First to my family, thank you for the continuous encouragement and support as I moved states away to pursue this opportunity. Your love, compassion, and constant confidence in my abilities to accomplish this work reinforced my conviction in myself. I truly would not have been able to accomplish all that I have without your support, and I will be forever grateful for your instilment in me that I can do hard things if only I try. To the friends who have experienced this journey with me, I appreciate the sanity you helped me sustain as we worked together to navigate this experience; your friendship has made this challenging process enjoyable.

To my academic family, I am in awe of the person you have helped me develop into both personally and professionally. To my committee members, Dr. Francesca Adler-Baeder, Dr. Elif Dede Yildirim, and Dr. Mallory Lucier-Greer, thank you for offering your time and expertise to provide feedback and insight so that this project may flourish. Specifically, to Dr. Francesca Adler-Bader, thank you for providing me the opportunity to become a youth relationship educator as part of my graduate assistantship through the Alabama Youth Relationship Education (AYRE) project; this work has sparked a passion in me that I will be forever appreciative of. Throughout my tenure at Auburn, you have helped guide and encourage me to acquire new skills and opportunities to propel me forward. Your dedication to me these past four years has prepared me for my future, and for that I am infinitely thankful. To my major professor Dr. Silvia Vilches, I initially sought you out due to your expertise in qualitative research and had no idea the path it would lead me down. You have guided me through two rigorous studies and have always made me feel supported to accomplish challenging tasks. You have fostered a love for qualitative work

in me and empowered me to establish my stance as a researcher. Your patience with me through the endless emails, meetings, and phone calls during this process were helpful in ways that I cannot begin to describe. Thank you for being an incredible mentor and major professor, for believing in me, and for never letting me lose faith in what I could accomplish.

Lastly, thank you to the individuals and organizations without whom this study would not be possible. Funding for this study was graciously supported by Dr. Francesca Adler-Baeder, the College of Human Sciences at Auburn University, and Kappa Omicron Nu Honors Society. The Dibble Institute not only supported me in the recruitment of study participants but also offered me the opportunity to extend my work as a youth relationship educator into a national platform as a Master Trainer. The skills I have gained and the people who I have met through their willingness to take a chance on me is one I will not soon forget. I'm also appreciative for the youth relationship educators who shared their stories and experiences with me. Finally, to all those who have played a role in my life these past four years, I cherish the relationships we have built and look forward to this next chapter of life.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter I - Introduction

Youth relationship education (YRE) is a sector of relationship education (RE) that provides adolescents with relationship knowledge and skills during a pertinent developmental time. YRE has previously been provided mainly through face-to-face delivery modalities; however, the coronavirus pandemic initiated an unprecedented historical event, causing many sectors of business and ways of life to unpredictably alter and adapt. During the coronavirus pandemic, many educators and program managers of YRE faced the task of quickly altering their programming or risk a halt to their YRE implementation altogether. Now, well into the coronavirus pandemic, researchers and practitioners have seen many relationship educators respond with resilience. However, little is understood about the experiences of YRE educators during this tumultuous time. Educators are sometimes referred to as facilitators within family life education; in this paper, I use the terms interchangeably but will mainly use the term educator to refer to any individual who teaches youth relationship education (YRE). Understanding YRE educators' experiences during this constantly evolving time during the coronavirus pandemic will help inform practitioners and researchers as they seek to advance the future of YRE. Therefore, within this study, my aim was to uncover the experiences of youth-focused relationship educators from their perspectives as they transitioned into online teaching, and to develop a grounded theory of YRE educators' determination of successfully transitioning into online teaching at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. This grounded theory informs processes for future YRE online training and implementation strategies.

Relationship Education

Relationship education programs are prevention and intervention programs aimed at providing knowledge and skills pertaining to healthy romantic relationships (Janssens et al.,

2020; Markman & Rhoades, 2012; Simpson et al., 2018). RE programs may include, but are not limited to, topics pertaining to love, identity, emotion regulation, co-parenting, intimate partner violence, communication, and conflict management (Cowan & Cowan, 2014; Futris et al., 2017; Hawkins et al., 2012). Though programs vary and are offered to both couples and individuals, some previous RE programs have focused on improving childhood outcomes through the spillover of individual and relational outcomes from couple-focused RE (CRE) programs (Hawkins, 2018). Specifically, engaged and newly married couples were the traditional populations to receive RE (Markman & Rhoades, 2012), with the public likely most familiar with the idea of pre-marital relationship courses. Within the past two decades, RE programs have extended their targeted audience to include singles, unmarried couples, LGBTQ+ individuals and couples, incarcerated populations, refugees, separated or divorced individuals, and youth (Bradford et al., 2012; Markman & Rhoades, 2012; Stanley et al., 2020). Numerous research shows the benefits of RE with diverse populations (e.g., Adler-Baeder et al., 2010; Bradford et al., 2014; Kerpelman et al., 2009; Stanley et al., 2020), providing the opportunity not only for those in traditional, married, heterosexual relationships to learn how to create and sustain healthy romantic relationships, but also those outside of what was considered a traditional, married couple.

Though knowledge and empirical literature surrounding YRE are growing, fewer studies have focused on the effects and experiences of YRE compared to adult focused RE (Hawkins, 2018; McElwain et al., 2017). Youth in the US today receive little to no information from home or schools pertaining to their romantic relationships outside of sexual education (Simpson et al., 2018). We know that youth engage in different types of romantic relationships that can exhibit trust, commitment, love, and intimacy (McElwain et al., 2017). However, many have idealistic

views of what a relationship should be and may not possess the knowledge and skills necessary for cultivating healthy, lasting relationships (McElwain et al., 2017). Relationship education can help modify unrealistic views that have been shown to decrease relational success and happiness (Simpson et al., 2018). Romantic relationships of youth have also been shown to influence academic achievement, self-esteem, depression, anxiety, career plans, identity formation, and suicide ideation (McElwain et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2018). Youth RE is similar to adult RE in that it aims to provide knowledge and skills to form healthy romantic relationships; however, an additional focus with this population is on preparation and preventative measures before dating initiation (Simpson et al., 2018). Adolescents undergo a process of identity development as they face numerous life choices and begin to focus on themselves; this sense of identity grows and develops through relationships and interactions with others (Verhoeven et al., 2019). The patterns and habits youth form in their early relationships are likely to influence the patterns and outcomes of their adult relationships (McElwain et al., 2017). Therefore, this is an opportune developmental period for interventive and preventive relationship education (RE) programming.

Youth Relationship Education

Similar to adult RE, YRE provides information pertaining to communication skills and patterns, intimate partner violence, conflict management, emotional regulation, cohabitation, and sexual decision making (Futris et al., 2017; Janssens et al., 2020; McElwain et al., 2017; Scott & Karberg, 2015; Simpson et al., 2018). Some YRE programs also include additional information on healthy approaches to relationship separation, bullying, financial responsibility, career planning, and substance use (McElwain et al., 2017; Savasuk-Luxton et al., 2018; Scott & Karberg, 2015). The implementation and evaluation of YRE programs has increased in recent years as funding has grown (McElwain et al., 2017). Specifically, federal funding provided

through Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) grants served 66,526 youth during the 2015-2020 grant cycle (Avellar et al., 2021). HMRE grantees serve a diverse set of youth regarding gender, race, ethnicity, and geographic location. YRE programs also reach youth through diverse nonprofit, for-profit, and higher education organizations that receive federal funding for delivery in school or community-based settings (McElwain et al., 2017; Scott & Karberg, 2015).

Delivery of RE, CRE, and YRE can include face-to-face (e.g., classroom setting) or online modalities, either synchronous or asynchronous programs (e.g., prerecorded videos, web-programs, via live video streaming) (Ballard, 2020; McAllister et al., 2012). RE delivered through online modalities was beginning to gain attention and popularity before the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 (Simpson et al., 2018). While each modality has its own best practices, providing engaging activities and allocating time to practice skills, regardless of modality, helps achieve program effectiveness (Ballard, 2020). Though I later discuss these practices in the context of online education and facilitation, effectiveness of programs has been shown to increase when active learning, or learning through the process of doing, is incorporated through methods such as role playing, skills-based activities, and interactive discussions (Ballard, 2020; Jing et al., 2013). With the unexpected transition into online YRE facilitation due to the coronavirus pandemic, researchers and practitioners know very little about how youth relationship educators make decisions to incorporate active learning elements to promote successful program delivery and student engagement in an online setting. Research suggests though, that regardless of delivery modality, successful RE programs use a strengths-based approach where participants' knowledge, skills, and abilities are recognized and built on as participants contribute to their own learning (Ballard, 2020).

Youth relationships are diverse and can include varying levels of intimacy, affection, commitment, and infatuation or love. Researchers agree that youth romantic relationships are not inconsequential, but instead can have both positive and/or negative effects on well-being, development, and future relationships (Hawkins, 2018; McElwain et al., 2017). Owing to these effects, researchers and practitioners recognize the importance of YRE as a way to help support youth in relational and familial stability later in life (Hawkins, 2017; Simpson et al., 2018). However, Hawkins (2018) suggests that unlike previous generations, society is not as intimately involved in the romantic lives of youth today. In a survey of 18- to 25-year-olds, Weissbourd and colleagues (2017) found 70% of youth reported a desire to have received more information from parents on the emotional component of relationships, and 65% reported wanting schools to provide more information on romantic relationships. Hawkins (2018) has argued that increased attention on youth within RE programming and research will not only aid youth in understanding and developing healthy romantic relationships but will lead to future success and stability well into adulthood. Previous research has found youth to have unrealistic and idealistic expectations for relationships partnered with a lack of relationship knowledge and skills (McElwain et al., 2017) that can create challenges in establishing healthy relationships and lead to lower future relationship quality (Simpson et al., 2018).

Adolescence is an applicable time to teach RE, as the information may prevent development of negative relational patterns, correct idealistic expectations, and promote thoughtful decision-making (Hawkins, 2018; McElwain et al., 2017). During middle and high school years, many youth begin dating and forming romantic bonds, making it an ideal time for YRE programming (Adler-Baeder et al., 2007). However, one precise developmentally and socially optimal time for YRE has not been determined. Some research suggests emerging

adulthood, compared to adolescence, may be ideal for YRE as dating relationships can be even more salient for emerging adults, prompting them to be more invested in the educational programming (Simpson et al., 2018). Futris et al. (2017) argue providing YRE in middle school could improve emotional, social, physical, and academic development in youth. Regardless of adolescence or emerging adulthood, Ballard (2020) considers any developmental period where romantic relationship knowledge and skills can discourage maladaptive romantic patterns to be an optimal time for relationship education.

Further research has addressed this influence of romantic relationships on youth well-being, stating that relationship experiences can spillover into academic achievement, career goals, and physical health (McElwain et al., 2017). When youth experience positive, high quality romantic relationships, they are likely to experience later high quality, healthy relationships; conversely, low quality romantic relationships are correlated with higher incidences of adverse outcomes such as depression, intimate partner violence (IPV), sexually transmitted infections (STI), and unplanned pregnancy (Collins et al., 2009; Hawkins, 2018; McElwain et al., 2017). Research notes that youth are not exempt from dangerous relational conflict; in fact, 70% of youth have reported experiencing some form of IPV, with LGBTQ+ youth being more susceptible to IPV (Hawkins, 2018; Taylor & Mumford, 2016). Though conflict in relationships is normal, many youth view it as negative because they do not know and utilize healthy coping and conflict management skills (Adler-Baeder et al., 2007). Many YRE curricula are designed to include conflict management and communication skills which may reduce the likelihood of conflict escalating into violence, which negatively impacts well-being. YRE also helps to build healthy relationship knowledge and skills, which can not only lead to more fulfilling adult

relationships (Collins et al., 2009; Hawkins, 2018), but can also increase youths' self-worth, confidence, competence, and relational skills (Adler-Baeder et al., 2007; Futris et al., 2017).

Youth Relationship Education Outcomes and Effectiveness

Youth relationship education programs have shown desired curriculum outcomes in romantic relationship knowledge, attitudes, and skills (McElwain et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2018). Meta-analytic results show an increase in relationship skills and positive relational attitudes pre-to-post YRE program (Simpson et al., 2018). Adler-Baeder et al. (2007) showed that immediately post-program high school students participating in YRE, compared to those in a control group, significantly increased five different types of relationship knowledge (i.e., attraction/mature love, expectations and behaviors, communication skills, smart dating strategies, and unhealthy relationships). Additional meta-analytic results have found small to medium effects for improved outcomes in communication, conflict management skills, decreased IPV, and increased resistance to peer pressure (Hawkins, 2018; McElwain et al., 2017). While these results are promising, less is known about result longevity. Barbee et al. (2016) found YRE participants to have statistically significantly sustained results 6 months post-program with youth less likely to have had sex, have fewer sexual partners, and less likely to have become pregnant compared to a control group. At 1-year post-program, Kerpelman et al. (2009) found youth to have more realistic expectations and increased conflict management skills. However, some early meta-analytic results suggest some YRE effects may fade over time (McElwain et al., 2017). Providing YRE in early adolescence and offering booster sessions in the period of later adolescence to emerging adulthood may make it possible to extend YRE results.

Popular Evidence-Based and Research-Based Youth Relationship Education Curricula. When reviewing individual YRE programs and evaluations, some, though not all,

YRE programs are evidence-based. Evidence-based programs are rooted in research, have been evaluated with control groups, and have shown desired participant outcomes (Puddy & Wilkins, 2011). Other programs may be research-based or -informed, meaning they were created based on empirical research but have not been sufficiently evaluated to show desired program outcomes when compared with a control group (Puddy & Wilkins, 2011). For YRE programs funded through the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), some of the most common curricula include The Prevention and Relationship Education Program (PREP)™, Within Our/My Reach™, How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette)™, Connections™, Love Notes™, and Relationship Smarts™ (Scott et al., 2017).

PREP: Within Our/My Reach™. Within My Reach is an adaptation of PREP (The Prevention and Relationship Education Program) for individuals both currently in and not in a romantic relationship (Stanley et al., 2006). Within Our/My Reach covers topics related to partner selection, intimacy, emotional and physical safety, commitment, conflict management, communication, and emotion regulation (Stanley et al., 2006). Though no research has been conducted to my knowledge on the Within Our/My Reach program with a youth population, a randomized control trial with adult couples shows that curriculum participants, compared to the control group, reported desired changes 12-months post-program for increased relationship happiness, increased warmth and support from their partner as reported by women, increased positive communication skills, decreased negative behaviors and emotions, decreased psychological abuse, and decreased psychological distress in women (Rhoades, 2015).

How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk or Jerkette™. How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette), also referred to as P.I.C.K. (Premarital, Interpersonal, Choices, and Knowledge), is a research-based relationship education program focused on five components of relationships that are said

to predict the future with that partner (knowledge of the partner, trust, reliance, commitment, and intimacy (Van Epp, 2010). Only one study, to the best of my knowledge, has assessed this program with youth; Brower et al. (2012) found participants' relationship knowledge on listening, problem solving, conflict management, and quality time increased post-program.

Connections ™. Connections is a relationship education program for youth that addresses relationship problems, individual differences, decision making, communication, and a focus on marriage (Kamper, 1996). Within rural Midwest high schools, Gardner (2001) found youth who participated in the Connections curriculum, compared to youth in the control group, reported better conflict management, less favorable views on divorce, and more favorable views on marital counseling and relationship education. Gardner et al. (2004) also found statistically significant changes post-program for youth program participants, compared to control participants, with results indicating increased relationship knowledge, decreased violence, increased parent-child communication, increased positive attitudes towards marriage, and increased attitudes towards seeking marital counseling or education.

Love Notes™. Love Notes is an evidence-based program that is geared toward older youth aged 14-24 years, and is focused on healthy relationships, intimate partner violence, and improved impulse control (Pearson, 2020). As discussed above, Barbee et al. (2016) assessed Love Notes in a randomized control trial focused on intervention and prevention of risky sexual behavior and found youth receiving Love Notes, as compared to the control group, were less likely to have ever had sex, more likely to use birth control, and reported fewer sexual partners at 6 months post-program.

Relationship Smarts™. Relationship Smarts Plus 4.0 is an evidence-based program, with similar content and activities as Love Notes, but targeted to younger youth (12-16 years), which

addresses topics of intimate partner violence, pregnancy prevention, sexual decision making, youth development, healthy relationships, and goal attainment (Pearson, 2004/2007/2013/2018). Through a quasi-experimental design, Kerpelman et al. (2009) conducted seminal research on the effectiveness of Relationship Smarts through state-wide high school treatment and control groups. Immediately post-program, when compared to the control group, the students receiving Relationship Smarts decreased unrealistic relationship beliefs, increased perceptions of conflict management, increased in the opinion that it is important to have a supportive partner, and increased in the possibility of seeking additional relationship education or counseling (Kerpelman et al., 2009). Expanding on this work, Ma et al. (2014) conducted an additional state-wide evaluation with a treatment-control group design and found youth receiving the curriculum increased in their standards that their partner should be warm, trustworthy, and loyal compared to youth who did not receive the curriculum. Likewise, female youth who participated in Relationship Smarts were less likely to report acceptance of dating violence compared to a control group (Savasuk-Luxton et al., 2018).

Online Relationship Education

The internet has become an increasingly popular tool for family life education (FLE), including RE (Ballard, 2020; Hughes et al., 2012). Online methods allow for easier access to FLE materials and program delivery. Within RE, a challenge is encouraging individuals or couples to seek RE programs who either have not sought services in the past or are not yet experiencing relationship challenges (Markman & Rhoades, 2012). This is especially true for youth who may not currently be in serious romantic relationships or may not recognize problems within a relationship. With the rising attention to accessible RE/YRE delivery modalities, online programming can be an innovative delivery method. In a review of best practices in FLE, Ballard

(2020) found online approaches (e.g., internet, smartphone, social media, video learning) have been shown to increase engagement, allow for easier access, and reduce barriers to RE programming or information. However, before the coronavirus pandemic, transitioning face-to-face YRE programs to online delivery while maintaining fidelity and desirable outcomes was thought to be an intricate and long-term process with adaptions needed over time (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

Transitioning to online delivery may include necessary modifications to meet participants' strengths, needs, challenges, and experiences (Ballard, 2020). Program adaptation will likely be most successful if the program is evidence-based or research-based so that the information and practices are grounded in research, and employs engaging, interactive approaches to teaching, which may incorporate active and experiential learning (Adler-Baeder et al., 2007; Hughes et al., 2012; Janssens et al., 2020). Referencing child and youth prevention programs, Durlak and DuPre (2008) suggested program creation and adaptation occurs in three phases: dissemination, adoption, and sustainability. Dissemination consists of informing the community about the presence and value of the program; adoption is whether the community or a sub-group accepts the program; and sustainability involves the maintenance of the program over time (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Cultural relevance and participant engagement may be areas in which modifications occur and could be easily adapted for online delivery, though educators should also maintain fidelity to program objectives (Ballard, 2020). Approaches suggested by educational researchers for online content delivery and audience engagement, need further research within YRE (Hughes et al., 2012). For example, rather than utilizing passive learning techniques such as reading material, educators can engross participants in learning through pictures, videos, audio, discussion, activities, and moments of self-reflection (Morgan, 2020;

Hughes et al., 2012). However, creating interactive methods of program delivery is only one component of participant engagement. Another element of modality commonly mentioned within both academia and RE programming, later expanded upon within this paper, is the development of a classroom community, which research suggests is influenced by the educator (Foreman et al., 2021).

Reports are indicating that individuals are increasingly turning to the internet for relationship advice (Hubler & Burr, 2019), and as the coronavirus pandemic has led practitioners to initiate a surge of online YRE programming, this presents a unique opportunity to advance YRE to reach larger audiences and increase accessibility. Due to the increased importance and usefulness of online YRE, it is important that researchers know how RE educators perceive the transition to online implementation, as YRE and RE educators can be essential in supporting desirable program outcomes (Bradford et al., 2012; Futris et al., 2017; Higginbotham & Myler, 2010). This study aimed to understand how YRE educators perceive success when transitioning to online implementation as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. This understanding of perceived success may enhance the effectiveness of online YRE programming and subsequently, desired youth relational and individual outcomes.

Chapter II - Literature Review

In early 2020, the coronavirus pandemic prompted the closure of many schools and community-based organizations. Not only did this cause school systems to transition into online learning, but YRE educators, who sometimes deliver within school settings, quickly had to determine how to convert their current practices into online delivery or stop delivery altogether. With this transition occurring unexpectedly, it is unlikely that YRE educators had time to thoughtfully and deliberately create a plan of best action for transitioning into online teaching and learning. School systems faced similar issues, with challenges including lack of knowledge in online learning environments and technology, adaptation of materials, and increased teacher workload (Lemay et al., 2021; Morgan, 2020). The novelty of this situation leads to uncertainty concerning how YRE educators determined the most successful way to adapt program implementation, and what YRE will look like following the coronavirus pandemic. As discussed above, it should not be assumed that what works within a face-to-face learning environment will be perceived by educators as similarly successful within online education (Lemay et al., 2021). Though researchers are working to understand this transition from face-to-face to online YRE, research regarding K-12 schools and higher education may provide an initial understanding of online experiences.

Online Education and Learning

When evaluating the perceived differences between face-to-face compared to online education modalities, research has assessed some strengths and weaknesses within K-12 and higher education settings. Though YRE, K-12, and higher education settings are unlikely to all produce the same education and learning experience, YRE may glean insight from these areas of education. YRE is typically delivered to individuals aged 12 to 24, which spans middle school,

high school, and higher education settings, making it applicable to review online education and learning experiences from these academic settings. Before the initiation of the coronavirus pandemic, NAYCi (2020) found college students prefer face-to-face education because they perceive it as easier to ask questions, communicate and interact with others, achieve higher levels of learning, and perceive teachers to teach more effectively. They also found that students felt that face-to-face education promoted more effective time management and prompted consistent studying (NAYCi, 2020). Expanding on this during the coronavirus pandemic, Nambiar (2020) found that the strengths of face-to-face education included the ability to provide immediate feedback to the educator on student comprehension, and better observation of body language or non-verbal cues, making immediate teaching adaptations in support of student learning easier. Conversely, weaknesses and challenges of face-to-face education include lack of active technology use, easier detachment from learning outside of class, crowded classrooms, and insufficient focus on the individual student (NAYCi, 2020).

When examining online education both before and during the coronavirus pandemic, students reported that online education can be easily accessed and allows for interaction and flexibility (Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Nambiar, 2020; NAYCi, 2020). However, increases in student interest in course content through technology use was only mentioned pre-coronavirus pandemic (NAYCi, 2020), while less distraction from classmates, less anxiety asking questions, and the ability to watch recorded lectures later were only mentioned during the coronavirus pandemic (Nambiar, 2020). During the coronavirus pandemic, teachers noted that online education made grading and course evaluations easier, supported visual learning through videos, and permitted educators to record lessons for future use or send to students who were absent (Nambiar, 2020). However, online education generally requires more preparation time, and may

involve increased educator probing for student engagement (Nambiar, 2020; Tucker & Quintero-Ares, 2021). Other challenges or weaknesses of online education that are similar before, and during, the coronavirus pandemic include technological difficulties, learner motivation, student isolation, limited feedback, lack of interaction, decreases in student engagement, environmental distractions, and difficulty monitoring student behavior (Coomey & Stephenson, 2018; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Nambiar, 2020).

Though some research and practice-based evidence has been gathered to explore online FLE programs, online family life educator facilitation expectations have not been standardized. However, in the early 2000s, standards for online education and facilitation were published by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Higher Education Program and Policy Council (see Table 1).

Table 1

American Federation of Teachers Instructor Standards

Number	Standard
1	Maintain academic control
2	Meet special requirements of distance education
3	Design the course around the delivery method
4	Ensure students understand course requirements and what is needed to succeed
5	Support personal relationships
6	Be thoughtful about class size
7	Cover all material
8	Explore topics and instructional methods
9	Allow research opportunities for students
10	Conduct similar student assessments as is typical in-person
11	Advise students similarly as if in-person
12	Allow the instructor creativity in their course design
13	Determine what is appropriate for the balance between distance and in-person education
14	Evaluate online courses

Note. Fourteen instructor standards established by the American Federation of Teachers (2000).

Notwithstanding these standards, YRE also does not currently have standardized training, implementation, and facilitation expectations for online YRE. In 2003, the International Board of

Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction (IBSTPI) produced a report on instructor competencies for educators across delivery modalities (i.e., face-to-face, online, and blended) grouped into: professional foundations, planning and preparation, instructional methods and strategies, assessment and evaluation, and management (IBSTPI, 2003). These standards may provide scaffolding for considering FLE implementation. The lack of standardized expectations for family life educators, and specifically youth relationship educators, may reveal diverse determinations of success when transitioning to online implementation from individual educators.

Educator Perception of Online Teaching

Educators' perceptions and previous experience with online teaching or learning can influence their approaches to teaching and program delivery (Lemay et al., 2021). Two months after the start of the coronavirus pandemic, Lemay et al. (2021) found, for example, that primary school teachers' perceptions impact their teaching approaches. Some perceptions that influence educators' approaches to online teaching within and outside of the contextual coronavirus pandemic, include perceptions of support, teaching control, workload, appropriateness of class size, self-efficacy or proficiency, and student willingness (Gonzalez, 2012; Lemay et al., 2021). Regardless of the potential influence of educators' perceptions, pre-coronavirus pandemic research has mainly focused on students' perceptions (Gurley, 2018). Nambiar (2020) suggests considering both student and educator perceptions when designing, adapting, and evaluating online courses. More research and knowledge are needed, especially within YRE, on educators' perceptions.

Though teachers reported online education was convenient during the coronavirus pandemic, 86.9% of college educators preferred face-to-face teaching in one study (Nambiar,

2020). Although educators may prefer face-to-face teaching, in April 2020 after the coronavirus pandemic began, Catalano et al. (2021) found primary school educators were not opposed to online teaching and actually reported confidence in their ability to efficaciously teach online. Researchers find perceptions of technology influence educators' online teaching through motivation, skills, knowledge, and integration (Tucker & Quintero-Ares, 2021; Walker & Kim, 2015). Family life educators with positive views of technology are more likely to effectively use technology than family life educators who hold a negative view of technology (Walker & Kim, 2015). Besser and colleagues (2020) found that students' openness to online learning helps buffer the transition that occurred due to the coronavirus pandemic, suggesting that educator openness to online learning may also ease the transition. These perceptions are important, because pre-coronavirus pandemic research shows that when educators perceive their teaching environment positively, they focus on student learning; however, when they view it negatively, they focus on themselves and information transmission (Gonzalez, 2012). Educators perceive that information transmission through lecturing is unmotivating for students, while students have a more neutral perception of lecturing on the success of their learning (Lemay et al., 2021).

Oomen-Early and Murphy (2009) found college educators' perceptions of students' technological efficacy also impacted the pre-coronavirus pandemic online teaching experience. Educators felt students were not ready for online education because of the different learning occurring online (e.g., more independent and requiring increased critical thinking) and the technological competence required by online education (Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009). Both before and within the context of the coronavirus pandemic, many educators also perceived online teaching as more time consuming, putting increased burdens and demands on them (Nambiar, 2020; Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009). Additional negative perceptions of online teaching from

educators regardless of the coronavirus pandemic include feeling that online education is less personalized, requires more conscious effort of student engagement, and needs explicit attention to constructing a community (Nambiar, 2020; Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009). Online education training and support may help educators cultivate and maintain the positive perceptions of online education found to be so impactful. Oomen-Early and Murphy (2009) state that educators who perceive themselves as well prepared and supported have increased confidence and are more willing to teach online. Researchers have established that educator perceptions of technology, online education, and perceptions of students' online efficacy are influential elements of successful online education (Gonzalez, 2012; Lemay et al., 2021; Nambiar, 2020; Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009).

Facilitation of Online Education

As previously mentioned, what works within face-to-face education should not be assumed to automatically transfer to online education, including online facilitation (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Gonzalez, 2012; Lemay et al., 2021). On the contrary, research has shown that online education and facilitation often requires different pedagogy and facilitation than face-to-face education (Gurley, 2018; Lemay et al., 2021). Morgan (2020) reasons that many educators likely taught online for the first time due to the coronavirus pandemic. When determining what influences teacher and student satisfaction with online education and facilitation during the coronavirus pandemic, Nambiar (2020) found that quality interactions between educators and students, technical support, structured classes, and educators' accommodations for students are influential. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Menchaca and Bekele (2008) found that factors such as pedagogical collaboration, organization, quality assignments, goal clarity, training, support, and technological logistics play an important role in online facilitation.

Online facilitation can range from information transmission through lecturing, to collaborative learning through communication and student engagement (Gonzalez, 2012). However, collaborative or interactive learning helps students build competence and engage in their learning (Berkel et al., 2011). To effectively create a learning environment that fosters students' comfort and feelings of safety to engage, Tanis (2020) endorses the importance of building trust, developing open communication, and allowing students a social presence to feel connected to their peers and teacher while in their online classroom. Though these factors were considered pre-coronavirus pandemic, it is likely that concepts of trust, communication, and connection translate to online education during the coronavirus pandemic. Group cohesion and comfort can predict the quality of prevention or intervention programs, like YRE, when delivered in group settings (Berkel et al., 2011). Therefore, educators should be thoughtful about planned participation to promote students' engagement and interaction. This may also aid students in decreasing feelings of loneliness or isolation, which could stem from online education prior to the coronavirus pandemic (Tanis, 2020) and may be exacerbated during the coronavirus pandemic. Educators who create a safe, engaging, collaborative environment also support a learning environment where students are more likely to develop interpersonal relationships, leading to increases in learning and engagement from both a student and educator perception (Hughes et al., 2012; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Tanis, 2020). It is likely that as educators gain more experience facilitating online, they will continue to learn and utilize varied methods of facilitation and student engagement that will make the transition into online teaching easier.

Facilitation of Youth Relationship Education

Within RE, especially YRE, researchers are still uncovering features of successful facilitation (e.g., characteristics, teaching style, time constraints, preparedness) and how they

influence implementation and participant outcomes (Futris et al., 2017). However, YRE researchers may be able to initiate a rudimentary framework based on academic settings, since facilitation within K-12 and higher education has been widely researched, with researchers having an idea of what constitutes a successful teacher and teaching methods. High school students perceive their teachers as successful in supporting learning when they assist with student personality development, assess teaching methods, communicate well, are fair, provide respect, solve problems, are encouraging, and pay attention to students (Ida, 2017). One study by Pound et al. (2017) found some indicators of a good or successful teacher when assessing sex and relationship education (SRE) educators. They established SRE educators are passionate and knowledgeable about what they teach, are comfortable within their own sexuality, are professional, confident, direct, trustworthy, non-judgmental, approachable, respectful, and treat their students as equals with autonomy. Lemay et al. (2021) suggest that researchers examine changes and approaches to learner-centered strategies, course objectives, feelings of community, course design, and technology understanding when assessing transitions to online education, as they can impact course success. An understanding of these approaches to teaching and learning may support researchers and practitioners in creating YRE training grounded in this concept of educators' determination of their success and develop trainings accordingly to support success.

Importance of the Facilitator-Participant Alliance

Previous research of CRE refers to the relationship between the facilitator, or educator, and their participant, as the facilitator-participant alliance (Bradford et al., 2012). Within CRE and relational therapy literature, a strong, positive, supportive, and trusting relationship between the facilitator-participant/therapist-client is indicative of desired changes in participant outcomes (Bradford et al., 2012; Ketring et al., 2017). Within FLE, building relationships and connecting

with participants is key for effective teaching (Ballard, 2020; Bradford et al., 2012); this is especially true in an online setting (Besser et al., 2020). Futris et al. (2017) indicate RE experiences vary with participant needs, location, program specifics, and facilitator preferences. Within YRE, it is likely that the online context matters and the interaction between the environment and educator, here referred to as the facilitator, is likely to alter student and educator experiences.

Facilitator characteristics may promote the likelihood of creating a positive facilitator-participant alliance. It is also likely that the relatability of the facilitator is important to the youths' YRE experience (e.g., engagement, enjoyment, receptivity) (Futris et al., 2017). Though characteristics and traits specific to YRE educators, which contribute to an effective or successful facilitator, are not fully understood, Higginbotham and Myler (2010) recommend beneficial characteristics of an adult couple relationship education (CRE) educator can include cultural awareness, knowledge, care, optimism, respect, and humor. Foreman et al. (2021) found three areas pertaining to YRE facilitation to increase relatability: character, content, and connection. YRE educators should be approachable, humorous, knowledgeable, cool, and interesting (Foreman et al., 2021). Delivering the content through activities and in an interesting way, as well as telling personal stories, was also found to be important in effective teaching (Foreman et al., 2021). Lastly, to form a connection with students, YRE educators should show interest in their participants/students, treat them as friends or peers, and develop a trusting relationship (Foreman et al., 2021). These components of relatability may factor into educators' perceptions of success.

Within YRE, a sense of community and rapport with participants has been found to increase participants' motivation to learn (Foreman et al., 2021). To help create a sense of

community amongst participants and the facilitator in relationship education programs, the facilitator must be caring, non-judgmental, attempt to build rapport, and take measures to understand their participants (Ballard, 2020; Bradford et al., 2012; Foreman et al., 2021). Rapport, or creating mutual trust and respect, is an aspect of bonding widely associated with effective teaching across various disciplines, especially within CRE (Ketring et al., 2017). Relationship education researchers have also stated that rapport and familiarity with participants increases the facilitator's credibility (Epting et al., 2004; Higginbotham & Myler, 2010). In a study focused on adult CRE, researchers propose attempting to bond and collaborate with participants during a program may improve the experience and increase material retention (Ketring et al., 2017). This suggests that facilitators who are familiar, actively attempt to bond, create trust and rapport, and collaborate with their participants are more likely to engage their participants in the program. Similar perceptions from K-12 and higher education educators and students have found that a positive, understanding, and supportive relationship between the student and teacher creates a learning environment where students actively participate, are more receptive to the information, are more attentive, are invested in their own learning, and have a greater sense of belonging (Berkel et al., 2011; Besser et al., 2020; Epting et al., 2004; Gillett-Swan, 2017; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008).

A prior relationship with participants may help educators create and support connective communities. In review of RE and CRE literature, Markman and Rhoades (2012) propose facilitators who know their participants may be perceived as more successful in program facilitation. However, youth report mixed reviews when asked who they wanted to educate them on sex and relationship education (Pound et al., 2017). Within a school setting, educators are a practical option to teach YRE, since they already know and have access to their students.

However, YRE can include sensitive topics (e.g., sexual decision-making, intimate partner violence, physical attraction) that students may be uncomfortable discussing with their school educator (Pound et al., 2016; 2017). School educators are less desirable as YRE educators due to power imbalances, student lack of confidence in their educators' relational knowledge, and student discomfort (Pound et al., 2016). Pound and colleagues (2017) believe that training can resolve student concerns with school educators teaching YRE. Community-based and near-peer educators are more frequently YRE educators and may demonstrate successful facilitator-participant relationships. Though program effectiveness with near-peer educators, educators close in age to their participants, is currently being studied, adolescents highly approve of near-peers as credible educators (Janssens et al., 2020; Pound et al., 2017).

Community and near-peer educators' similarity and relatability to students may make them a more viable facilitator option to promote program effectiveness; therefore, community educators will be the focus within this study. Although there is a gap in empirical research on the importance of the similarity between the facilitator and participant within CRE, Bradford and colleagues (2012) report that education level and relationship status can influence desired participant outcomes. Sex and ethnicity, however, were not found to predict CRE participant changes, indicating that it may not influence CRE participant outcomes if their facilitator is the same sex or ethnicity as them (Bradford et al., 2012). Therefore, facilitators should attempt to question, understand, and relate to their participants and communities (Bradford et al., 2012). Facilitators who are viewed as not relatable, unable to understand participant experiences, or who show disinterest in knowing their participants as individuals may cause a distant or weak facilitator-participant alliance (Bradford et al., 2012). There is a need for deliberate research to understand educator perceptions of their teaching and delivery, as the facilitator has been found

to play a vital role in program effectiveness through delivery and participant connection. This research is necessary in valuing the experiences of YRE facilitators to create universally consistent quality facilitator training and subsequent YRE implementation.

Perception of Educator Success in Online Teaching

Research recognizes the importance of educator perceptions on teaching and learning expectations, outcomes, and in creating effective learning environments; however, educators' perceptions of success in teaching are widely understudied (Lemay et al., 2021). Educational research has assessed success through the student perspective or based on student outcomes, though researchers have yet to establish how academic and RE educators determine if they are successful in their teaching (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Bradford et al., 2012; Foreman, 2021; Lemay et al., 2021). We might consider outside perceptions of success as an initial indicator for elements influential in educators' perceptions of their own success; if others evaluate educators by these standards, they may translate into personal standards of success. From the limited research on perceived factors of success during the coronavirus pandemic, success can so far be translated into: (i) educator and environment characteristics, (ii) technology awareness and efficacy, and (iii) educator support or training (Lemay et al., 2021).

Many times, educators can control some aspects of the teaching and learning environment such as the method of program delivery, participant interaction, program adaptations, and program assessment (Ballard, 2020; Berkel et al., 2011; Bhuasiri et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, students perceive successful teachers as confident, fair, quick to respond, explain material clearly, interact with students, have a positive attitude toward students, and exhibit comfort using technology (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Bradford et al., 2012; Foreman, 2021). It is important to note that students perceive technological efficacy as an indicator of

educator success (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Bradford et al., 2012; Foreman, 2021). In online classes or online program delivery, YRE educators must use online platforms to deliver the curriculum, but also as a means of participant interaction. Researchers have suggested that successful online teaching and learning may require both the educator and participant to have some level of comfort with technology (Bhuasiri et al., 2012; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Nambiar, 2020). With a collegiate sample of teachers and students during the coronavirus pandemic, Nambiar (2020) found that technology challenges are the most influential factor in predicting online course satisfaction among teachers and students. Bhuasiri and colleagues (2012) assessed the specific components of technology that influence pre-coronavirus pandemic online course success and found the top factors to include: previous technological training, perception of technology's usefulness, attitude toward online learning, technological efficacy, and program flexibility.

Educator support and training were widely mentioned as components impacting online learning success (Ballard, 2020; Catalano et al., 2021; Nambiar, 2020). Ballard (2020) denotes quality training, along with experience, maturity, emotional stability, empathy, and flexibility to promote successful facilitation. Gurley (2018) notes the importance of formal training as a means of preparation for online teaching, finding educators have greater perceptions of confidence, comfort, and efficacy in their ability to teach if they received formal training as opposed to training on the job. Thoughtful training or professional development may influence educators' perceptions of their teaching (Catalano et al., 2021; Nambiar, 2020). This is especially true for new educators who have been found to need more time and experience before they are comfortable teaching (Almond et al., 2021; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008). In all, it is possible that YRE educators' experience with, and attitude about, technology, previous training, and previous

teaching experience may contribute to their determination and understanding of successfully transitioning to online teaching.

Youth Relationship Educator Training

There is not a consistent approach to YRE educator training, even though quality educator training within RE, CRE, and YRE produces skilled educators and influences desired participant outcomes (Bradford et al., 2012; Futris et al., 2017; Higginbotham & Myler, 2010). There is inconsistency in research on what is known about YRE educator training, yet there are guides or models for family life educators (FLE) to follow when preparing to teach family life education, including relationship education. The National Extension Parenting Educators' Framework (NEPEF) was created to provide a guide to knowledge and professional skills for parent educators (DeBord et al., 2002). The six professional skills recognized as necessary for delivering parent education may also be applicable for youth relationship education, and include: (i) grow – personal growth through knowing oneself and relations with others, (ii) frame – the ability to use theory to guide practice, (iii) develop – aptitude for marketing, delivery, and program evaluation, (iv) embrace – capability to serve diverse populations, (v) educate – using suitable delivery methods and techniques to aid each participant in their learning, and (vi) build – expanding professional networks and community resources (DeBord et al., 2002, p. 7). In addressing the competencies needed to be certified as a Family Life Educator (FLE), the National Council on Family Relations declared 10 areas of knowledge: families in society, internal dynamics of families, human growth and development, human sexuality, interpersonal relationships, family resource management, parent education and guidance, family law and public policy, ethics, and family life education methodology (National Council on Family Relations [NCFR], 2020). Along with demonstrating competency in these areas, a Certified

Family Life Educator (CFLE) must have a bachelor's degree and two years of FLE experience or five years of experience if their degree is not related to the CFLE field (NCFR, 2020).

Many youth relationship educators are not CFLEs though, as certification is not always required to teach relationship education (Ballard, 2020). Educator training requirements are typically set by project managers, grant funders, or by the YRE curriculum training requirements. Some YRE programs are evidence-based and suggest educators undergo training to teach the program, although suggested training is likely to vary in time and intensity (Ballard, 2020). Since quality facilitation has been shown to affect program effectiveness and participant outcomes, quality educator training is likely important (Bradford et al., 2012; Gurley, 2018; Janssens et al., 2020). Nonetheless, Cooke (2006) reports that many FLEs receive training on the job rather than ahead of time. It is therefore not surprising that Pound and colleagues (2017) state some relationship educators may not feel prepared to deliver the educational program.

An additional facilitator skill, relatability, can be supported through cultural competency or humor (Ballard, 2020; Berkel et al., 2011; Cooke, 2006; Epting et al., 2004; Janssens et al., 2020). During training, it is important that educators be taught how to assess the needs of their participants and adapt the program with cultural awareness while maintaining fidelity (Ballard, 2020; Berkel et al., 2011; Cooke, 2006; Janssens et al., 2020). Besser et al. (2020) reason that a FLE should engage in training to prepare them to promote participants' open-mindedness, resilience, problem-solving, and hopefulness. Epting et al. (2004) further muse educators should be casual and incorporate humor, which may not always come naturally to every educator. While no one training model is in place for FLEs, training environments that offer opportunities for modeling, feedback, and emotional support have been successful (Almond et al., 2021; Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Hawkins (2018) states that training must be intentional and ongoing to address the

gap between the intended and actual delivery. Within the context of online YRE, this may suggest an importance for an awareness of the role that training can play in the determination of educators' perceptions of success for online program delivery.

The Impact of Developmental Differences when Teaching Youth

There are reasons and methods for teaching youth differently than adults, though many times youth and adults are taught in similar fashion (Bongolan et al., 2009). Andragogy is the practice and assumptions associated with teaching adults, while pedagogy is the teaching practices and assumptions pertaining to children (Knowles, 1968; Merriam, 2017). Some elements of pedagogy include the learner being educator dependent, educator led, and having little incorporation of life experience (Knowles, 1968). In contrast, andragogy requires increased self-directed and self-motivated learning, reflection, mutual appraisal of learning from both the educator and student, and immediate application of material (Knowles, 1968; Merriam, 2017). Adolescents are in a developmentally ambiguous state between childhood and adulthood where they may, at times, fluctuate between child-like and adult-like learning abilities.

Adolescence is a time of identity development, as youth are determining how they see themselves in various contexts; developing and maintaining a stable identity is linked to resiliency, competency, and autonomy (Verhoeven et al., 2019). Therefore, supporting youth identity development through YRE implementation is likely to be of higher importance than when working with adults. Verhoeven and colleagues (2019) suggest educators can support identity development by allowing youth the opportunity to explore various interests, uncover personal talents, and role play different identities. They also mention the importance of delivering educational programming that can translate into personal meaning for students and provide a supportive learning environment. This is good news for youth relationship educators,

as YRE contains topics that are likely meaningful to many students such as attractions, dating initiation, communication skills, and conflict management techniques.

From a biological perspective, there are differences in youth brain development which may indicate additional reasons why YRE should be taught differently than RE. Adolescent brains are not fully developed (Wolfe, 2001). Youth tend to make more emotional than rational decisions, may lack impulse control, and might exhibit more irrational behaviors than adults, impacting their ability to learn, because the frontal lobe, which can be termed the 'thinking brain,' is not fully developed (Wolfe, 2001). As their brains become more developed, youth are determining what they do not know and how new information fits into what they do know (Bongolan et al., 2009). Because the frontal lobe is still developing, thinking can be influenced by the amygdala, which relies on emotional memory and fight or flight responses (Wolfe, 2001). Finding meaning within new knowledge aids youths' brains in transferring knowledge to long term memory (Bongolan et al., 2009; Wolfe, 2001), suggesting an ideal time for relationship education as they transfer the YRE content to long term memory.

Researchers have made suggestions on how to approach teaching youth to support their understanding of how concepts fit together and to find meaning within the knowledge (Bongolan et al., 2009; Wolfe, 2001). Bongolan et al. (2009) suggests starting with a warm-up that connects the lesson to previously learned material and explains lesson concepts. Clear and reasonable expectations and limits may help youth achieve lasting learning and material retention (Bongolan et al., 2009). Along with expectations, though learners of all ages want to be respected, youth are especially sensitive to respect (Bongolan et al., 2009). Youth educators should exhibit and model respect while sharing their enthusiasm of what they are teaching (Bongolan et al., 2009). Educators should also display enthusiasm for getting to know their students; one way to increase

relatability with youth is to use humor (Wolfe, 2001); educators can also ask students their opinions and experiences to show they value the students' viewpoint (Ballard, 2020; Bongolan et al., 2009; Bradford et al., 2012). However, though showing respect and care toward students can support learning by prompting student investment, as part of their development, many youth are seeking independence from adults and instead gravitate toward their peers (Bongolan et al., 2009; Verhoeven et al., 2019). Allowing youth to work in pairs and small groups may encourage their dedication to learning the material (Bongolan et al., 2009). Lastly, youth educators should intermittently check-in with their students to gauge understanding and determine if clarification is needed; acknowledging student success and content mastery can also aid students in staying motivated to learn (Bongolan et al., 2009).

Within an online context, Besser et al. (2020) found youth and young adults to report lower levels of concentration, focus, motivation, and performance regarding their learning during the coronavirus pandemic. Literat (2021) also found stress, work overload, and mental health to impact youth's perceived ability to learn in an online context due to the coronavirus pandemic. These challenges may be exacerbated for youth from lower socioeconomic groups who are also more likely to experience less access to technology and unstable internet (Catalano et al., 2021). Considering these findings, all youth may experience challenges with online learning during due to the contextual factors associated with the coronavirus pandemic; however, youth learners from lower-socioeconomic status (ses) groups may experience more difficulty when unexpectedly transitioning to online learning (Besser et al., 2020; Catalano et al., 2021; Literat, 2021).

Adolescent development and learning face-to-face and online may be an element of YRE curriculum development that may not be explicitly explained to YRE educators as they prepare to teach the YRE program, despite research that has shown that successful facilitation is

important for effective programming (Ballard, 2020; Bradford et al., 2012; Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Futris et al., 2017; Higginbotham & Myler, 2010). As such, it is possible that YRE educators are not taught techniques that are best suited for youth learning, which may have impacted their feelings of successfully implementing the YRE program. Therefore, an understanding of the educators' knowledge of how to teach youth, the training they received on this, and how that translates to online program delivery may help establish how YRE educators perceive success.

Relevant Themes of Online Education during the Coronavirus Pandemic

In summary of the literature described above, when the coronavirus pandemic began in early 2020, YRE educators unexpectedly transitioned to online implementation or temporarily stopped programming. Though empirical literature is beginning to be published on this unforeseen historical event, much is still yet to be understood. As previously discussed, research conducted on face-to-face and online education in educational settings pre-and-during the coronavirus pandemic can inform YRE, but it cannot be expected that educational success is similar to YRE success. Similarly, perceptions of success and successful practices face-to-face and online may not automatically translate (Lemay et al., 2021); however, presented here is a summary of the literature on online learning during the coronavirus pandemic as outlined above.

Student and educator perceptions on technology, effectiveness of online education, and students' online efficacy have been shown to impact online teaching and learning (Lemay et al., 2021; Nambiar, 2020). Strengths of online education during the coronavirus pandemic include flexibility, ease of access, ease of grading, ability for recorded lectures, less peer distraction, less anxiety asking questions, and new methods of interaction (Nambiar, 2020). Challenges of online education during the coronavirus pandemic include increased preparation time, conscious effort

planning and enticing student engagement, decreased student engagement, limited feedback, learner motivation, student isolation, increased environmental distractions, explicit attention in creating an online environment, and technical difficulties (Nambiar, 2020; Tucker & Quintero-Ares, 2021). Some of these challenges may be amplified for at-risk, low-socioeconomic status, and rural youth as they may have experienced increased challenges with reliable technology or unstable home situations. However, supports to ease the transition to online education during the coronavirus pandemic can include structured classes, student openness to online education, student accommodations, quality student-educator interactions, and technical support (Besser et al., 2020; Nambiar, 2020). Though many academic educators report confidence in their ability to effectively teach online, face-to-face was still the majority's preferred modality (Catalano et al., 2021; Nambiar, 2020).

Theoretical Lens

Within qualitative research, researchers can utilize a theoretical lens to guide research questions and data analysis (Mitchell, 2014). Though grounded theory, as described within the methodology, is an inductive process, an active learning theoretical lens and sensitizing concepts from the ABC-X model help develop the understanding of youth relationship educators' experiences of transitioning to online programming in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. As discussed above, YRE programming shows participant outcomes changing pre-to-post program in the desired direction (McElwain et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2018), but less is published on the processes behind program implementation and educator training. Though I noted frameworks and models suggested for family life educators (DeBord et al., 2002; NCFR, 2020), there are not currently YRE-specific frameworks or models of training and implementation. Similarly, facilitation guidelines and expectations for online YRE

implementation and training have not been established. As mentioned, the coronavirus pandemic triggered an upheaval of everyday life, causing many YRE educators to adapt their delivery modality and implementation strategies. Though little is known about FLE or YRE educators' perceptions of online implementation, academic educators' perceptions have reportedly been influenced by their views on technology (Tucker & Quintero-Ares, 2021; Walker & Kim, 2015). This suggests that online training and support, as well as technological training, may be of interest as educators prepare for online YRE implementation. Although research on youth relationship education is unclear on how educators are prepared to promote group cohesion, create a secure environment, and develop the participant-facilitator alliance, they are likely predictive of YRE programming effectiveness based on RE empirical literature (Berkel et al., 2011; Bradford et al., 2012;). These experiences with technology, training, and support may contribute to YRE educators' feelings of success.

Theoretical Lens on Learning: Active Learning Theory

Active learning has been widely used within educational literature and may provide insight into how youth participants' learning intertwines into the educators' perceptions and determination of their own success. Jing and colleagues (2013) simply state that active learning is the process of learning by doing. Through this perspective on learning, individuals learn through experiences, reflections, and attempting to further understand (Czaplinski et al., 2020; Hasnine et al., 2020; Jing et al., 2013). Research has found that when educators use active learning strategies (e.g., role play, questioning, problem-solving, writing), students are more likely to achieve greater learning and show increased engagement (Hasnine et al., 2020; Jing et al., 2013). Active learning has also been shown to increase student confidence, attention, critical and creative thinking, collaboration, problem solving, and positive attitudes toward learning;

however, it requires students take ownership of their own learning through questioning, processing, understanding, communicating, and problem solving (Czaplinski et al., 2020; Hasnine et al., 2020; Jing et al., 2013). Some students, however, may be less confident in taking ownership of their learning.

Online education, as previously mentioned, may require different teaching and learning strategies. Czaplinski et al. (2020) suggest that the coronavirus pandemic indicated a need to incorporate active learning (learning by doing) into educational practice. Derakhshandeh and Esmaeili (2020) report adverse emotions such as anxiety, depression, isolation, and disconnection may stem from online education. As such, educators delivering content online must deliberately plan opportunities for students to actively learn and collaboratively engage with the material and their peers to combat potential challenges of online education. Initially, educators may need to scaffold active learning by providing students more structure, guidelines, or assistance, as active learning requires students to proactively take lead over their learning, which some students have limited experience with (Czaplinski et al., 2020). Czaplinski et al. (2020) specifically state active learning requires self-direction (i.e., knowing oneself and planning for learning success) and self-regulation (i.e., goal setting and awareness of effective learning approaches for oneself). With a collegiate sample, Czaplinski and colleagues (2020) noted most students were developing the self-direction and self-awareness needed for active learning; therefore, they recommend educators provide more structure to their learning strategies and receive training to do so.

It may be possible that the presence of active learning strategies when transitioning to online YRE may support youth relationship educators' determination of success when transitioning to online delivery during the coronavirus pandemic. Though research has shown

previous implications of active learning in face-to-face and online education, little is still known as to the role of active learning in educators' determination of success. The effectiveness of these learning strategies may aid or hinder an educator's perception of success depending on how well they were implemented and their reception. For instance, as active learning has shown to increase student attention, confidence, and learning achievement (Czaplinski et al., 2020; Hasnine et al., 2020; Jing et al., 2013), active learning theory raises questions about how educators perceive achievement of learning and engagement if online active learning strategies were not implemented. In this study, active learning theory is used as a theoretical lens to support analysis, as described below in the methodology. Through this lens, I am able to concentrate the inquiry on aspects of learning defined by research.

ABC-X Model

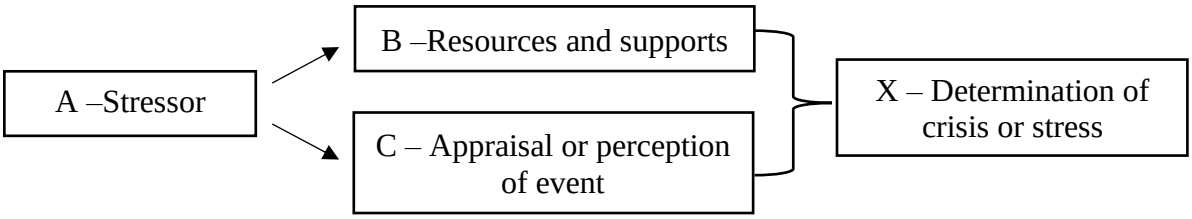
The ABC-X model helps researchers to describe the adaptation that ensues when a stressor event has occurred (Hill, 1958). The coronavirus pandemic is a stressor event that shaped the way YRE educators implemented programming, in addition to its impact within their daily lives. The ABC-X model was developed to aid family scientists in understanding stress and coping (Hill, 1958). Within this model A refers to the stressor event, B are the resources and supports available, C is the perception or appraisal of the stressor event, and X which determines if the stressor event is deemed a crisis or not depending on B and C (Hill, 1958) (see Figure 1). In this case, the stressor event (A) is treated as the unexpected transition of YRE to online delivery due to the sudden onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The ABC-X model suggests that individuals' determination of a crisis is dependent upon their resources, supports, and perceptions of the event. Though grounded theory is an inductive approach to data analysis, this

model drew my attention to potentially impactful components to answer the research questions during data analysis.

Within this study, the ABC-X model sensitized me to theoretical inputs (i.e., resources, supports, and perceptions) as possibly impactful within the theoretical development. Sensitizing concepts provide the researcher with a reference for where to start; they suggest to the researcher concepts that may be important in answering the research questions (Bowen, 2006). The outcome (X), educators' determination of success when transitioning to online YRE implementation, is likely to be informed by both the resources (B) and their perception of the transition to online education (C). Therefore, it is likely that data related to support, resources, and perceptions of the experience will be impactful in determining perceptions of achievement or failure of success. Perceptions are largely associated with symbolic meanings of events, actions, or intentions (Tsang & Jiang, 2018). As grounded theory uses symbolic interactionism (Whiteside et al., 2012), and YRE has shown educators' and youths' perceptions to be important, incorporating sensitizing concepts pertaining to perceptions is an informed approach. For instance, researchers have found that perceptions of technology, support, student efficacy, and educator burden are likely to shape YRE educator perceptions of the transition to online education (C) (Gonzalez, 2012; Lemay et al., 2021; Nambiar, 2020; Oomen-Early & Murphy, 2009).

Figure 1

ABC-X Model



Note. This figure demonstrates the elements of the ABC-X model.

Current Study

This study considered the experiences of youth-focused relationship educators as they transitioned to online implementation due to the coronavirus pandemic. I sought to understand the impact of these experiences on their determination of successfully transitioning to online implementation in unprecedented times, without time to prepare. Online RE is effective for adult populations (Spencer & Anderson, 2021), but effectiveness for youth populations is still being determined. Before determining if online YRE is effective, I must understand the processes that occurred during the transition to online implementation, to later discern the components influencing program outcomes and effectiveness. As researchers have recognized the importance of facilitation on program effectiveness (Ballard, 2020; Bradford et al., 2012; Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Futris et al., 2017; Higginbotham & Myler, 2010); it is imperative to understand how educators determine if their facilitation is successful. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand youth-focused relationship educator experiences of transitioning to online teaching. The goal was to develop a working theory of successful transitions into online YRE teaching. By understanding the experiences and transitions that have occurred, we were able to recognize processes, perceptions, challenges, and strengths to better support YRE educators and reinforce successful online YRE training and implementation strategies. This work is informative for

future practitioners and researchers working in relationship education who will continue to adapt the future of the field.

Research Questions

(1) How did youth focused relationship educators transition from traditional in-person teaching to online teaching at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic?

(2) How did youth focused relationship educators determine success with online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic?

(2a) What hindered educators' perceptions of success in transitioning to online teaching due to the coronavirus pandemic?

(2b) What enabled educator success in transitioning to online teaching due to the coronavirus pandemic?

Chapter III - Methods

Study Design

Within this study, I took an interpretive grounded theory (IGT) approach to developing a theoretical framework for understanding the perception of success for youth relationship educators when transitioning to online teaching. This framework is situated in the context of an unexpected transition due to the coronavirus pandemic. In IGT, there is an emphasis on developing a theory from the data, rather than testing preconceived hypotheses (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Sebastian (2019) states that interpretive grounded theory has influenced socio-ecologic, education, and learning research. The inclusion of IGT in educational and learning literature was useful when aiming to understand youth relationship educators' process of transitioning and their development of the determination of success when unexpectedly transitioning into online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic. This method of theory development is more likely to accurately provide insight into the process of the subject that is occurring (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The researcher's prior knowledge is valued and considered an asset to data analysis in IGT (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Within this view, researchers' insight and outlook prompts researchers to acknowledge and explore specific research questions of interest. In an IGT approach, Strauss and Corbin (1998) view a researcher's contextual or inside knowledge of their subjects or study matter as potentially strengthening to data analysis and interpretation. The IGT approach was an appropriate methodology choice for this study as I have insider knowledge of youth relationship education as a YRE educator and master trainer of YRE educators. My knowledge and understanding therefore strengthened the study by supporting the awareness necessary to practice theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In grounded theory,

theoretical sensitivity is the researcher's recognition of meaning and relevance within the data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded Theory Methodology

Grounded theory (GT) methodology was first coined by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 to connect research and theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Whiteside et al., 2012). Its initiation was through the debate on the purpose and value of qualitative versus quantitative research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) recall qualitative research in the 1930s to typically be utilized as a precursor to survey development due to its ability to aid in the understanding of social structures and systems, but not in its ability to produce facts or generalizability. This view on verification of fact or knowledge was what led many researchers to view quantitative research as the most appropriate way to create and adapt theory, as many qualitative researchers did not view their work as theory building due to its use as a quantitative precursor (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) took a novel approach in their notion that both quantitative and qualitative research could be used for verification and theory building. They state that grounded theory is a process for producing a theory, or in other terms, provide an explanation for an event, problem, or other occurrence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sebastian, 2019). Though grounded theory was originally situated within nursing and sociology, Glaser and Strauss' (1967) explanation for the purposes of theory relate to family science and are as follows: 1. predict and/or explain behavior, 2. theoretically advance the field, 3. suggest practical applications, 4. provide perspective on an event or behavior, and 5. guide and provide a style for research. To understand how theory development is validated, it is important to understand the foundational characteristics of grounded theory.

Grounded theory has specific methodological characteristics that are distinct and imperative to successful analysis and subsequently theory development (Whiteside et al., 2012). Some of these methodological characteristics or considerations involve constant comparison of data, theoretical sampling, saturation, theoretical sensitivity, and objectivity (Andrews et al., 2012; Whiteside et al., 2012). Constant comparative analysis is the method of data analysis within grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) established the constant comparative analysis method to provide an evidential check on qualitative data analysis. They assert there are four stages to this method: "1. comparing incidents applicable to each category, 2. integrating categories and their properties, 3. delimiting the theory, and 4. writing the theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.105). As comparative analysis is intended to develop theory, it is always evolving, which is why researchers must constantly compare the emerging theory with their concepts and categories within the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

To test applicability of categories and determine additional insights into the emergent theory, grounded theorists utilize theoretical sampling (Glaser & Straus, 1967). Theoretical sampling is the process of iteratively collecting data, analyzing data, reviewing codes and categories, and determining what additional data needs to be collected to further develop or refine the theory (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Whiteside et al., 2012). Theoretical sampling is applied to allow the researcher to determine what additional data must be collected and analyzed from the inductively created codes in the data (Andrews et al., 2012; Glaser, 1998). In essence, the researcher determines new questions to ask or alternative participants to sample from the inductive coding process that occurred from the previously collected data. This form of sampling and data collection is completed in order to uncover categories and properties among the data, the relevant context, and to later indicate interrelationships that build the theory

(Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Whiteside et al., 2012). This process of constant comparative analysis through theoretical sampling ends when the researcher feels saturation has occurred within the categories (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Whiteside et al., 2012). Saturation occurs when new insights are not gleaned with additional data collection; this occurs as data are compared to, and against, each other (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sebastian, 2019; Whiteside et al., 2012). Glaser and Strauss (1967) claim that collecting additional data after reaching saturation is likely not beneficial toward the process of developing the theory. As such, grounded theory does not have a recommended sample size for participants or sources of data as data is considered to be robust once saturation has occurred (Andrews et al., 2012; Glaser, 1998).

When analyzing data through the constant comparative method, grounded theorists are interested in creating more than thorough descriptions of the data, they abstract data to allow for development of theoretical conceptions (Andrews et al., 2012; Glaser, 2001). To do this, it is important that researchers utilize both objectivity and theoretical sensitivity. Objectivity within qualitative data analysis refers to the researcher's ability to view and explore the data impartially; however, the researcher must also use theoretical sensitivity to recognize cues, properties, and meaning within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Whiteside et al., 2012). Through this method, the researcher aims to generate additional questions, various categories, and properties about the topic; these may include components such as conditions, processes, and causes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) clarify that a category is a "conceptual element of the theory," while a property is a "conceptual aspect or element of a category" (p.36). As the researcher may find diverse meaning within the data, Glaser (1998) suggests they ask questions like: "What is this a study of? What categories does this incident indicate? What property of

what category does this incident indicate?" (p. 123) when analyzing and coding. Glaser and Strauss (1967) initially mused that coding should be systematic, meaning that the researcher writes potential categories and properties while reviewing the data, while also writing any necessary memos as they go. Memos are notes of the researcher's abstracted thought about codes and the connection of codes or categories while analyzing data (Glaser, 1978, p. 83). Andrews and colleagues (2012) indicate the method of asking questions while analyzing, comparing codes, and comparing categories is what helps the core category or guiding principle of the theory to emerge. Strauss and Corbin (1990) also define the core category as, "the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated" (p. 116). Though not consistent in all approaches to grounded theory, the prominence of a core category helps to guide the overarching framework and aids in theoretical questioning to connect other categories within the developing theory (Sebastian, 2019).

The Varying Approaches to Grounded Theory

Grounded theory has been framed through philosophical movements such as postmodernism, symbolic interactionism, and constructivism (Whiteside et al., 2012). Therefore, three main approaches within grounded theory have emerged since its inception: classical grounded theory, interpretive grounded theory, and constructivist grounded theory (Sebastian, 2019). Classical grounded theory (GT) began with Glaser and Strauss (1967) but is mostly associated currently with Glaser's objectivist ontology, in which he refers to the discovery of the core category. Interpretive grounded theory (IGT), also referred to as evolved grounded theory, is associated with Strauss and Corbin (1990) as they reconsidered the structure, analysis, and role of the researcher within grounded theory. The most recent adaptation of grounded theory is Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (CGT) which differs in its analysis and understanding

of the researcher's interpretation and construction of the data, as well as allowance for multiple core categories (Sebastian, 2019). In these latter two approaches, the theory is most often referred to as emerging from the data and understood to be temporally bound and limited to the context of the study.

Within previous studies, some researchers have not clearly stated which approach they took to grounded theory and have ended up utilizing a combination of the three main approaches, causing impactful flaws to their analysis (Sebastian, 2019). As classical grounded theory has previously been described, I now review some specific similarities and differences within the three approaches to grounded theory. Across the approaches, the constant comparative analysis method remains paramount to the process of theoretical development (Rieger, 2018; Sebastian, 2019). When setting up the study, classical grounded theory states that a review of literature should be conducted after data analysis which helps the researcher to achieve their role of being distanced during the analytic process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sebastian, 2019). In IGT, research literature is reviewed prior to and during the analytic process as it may help the researcher in their role of actively engaging with and interpreting the data (Sebastian, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In CGT, the researcher decides when to review the literature as the role of the researcher is to construct, rather than discover, the data (Charmaz, 2006; Sebastian, 2019).

All approaches recommend some form of vagueness when determining initial, guiding research questions (Sebastian, 2019). GT does not adhere to creating research questions ahead of data collection and instead states that questions should be driven by an inductive data analysis (Rieger, 2018; Sebastian, 2019). This also increases validity by reducing the possibility of the researcher inserting their own preconceived ideas or notions into data collection or analysis (Rieger, 2018; Sebastian, 2019). IGT and CGT approaches follow the premise that research

questions initially be vague, and that alterations or subsequent questions are likely to emerge during data analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Sebastian, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Similar to the role of the researcher, each theoretical approach differs in how to handle researchers' prior knowledge about the subject or participants. To not influence data analysis within GT, the researcher attempts to remain neutrally objective without acknowledgement of prior knowledge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sebastian, 2019). IGT and CGT both allow for the acknowledgement of researchers' prior knowledge (Charmaz, 2014; Sebastian, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through an IGT approach, this knowledge is potentially useful in study conceptualization, data collection, and analysis and allows the researcher to practice theoretical sensitivity (Sebastian, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Prior knowledge is recognized as inescapable in CGT and IGT, making it important to recognize how the knowledge influences the researcher and the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). There must be careful attention to a balance between disregarding and overpowering the analysis with prior knowledge; within this regard reflexivity may be important (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Sebastian, 2019).

Data coding and analysis are some of the more diverse practices amongst the three approaches. In GT, substantive coding proceeds by immersing oneself in the data until a core category has been found (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rieger, 2018; Sebastian, 2019). GT uses the constant comparative method to theoretically code, unifying categories into one core category of the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rieger, 2018; Sebastian, 2019). IGT employs a three-step process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to produce a core category. Open coding refers to detailed coding of abstraction or deconstruction of data into parts and compares these components in the process of developing categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Rieger, 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding is the process of connecting categories through

relationships and properties (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Rieger, 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998); this may be an instance where prior knowledge could strengthen the analytic process. Finally, selective coding is the process of uniting all categories within the core category to form the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Rieger, 2018; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding can be very granular: IGT leaves room for one instance, event, or property to be coded as a potentially significant instance (Sebastian, 2019). Lastly, CGT codes all data and then groups the data into frequently prevalent and relevant codes (Charmaz, 2006; Rieger, 2018; Sebastian, 2019). CGT is also the only approach to grounded theory that allows the researcher to have more than one core category in building their theory (Charmaz, 2006; Sebastian, 2019). Though each grounded theory approach holds merit, I utilized an interpretive grounded theory approach to guide the study. Interpretive grounded theory was most fitting for this study due to its recognition of the value of empirical research, personal knowledge, and experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In order to practice this awareness and exercise theoretical sensitivity, I have been an educator of YRE for four years and a general family life educator for one year beyond that. As a youth relationship educator, I recognized the importance of this unprecedented historical event on the process of YRE implementation. I did not experience the initial transition into online teaching due to the coronavirus pandemic; however, I have experienced the aftermath of online and face-to-face YRE during the coronavirus pandemic. I am also a trainer of youth relationship educators, having experience training educators in both an online (four years) and face-to-face (two years) setting. Through these training experiences, I have assisted in preparing YRE educators nationwide for face-to-face, online, and hybrid models of teaching. Though I hold insider status and knowledge as a youth relationship educator, I recognize individual educators may have diverse experiences and differing views on their similar or differing experiences. It is

helpful that I am familiar with general face-to-face and online YRE delivery, but did not personally experience the immediate, unexpected transition myself as I have general knowledge, but no specific experience to contribute to the understanding of unexpectedly transitioning to online YRE delivery. This aided in strengthening my understanding of the context and general procedures around YRE but reduces the risk of relating my experience with that of my participants, allowing me to remain objective while also employing theoretical sensitivity. Likewise, the constant comparative method, as described below, within grounded theory assists with checking un-inspected assumptions I may have had as the researcher, as the data are compared, and negative cases are sought. This theoretical understanding of perceptions of success within the context of the coronavirus pandemic can be advantageous in determining how to best train and support educators within the areas they feel necessary for successful YRE implementation.

Procedures

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of 12 community-based family life educators who had implemented YRE programming online (see Table 2). To be included, participants were required to be 18 years or older, understand and speak English, and be involved with the teaching, training, or management of youth relationship education. Across GT approaches, it is important to have a sample that represents diverse experiences on the research topic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This sample is diverse in race, ethnicity, geographic location, implementation setting, and years of YRE experience.

Table 2

Sample Demographics for Focus Groups and Interviews

	Focus Group Participants (N=12)	Interview Participants (n=5)
Gender		
Male	6 (50%)	2 (40%)
Female	6 (50%)	3 (60%)
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	6 (50%)	2 (40%)
Black/African American	3 (25%)	2 (40%)
Hispanic/Latino	2 (16.6%)	1 (20%)
Bi-racial (African American/Latino)	1 (8.3%)	0 (0%)
Years of Experience		
0-2 years	3 (25%)	2 (40%)
3-5 years	5 (41.6%)	2 (40%)
5-10 years	3 (25%)	1 (20%)
10+ years	1 (8.3%)	0 (0%)
Geographic Location		
West U.S. (California, Utah)	5 (41.6%)	2 (40%)
Midwest U.S. (Michigan, Ohio)	2 (16.6%)	2 (40%)
South U.S. (Alabama, Texas)	5 (41.6%)	1 (20%)
Implementation Setting		
Community-based/Non-profit	9 (75%)	4 (80%)
University-based	3 (25%)	1 (20%)

Note. This table represents the demographic information for all twelve participants as well as the subset of individuals who were sampled from the original population to also provide an interview.

Recruitment occurred through the Dibble Institute, a national nonprofit organization focused on publishing and disseminating YRE curricula, as well as training facilitators. The Dibble Institute indicated their support in the recruitment of these individuals (see Appendix A for letter of support). The Dibble Institute was not involved in the study other than to provide access to potential participants. As such, the Dibble Institute did not know who participated, did not have access to the data, and anonymized data are reported to provide further anonymity to participants. Recruitment also occurred through the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) blog posts. NCFR blog post forums are available for individuals in the field of family science who have a membership with NCFR which is a nonprofit organization focused on

research, education, and family science practice. After consenting to participate in the study, participants had the opportunity to earn up to $30 in Amazon e-gift cards as described below.

Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized theoretical sampling to explore different types of data to develop a grounded theory of youth relationship educators' perceived success in transitioning to online teaching. Data was collected through theoretical sampling derived from focus groups and interviews. The data collected was first through focus groups of 2-5 YRE educators in 3 focus groups, to initiate the analysis of youth relationship education and the transition to online YRE. Focus groups can be a beneficial method to learn more about the population and targeted audience to gain insight on applicable elements for further questioning (Morgan, 1996). Focus groups are observed to develop conversations between participants, with participants learning from each other and exploring concepts (Krueger, 1998, p. 20) and can supply the researcher with new information, consolidate knowledge, allow for differing opinions, and generate ideas through brainstorming (Edley & Litosseliti, 2010). Within the nature of grounded theory, the initial collection of data is only loosely structured toward initial research questions (Sebastian, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) (see Appendix B). From focus group findings and through theoretical sampling, subsequent data collection with individual interviews is more focused on developing and understanding research questions through the constant comparative process of collecting and analyzing previously collected data (see Appendix C). Therefore, the second form of data was collected through 5 individual interviews to probe into in-depth individual experiences of transitioning to online implementation during the coronavirus pandemic and perceptions of success. When used in conjuncture with focus groups, interviews provide an opportunity to expand on previous group discussions and unearth in-depth narratives either at a

specific time point or across time (Morgan, 1996). Thus, subsequent data was collected to expand on, seek negative cases that do not match the majority of the data, and test emerging relationships or theoretical categories.

Focus Groups. I initiated the first phase of sampling through focus groups to begin category development between July and August 2021. Through the Dibble Institute's nationally diverse clientele, I conducted and recorded three focus groups through Zoom with a diverse sample (e.g., ethnicity, race, geographic background) of 12 youth-focused relationship educators (see Table 2). Utilizing a semi-structured approach, each focus group lasted an hour to one and a half hours. Within this semi-structured list of questions, I followed a list of open-ended questions but also allowed the conversation to progress naturally which led to additional topics outside the prescribed questions. Participants were asked about the transition to online programming, strengths, challenges, and audience engagement (see Appendix B for questions).

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study was obtained and allowed for the use of an information letter. Before conducting focus groups, I engaged possible participants in the process of consent. Potential participants received the information letter via email. I then discussed the information provided in the information letter during the intake process. Participants had the opportunity to review the information letter and determine their intentions to participate in the study. If the individual agreed to participate, I asked them introductory contextual questions (e.g., gender, race, years as a relationship educator, YRE setting) and scheduled their focus group (see Table 2). Focus groups were held and recorded online through Zoom and were scheduled based on participant availability. Once enough participants indicated interest and intent to participate, they were emailed a scheduling poll to determine the time of best fit for the majority of the interested individuals. If a participant was unavailable during the

determined time, I included them in the next focus group. Once a group was full, I no longer offered it as a possible time for new participants. Following each focus group, participants were each compensated through a $15 Amazon e-gift card.

Measures were taken to secure participant privacy. As the focus groups were held on Zoom, all meetings required registration and were password protected; this ensured only participants and I were present during the focus group. During the focus group, participants were told that they were not required to answer any question they did not want to. Data from the focus groups was initially transcribed through Zoom and further transcribed for clarity by either myself or a paid research transcriber. To protect participant confidentiality, I kept the audio-visual recordings within Auburn University's Box online platform on a secure and password protected computer. Once transcription was completed, participants were provided an identification number which replaced names; any further identifying information such as the specific curriculum taught, length of employment, and organization was removed from the transcripts. Initial coding from the focus group data identified characteristics and topics important for further exploration through theoretical sampling in the form of individual interviews (see Appendix D for initial categories).

Interviews. Following focus groups, I analyzed the transcribed data in order to identify concepts and categories of importance within the next round of theoretical sampling through individual interviews. These initial codes or categories were emerging concepts with varying properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through an open coding process, as described below, I generated new research questions and determined populations imperative to the development of the emerging theory within the next round of theoretical sampling. Interview questions were also semi-structured and determined from the concepts and categories emerging

from the comparative analysis of the overarching discussion within the focus groups (see Appendix C). An IRB modification was approved to expand the pool of possible participants and conduct interviews. Participants from the focus groups were invited to participate in an interview lasting approximately half an hour. The determination of who to interview arose from the understanding of who could provide insight into the questions emerging from focus group data analysis. Sampling continued until coding saturation occurred where I no longer obtained new insights from additional data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Sebastian, 2019; Whiteside et al., 2012). As such, individual interviews were held with a subset of 5 of the original 12 participants. The same protocols for consent as mentioned above were followed during individual interviews. Interviews were then transcribed by either myself or a paid transcriber. Following each interview, participants were compensated through an additional $15 Amazon e-gift card.

Data Analysis

As I was not analyzing to support or challenge a hypothesis, I inductively coded and categorized data (Whiteside et al., 2012). To adequately discuss the coding process within IGT, it is first vital to provide definitions of the main elements of the coding process as these can differ across approaches and within qualitative research. A concept is an abstracted label assigned to an instance, idea, or event (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). A category is a grouping of similar concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). Properties are defining characteristics of a category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61). It is also important to note that within IGT and specifically the constant comparative method, data analysis is not designed for two or multiple researchers to analyze the same data and come to identical conclusions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest grounded theory is a methodology that supports creativity and flexibility

within data analysis; as previously mentioned, IGT values each researcher's background knowledge which may influence the data analysis process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Though this means there is not the opportunity for interrater reliability, verification of the categories and relationships occurs through constant comparing and repeated sampling within the data to confirm the stability of codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To achieve this verification and eventual substantive theory, IGT practices three processes to data analysis: 1. open coding, 2. axial coding, and 3. selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

Open Coding. Open coding is the first step in IGT data analysis. Within this process, concepts are recognized, grouped into categories, and the properties of categories are discerned (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During open coding the researcher engages in analytic questioning: who, what, when, why, where, and how much, to distinguish the concepts, properties, and guide theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An imperative element of open coding includes breaking down the data into abstractions of the idea, event, or opinion (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) advocate that this method allows for the researcher to understand the foundational underpinnings of the data and logic within the concepts more clearly. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest there are different ways to go about open coding. The first way is to conduct a line-by-line analysis which involves coding phrases or words that could generate categories or properties; they advise this is the most time-consuming method but may be useful during early stages to quickly generate categories to inform theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.119). Another suggested method of open coding is to code sentences or paragraphs (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.120). This approach is best used when the researcher already has a few categories and can contemplate the main idea of the passage (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.120). Lastly, open coding can be done by analyzing a whole document or

transcript and contemplating its similarities, differences, and importance in relation to other documents or transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.120. Regardless of the method, or methods, chosen to implement open coding, the constant comparative method is paramount to informing which categories are most salient within the emerging theory. By constantly comparing, the researcher checks their analysis of the data with other comparative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.23). While abstracting the data, the researcher utilizes this method to examine the data for similarities and differences which can be useful during axial coding to understand how multiple incidents are relevant to one another or in recognizing relationships that may be evident between categories.

Axial Coding. Axial coding occurs after open coding; however, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest the researcher move between open and axial coding before progressing to a third stage of selective coding. Axial coding occurs when the researcher determines the relationships and connections among categories and their subcategories; through this process, the researcher links categories by properties (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Subcategories are specific concepts of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 101). Essentially, axial coding reconstructs the abstracted data from open coding into categories and subcategories that are more complete and connected explanations of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This is why it can be beneficial to go back and forth between open and axial coding during the constant comparing as the researcher gains clarity and redefines their understanding of the data and developing theory. At this point, it may become clear that further data is required to help clarify emerging concepts. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that a researcher can either relate categories by using the participants' actual words or through the researcher's conceptualization of the data. Within IGT, it is logical that the researcher conceptualizes the categorical connections as the concepts and categories are already

abstracted from the raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To conceptually link categories, the researcher must again ask questions such as who, how, when, where, how much, and why (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). By applying this contemplative questioning, the researcher discovers both the structure and processes occurring within the emergent theory and connects them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ultimately, axial coding is used to explain the conditions, properties, relationships, and connections within the categories to build a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Selective Coding. Selective coding is the final portion of data analysis that occurs within an interpretive grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). During selective coding, the researcher has collected all data and is concerned with integrating and refining the categories within the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). One of the main purposes of selective coding is to select one core category that will be the primary focus of the theory (Sebastian, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The core, or sometimes referred to as central, category should contain a condensed explanation of all products of the analysis that encompasses the overarching meaning of the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert the core category is likely to evolve through one of two ways. Either the researcher will determine that one of their categories is paramount, or that while the categories are all imperative parts of the theory, a different term or phrase is needed to capture the conceptualization of the core category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This method is different from reporting on themes within the data because it builds upon interrelated concepts and categories to develop a theoretical guide (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Coding in this Study. In this study, open coding was first implemented with focus group data. I initially analyzed the focus group transcripts one at a time using the line-by-line method of open coding to determine initial concepts. In doing this, I also wrote memos or potential

conceptual abstractions in the margins of the document, a method deemed useful by Strauss and Corbin (1998). During this process of coding, I compared statements and instances within each focus group and grouped similar concepts into categories made up of subcategories. Once this was completed for each focus group, I then switched to comparing the categories between the three focus groups. The focus groups were asked similar questions which aided the constant comparative method by checking the categories across each group for similar or different experiences from YRE facilitators. After comparison of categories, I conducted axial coding to detect connections and relationships between emerging categories. The individual and collective focus group categories aided in establishing the theoretical sampling necessary to further develop the theory (see Appendix D for initial categories).

From this analysis, I conducted a second phase of data collection by interviewing 5 previous participants. I again conducted open coding through line-by-line coding of each interview transcript and wrote conceptual abstractions in the margins. Once initial coding was complete for interviews, I grouped similar conceptual abstractions into categories made up of subcategories. These categories were compared with focus group categories as well as those within other interviews. From the comparative method and theoretical sampling, I conducted axial coding and formed collective categories across the focus group and interview data. These categories were new categories that encompassed the concepts across focus groups and interviews that underpinned the developing theory. Within axial coding, following the categorization of data from the collective interview and focus group data, I unearthed the connections and relationships between categories as defined by their properties. Once all data was analyzed and categories with subcategories were created, I finally turned to selective coding to assess the categories for either a core category or a conceptualization of an overarching core

category that could be created. To do so, I followed criteria set forth by Strauss (1987) for determining a core category: 1. relate all categories to the core category, 2. certify that the core category appears frequently within the data, 3. logically relate, rather than force a connection between, categories within the core category, 4. title the core category abstractly rather than detailed or specific so as to lead to more general, formal theory, 5. ensure concepts are integrated, and 6. allow for the core category to explain the normative, main point and leave room for contradictory instances (p.36). Using these guiding criteria, I deliberated on how the categories answered the research questions and related to one another in a logical manner through the use of pictorial diagrams. Diagrams are useful within grounded theory for integrating and theorizing about relationships between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.153). Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that clear, sensible diagrams are indicative of an integrative theory. Through this diagramming and mapping, I represent the connections between all other categories in supporting the core category to develop the theory, to answer the central research question of how youth focused relationship educators determined success with online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic.

Chapter IV – Analytic Results Showing Categories of Connecting

Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect

In this chapter, a summary of the core category is presented first, followed by details of the three supporting categories (i.e., Choosing to Continue, Building and Maintaining Connections, and Moving Forward for Success). The analysis of data and development of grounded theory categories resulted in a core category of Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect, which captures how youth relationship educators arrive at and determine success through their effort to create meaningful connections and YRE experiences (see Figure 2). In response to the first research question regarding how YRE educators transition to online implementation, the analysis revealed that the process for connecting and creating meaningful connections shifted when YRE educators had to pivot into online implementation due to the coronavirus pandemic. Pre-coronavirus pandemic, YRE educators had ways to successfully connect with youth in-person (e.g., eye contact, hands on activities, discussions on clothing). When the coronavirus pandemic occurred, YRE educators pivoted to translate programming and connective processes through an online modality. Therefore, the core category of Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect shows the adaptive process that occurred for YRE educators and how it impacted their thoughts of successful programming. YRE educators were unable to translate the personally considered indicators of success in-person into an online modality and had to shift their perceptions of what success looks like and means online. This perceptional shift influences YRE educators' programming intentions moving forward, as well as their understanding of success, regardless of delivery modality. In summary, the YRE educators in this study expressed a desire to combine methods from both in-person and online implementation to continue attempting to successfully implement YRE programming in the future.

Figure 2

Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect

Note. Figure 2 depicts the three categories that form the core category of pivoting to meaningfully connect.

In Figure 2, showing the core category of Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect, YRE educators "plug in" when making the decision to continue programming even though that means a shift in their typical programming. Traveling along the power cord from left to right, YRE educators build their connective power as they work to generate and maintain connections with youth, agencies, and community partners across in-person and online delivery modalities. The plugged-in power cord leads to the computer, where the person at the computer chooses to move forward with the knowledge and practices of the YRE experience that modified their ongoing feelings about how to successfully create meaningful connections with youth and which delivery mode is best suited to this process.

Using the figure as a guiding metaphor, the following paragraphs discuss each of the three categories under the core category of Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect. Details of the codes, sub-categories (Axial codes), and categories are presented in the Appendix (see Appendix E-H). Category overviews provide an overview of the sub-categories and concepts. Following the category overview, I further detail each set of categories, sub-categories, and codes, and present data from focus group and interview findings to support the process and components of determining success. Results are discussed in relation to the sensitizing concepts from the ABC-X model (i.e., perceptions, resources, and supports) (see Appendix E). The three sensitizing concepts from the ABC-X model did not direct the analysis but offered a reference of components that focus my attention when assessing the stressor event of moving to an online format due to the coronavirus pandemic (Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006). The three categories of (i) Choosing to Continue, (ii) Connecting and Engaging, and (iii) Moving Forward for Success represent the process of Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect. Starting with Category One: Choosing to Continue, the data used in the analysis are presented with the findings.

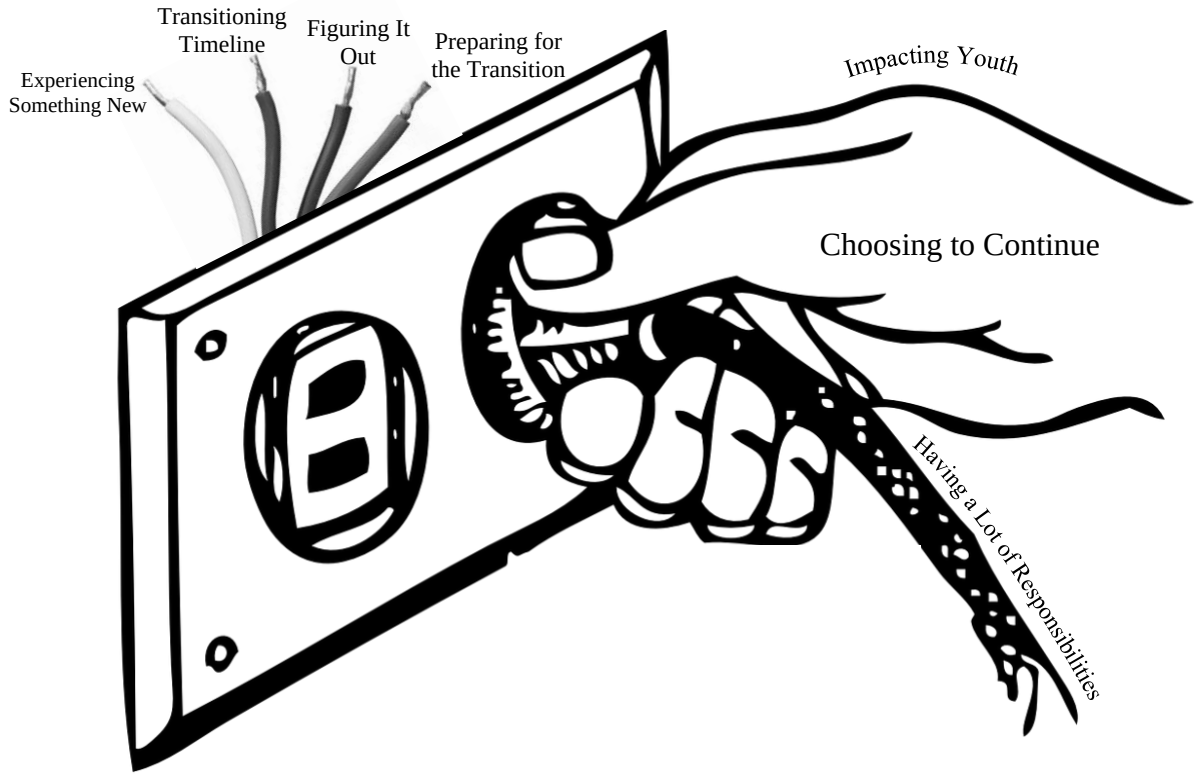
Category One: Choosing to Continue

Overview of Category 1. The category of Choosing to Continue describes how YRE educators and their supporting agencies considered necessary choices at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic regarding implementation. The context of the coronavirus pandemic was the important instigator for the sudden pivot to online education. Before the coronavirus pandemic, YRE educators typically implemented programming in-person. If they chose to continue implementing YRE programming, they would have to pivot their practices and approach, as in-person programming was not possible at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. YRE educators detailed the reasons for wanting to proceed with figuring out how to prepare for

online implementation and the initial transition that occurred (see Appendix F). In Figure 3 the category of Choosing to Continue shows a hand plugging in a power cord to an outlet. The hand represents the active decision to choose to switch to an online modality (represented by the power cord) which was necessary to continue YRE programming at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. The perceived impact of YRE programming and fostered connections were the driving motivators for this decision. The wires protruding from the back of the outlet represent the behind-the-scenes process of getting 'plugged in,' including deciding how to transition into online implementation and the subsequent preparation. New responsibilities were not equally distributed amongst YRE educators during this process, as will be discussed in Analytic Results: Category One. However, these responsibilities initiate the descent into the power cord, in which the theory shows how YRE educators build and maintain connections.

Figure 3

Category One: Choosing to Continue



Note. This figure depicts the sub-categories and codes that make up category one: choosing to continue.

Findings of Category 1: Choosing to Continue. When the coronavirus pandemic began, nearly everything in everyday life changed. School systems went online, people quarantined at home, physical and mental health were at the forefront of American society, and YRE was abruptly stopped as community organizations and school systems figured out what to do. Despite the challenges and effort it would take to choose to continue programming, YRE educators expressed their desire to continue programming to their agencies, and in some cases were the driving force of YRE agencies choosing to continue programming.

> I pushed pretty hard. I was like, can I just try? Can I just find one teacher, with only a couple of classes in their school that we can just try it out? [Participant 5][Focus Group]

Some agencies had already met their participant quotas as set by their grant funder when the coronavirus pandemic began and chose not to continue YRE programming online, though many agencies and educators did choose to continue YRE programming. For these individuals who chose to continue programming, there was a quick shift at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Although there was a hurried shift in mindset, this did not mean that every YRE educator immediately began online implementation. Some YRE educators expressed launching their online programming rapidly with only a month break around April 2020 to regroup.

> We took a pause for April to make sure everything was working as far as Zoom and teach it to ourselves, like how to work Zoom and everything. Then we started back up in May. [Participant 9][Interview]

Other YRE educators did not launch into online implementation as quickly but were still quickly navigating what online YRE programming would look like. These individuals were working with schools and were many times told to pause programming until the school system had a better understanding of their plans for academia during the coronavirus pandemic. This meant that YRE educators generally took a break from April-August 2020 to regroup and prepare for online implementation at the start of the fall semester in August 2020.

> Virtual was in the process, and we were told to hold off. All the students and everybody were trying to figure things out. I think we really didn't start meeting up with the team until later, I want to say like in late April or May, when people....our partners were pushing and asking to keep doing it…to make it work. We prepared and it took us a really long time to get started. [Participant 10][Focus Group]

The motivation to continue programming through an online modality came from both a need to have participants to fulfill grant funder requirements and a drive to continue serving the

youth in their communities. YRE educators articulated their intentions in being YRE educators because of a desire to help youth. They care about the youth they serve, even considering the youth as an extension of their own children. Empowering youth and making a difference in their lives through YRE programming and the connections they build, is the meaningful experience YRE educators strive for.

> It's like, well hold on, I care about you [the youth]. I want you to succeed and here's something to help. And then it's like you know what? You won the day. You know because tomorrow might be horrible but today, you won. [Participant 12][Interview]

Relationship education programming was perceived as a way to impact youth through program content that was helpful for, and needed by, youth. In their interactions with youth, YRE educators reported feeling like it is a privilege to be able to help teenagers recognize the need to make good decisions and provide youth skills to be more successful in life. They admit that all youth may not be impacted, or at least impacted equally, but they feel like any impact they are able to make is important. Seeing the impact from the YRE programming and connections made with youth showed up in various ways. For some, this included feeling like youth remembered program content or learned from the program how to make healthy relationship decisions. However, remembering program content was not the only indicator of programming success. Having youth express feelings of enjoyment about being there or not wanting to leave the program indicated to YRE educators that they were making an impact in their youths' lives. Experiences where they could visually see youth were happy to be there, or having youth tell them about how the programming was making a difference in their lives also induced feelings of successfully impacting youth.

> I've had young women come up to me and say, the things that you were talking about represents my whole relationship and I'm ready to break up today. [Participant 7][Interview]

YRE educators had numerous stories about instances where the YRE programming made a difference in youths' lives. YRE educators reflected on the emotional element of making an impact, helping their youth, and having moments that are unforgettable. One educator detailed an emotional experience of being able to intervene with a youth who was planning to commit suicide but chose to reach out to the YRE educator for help because of the YRE programming they were receiving.

> I've even had the tragic occurrence of because a student heard what we had to offer, by way of content and curriculum, admit that they were experiencing suicidal ideation and that they had a plan and that they were ready to go home that day and pursue the plan. And because of that, because of hearing that and being a mandated reporter, I was able to step in and facilitate accordingly, but because they found me to be a safe individual, they were okay with allowing me to walk with them to the support that they needed…and so again, you hate to see those names, but you also know, if you weren't there, something else could have been the outcome, and so you know those are things that flood my system. I think I'll never forget those moments. [Participant 7][Interview]

The connections that encourage youth to open up to YRE educators, be vulnerable, and seek advice on their personal experiences secured YRE educators in perceiving that they are making meaningful and impactful connections with youth. Therefore, though the coronavirus pandemic meant a change to YRE programming, YRE educators chose to continue, to figure out what online implementation would look like, and prepared for the transition. YRE educators

struggled with the challenge of figuring out how to switch to online implementation because they, themselves, were not sure what exactly was going on and what sort of support to ask for.

> I think at first it was something we just had to figure out…we had to figure it out and make it work. [Participant 9][Interview]

During the transitional time between in-person and online implementation, YRE educators prepared for the transition by coming up with a plan to shift YRE program content to an online modality. This was considered something that required a lot of effort with individuals being assigned to transition specific lessons to a virtual format and then working as part of a team to brainstorm and share resources.

> We were doing weekly meetings with all the partners and just brainstorming together what the curriculum looks like virtually. And [co-facilitator] and I, we were assigned lessons and we created the PowerPoint presentations to fit the virtual format. [Participant 10][Focus Group]

YRE educators also used the down time to prepare for the online transition by practicing teaching the curriculum online. By the time online implementation began, YRE educators reported feeling stress regarding the transition, but prepared to tackle the new experience. Due to having to quickly navigate what the coronavirus pandemic meant for their role as YRE educators, many educators reflected on having a lot of responsibilities, especially when transitioning to online implementation. They had to switch into new roles, determine how to logistically transition, and figure out online teaching. The perception of added responsibility was not universally similar for all YRE educators. Some individuals did not feel as burdened if they were only required to implement an online plan that was given to them; however, those who were part of the process of creating online plans, traversing community and school partnerships,

and familiarizing themselves with new technologies reported feeling overwhelmed at times. Sometimes, this translated into YRE educators feeling like they were unable to give their full effort to all of their roles and responsibilities.

> I think it depends on your role…If you're just teaching, maybe it was a great, positive experience, but trying to deal with the technology, the logistics, coming up with a plan, all of that, and then having to worry about planning to teach it and all that too. I'm good. [Participant 1][Focus Group]

Another responsibility of YRE educators is to recruit youth and fulfill their quota set forth by funder requirements. The coronavirus pandemic shifted educators' thoughts on how to recruit and what reaching youth entailed. Organizations and educators who had already met their funding requirement quotas were able to be less concerned with continuing to recruit and implement. However, for those who had not met quota, or who were adamant about continuing to implement regardless of quota, figuring out how to recruit and reach youth virtually was of primary concern. Initially YRE educators not working within a school system, reported not being sure how to reach youth. They reflected on wanting to have received more help from their organizations or community partners. Over time however, recruiting was described as easier to manage. Youth bought into the online implementation of the program over time and began inviting their friends. This shift to online implementation allowed YRE educators to reach more youth than when implementing in-person, because they were able to be in more places (e.g., schools, community settings) within a day, hold more sessions, and reduce barriers like educator or participant travel, leading them to reconsider how they reach youth due to this newfound virtual capability. The ability to reach larger numbers of youth was considered one of the biggest strengths of online implementation.

> Being virtual has allowed us to see more students and more places in the same day than we ever could in a single capacity. Now the benefit of that is there were opportunities to engage youth where we would have said no, naturally, because we just can't be in two places at one time. But virtual capacity has led us to reconsider that and rethink that, so I think that is the strongest strength, and it led us through some doors where we originally were told no. [Participant 7][Focus Group]

Although the coronavirus pandemic prompted an unexpected movement toward online implementation for YRE educators, they exhibited enthusiasm in choosing to continue with programming. The process of Choosing to Continue (Code 1: Choosing to Continue) was driven by YRE educators' passion for their youth, empowerment of their youth, and desire to provide meaningful experiences that impact their youth (Code 2: Impacting Youth). This internal motivation was also guided or constrained by external supports (e.g., YRE educators and agencies) through decisions to continue programming and assistance during transition. After making the decision to continue with YRE programming, YRE educators were faced with a new experience (Code 3: Experiencing Something New) and needed to figure out (Code 5: Figuring it Out) how to pivot into online implementation. Some educators quickly adapted (Code 4: Transitioning Timeline) their programming for online (e.g., one month) while others had a lengthier process (e.g., multiple months) when preparing for the transition (Code 6: Preparing for the Transition). The preparation time allowed all educators to figure out how to adapt their YRE program for an online modality, become familiar with technology, and practice teaching the adapted program online. This move to an online modality caused some educators to feel overburdened with new responsibilities (Code 7: Having a Lot of Responsibilities), but

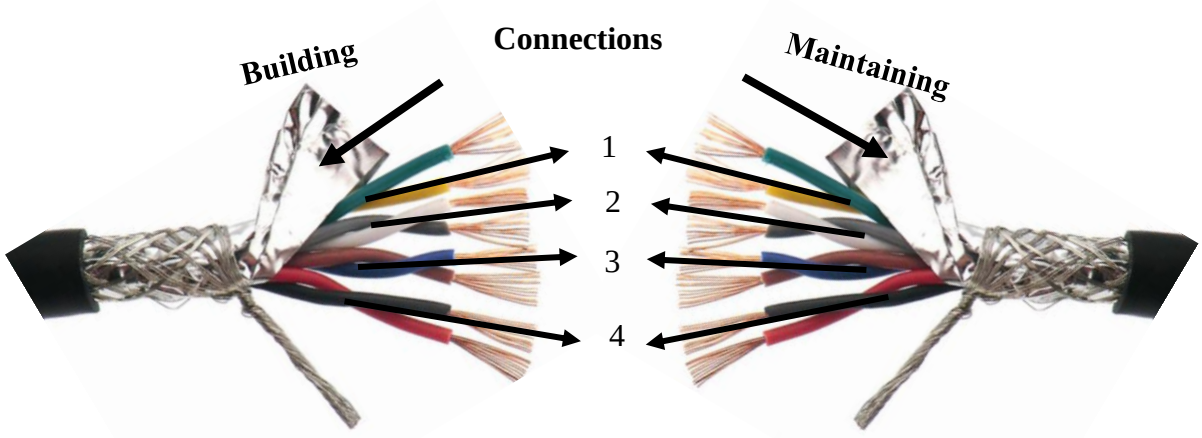
convinced educators that the added effort was beneficial as it was a way to connect with more youth by reducing barriers of in-person programming.

Category Two: Building and Maintaining Connections

Overview of Category 2. Providing meaningful YRE experiences required intentional effort from YRE educators and their supporting agencies to build and maintain connections both before and during the coronavirus pandemic. Category Two (Building and Maintaining Connections) outlines the four sub-categories (i.e., Building Community Partnerships, Maintaining Community Partnerships, Retaining Connections Through Technology, and Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities) which explain the nuances of building and maintaining connections for YRE educators (see Appendix G). Figure 4 shows the category and its sub-categories (see Figure 4). The protective sheath covering the wires within the power cord represent the connections. The four sub-categories that support YRE educators in building and maintaining connections make up the wires encapsulated by the sheath (connections). There is a break between the two sets of power cords which represents the two modalities, in-person and online implementation, as divided by the coronavirus pandemic. Though this separation is present, YRE educators can re-connect the two sides of the power cord through the four elements (i.e., sub-categories) of Building and Maintaining Connections.

Figure 4

Category Two: Building and Maintaining Connections



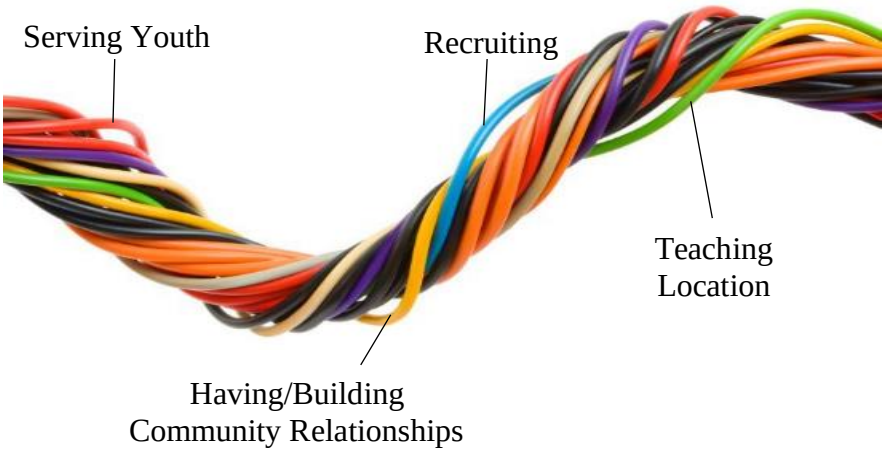
Note. Figure 4 depicts category two: building and maintaining connections as a connective casing that bridges in-person and online implementation. Building and maintaining connections is supported by four sub-categories: 1. building community partnerships, 2. maintaining community partnerships, 3. retaining connections through technology, and 4. connecting and engaging youth across modalities.

2.1 Sub-Category Building Community Partnerships.

Overview of Sub-Category 2.1. Regardless of delivery modality, Sub-Category One: Building Community Partnerships captures the need to build connections with community partners to gain access to youth and programming space for implementation. These community partners, such as local organizations and school systems, were themselves impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. As described below, challenges arose in the process of pivoting into an online format because of the transition faced by the community organizations. Building community partnerships is an interwoven experience that can help to create close connections amongst YRE educators, the organizations through which they serve, and the youth, as depicted by the closely twisted wires in Figure 5. YRE educators' effort to serve youth initiates the process of Building Community Partnerships which leads to forming relationships within the community to reach and recruit youth for YRE programming. This process results in the setting, or location, that YRE educators implement YRE programming.

Figure 5

Sub-Category One of Category Two: Building Community Partnerships



Note. Figure 5 depicts sub-category one (building community partnerships) of category two (building and maintaining connections).

***Findings of Category 2.1: Building Community Partnerships*.** YRE educators, at a foundational level, commented that they provide services to youth; however, their description of serving youth was much deeper. YRE educators chose their careers with the intention to serve their community and specifically to impact youth. When working within their communities, YRE educators within this study operated within either a school or community-based setting. Though this service occurred in various locations (e.g., park, school, etc.), as described below, a commonality among educators was the experience of serving youth classified as at-risk, high-risk, or high-need. For some educators, this included youth who were considered low-income/SES. For others, they worked with a potentially transient population such as youth within the foster care system or youth who were justice-involved or justice-impacted. Justice-involved refers to youth who have personally been incarcerated or on probation, while justice-impacted refers to youth who may have a family member or close relative involved in the justice system or who are living within a high crime area.

> The majority of the families live at or below the poverty level. So, living at or below poverty level comes with things like housing insecurity, food insecurity, the increased rate of having some sort of police involvement, or gang violence, or just violence in general, and then also an increase in single parent households and teenage pregnancy. [Participant 9][Interview]

For those working in school-based settings, YRE educators were mainly within high schools, though some were also in middle school and college settings. School-based YRE was almost always implemented across multiple weeks, with educators implementing in the school system multiple times a week or at least weekly. Those within a community-based setting were diverse in their location and approach to YRE pre-coronavirus pandemic. Community-based implementation of YRE may be spread out over multiple weeks but was also possible to occur over a weekend or within one day. Some of the locations mentioned include after school programs, community parks, domestic violence shelters, group homes, and juvenile detention facilities. For youth on probation or within the juvenile detention facility, YRE educators felt the environment made their job to implement YRE difficult. Juvenile detention centers were not seen as an environment beneficial for youth growth and generated the challenge of losing access to youth once they were released. Therefore, though YRE educators recognized the need and impact when working with justice-involved youth, they would have preferred to interact with youth in a different setting that was supportive of growth and learning.

> An incarcerated setting is not one that is conducive to growth, as much as that's how they like to tout it. It is not conducive to learning and it is not the place where I would prefer to interact with my youth, because a lot of my youth in those programs were constantly in

survival mode and when the kid is in survival mode, I do not have their full attention. They are distracted, they are on edge. [Participant 6][Focus Group]

To serve youth and implement programming (Code 1: Serving Youth), YRE educators stated the need to build community partnerships; this collaboration with the community or agencies was deemed crucial for success (Code 2: Having/Building Community Partnerships). Community individuals are many times the gatekeepers who determine if YRE educators are able to reach youth and implement programming. Many times these gatekeepers provided the programming location (e.g., community organization, school, juvenile detention facility) (Code 3: Teaching Location). Therefore, having good relationships with agencies, as well as good reputations within the community, not only grants YRE educators' access to youth populations through those agencies or schools, but can allow the educator more freedoms and flexibility. For instance, educators mentioned being given whatever physical space, resources, and time they needed to implement due to their connection and reputation with the school. Some educators were very familiar with their community, or had others lay the groundwork with their community partners, helping to build this connection. For those that did not have the connections already, they worked to introduce themselves to individuals and showed loyalty to schools or agencies by working with them and building the connection over a span of years (Code 4: Recruiting). These community partnerships were also described as mutually beneficial as YRE educators were able to implement their relationship education programs and were then able to help connect youth with the partners for job and internship experiences.

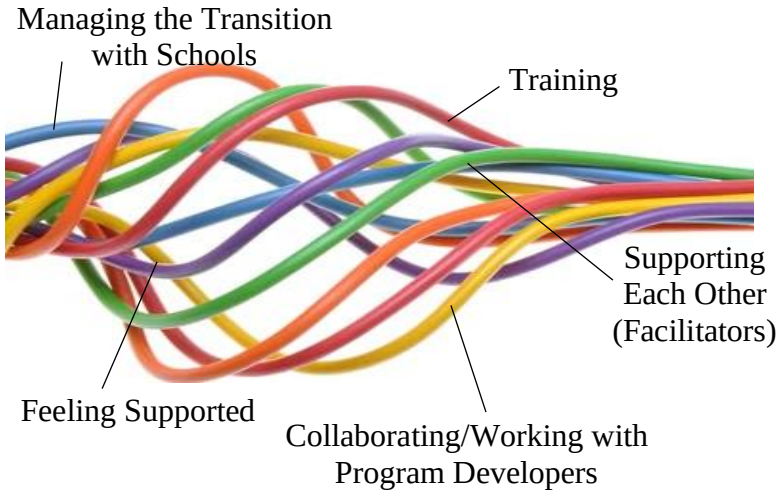
2.2 Sub-Category Maintaining Community Partnerships.

Overview of Sub-Category 2.2. School systems were enmeshed in their own process of figuring out academic logistics at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. As such, Sub-Category

Two: Maintaining Community Partnerships, describes how YRE educators had to actively work to maintain connections with the school system, teachers, and other community agencies. They also recognized these connections as valuable resources aiding their intention to create a meaningful connection with youth through YRE programming. Figure 6 displays this process of maintaining community partnerships because of the coronavirus pandemic. Within this figure, the wires are more loosely interwoven than in Figure 5; this is due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on the connections between YRE educators and their community partners (e.g., schools, organizations). YRE educators, as previously mentioned, were largely operating through local school systems, and therefore had to manage the transition into online implementation due to the coronavirus pandemic with schools. Perceptions of support through entities like YRE serving agencies, training and professional development opportunities, YRE curriculum developers, and other YRE educators aided in managing the transition. Maintaining community partnerships was loosely connected at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic because of the resulting academic transition and chaos. YRE educators' supports and efforts towards maintaining connection through online implementation helped return the partnerships to a tight-knit connection as indicated by the interwoven wires on the right side of the figure.

Figure 6

Sub-Category Two of Category Two: Maintaining Community Partnerships



Note. Figure 6 depicts sub-category two (maintaining community partnerships) of category two (building and maintaining connections).

***Findings of Sub-Category 2.2: Maintaining Community Partnerships*.** YRE educators gained access to youth populations and were provided locations in which to implement through the previously mentioned schools and community agencies. These partnerships were, many times, connections that had been fostered and sustained over years. When the coronavirus pandemic occurred, school systems were hit especially hard. YRE educators recalled the upheaval that occurred because school systems were shifting between virtual, hybrid, and in-person academic delivery at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Schools were not perceived to prioritize YRE since the school systems were managing their own uncertainty regarding teaching and learning during the coronavirus pandemic. As previously mentioned, some YRE educators and their organizations decided to take a break in their implementation until school systems were more certain of their plans moving forward. For those that did not take a break, or those who did and tried to get back into school systems following the break, there

were complicated school rules and policies in place that made it more challenging to implement within the school system. Those with a close connection and good reputation within the schools indicated schools were more accommodating to allow them to implement because the teachers found value in the RE program and were deliberate in making the YRE curriculum part of their class curriculum.

> There was already truly a relationship built in the school system so that when I went in, our transition was fairly easy because the teachers love the program and when we had to go hybrid, the teachers kind of made our program part of the curriculum. [Participant 8][Focus Group]

Connections with schools and community agencies were not the only resources that aided YRE educators as they transitioned to online implementation. Intangible resources were the perceptions of support from organizations, other facilitators, and curriculum developers. Feeling supported was considered a perception aiding in feeling successful when attempting to maintain meaningful connections online. Organizations were favorably viewed as a resource for educators when they provided guidance, offered opportunities for professional development, and answered questions. By working together as a team to transition to online implementation during the coronavirus pandemic, educators were strengthened in their resolve to continue working with their organizations. Some elements of working as a team included sharing tips on what was working or not working, compiling resources, and sharing ideas for how to move forward. Being able to ask other facilitators questions was appreciated and helped boost YRE educators' sense of efficacy in their own transition. Similarly, during focus groups, hearing the experiences from other YRE educators with whom they did not work with, generated a sense of peace, knowing

that others experienced similar challenges, and those challenges were not indicative of failure when transitioning to online implementation.

> Just to know that other people are in the struggle like me, this actually is super supportive to hear that. Like man, we did not fail; other people have kind of had the same struggle so it's good, this is really good for me honestly. [Participant 9][Focus Group]

YRE curriculum developers also directly and indirectly provided support and resources to YRE educators during the coronavirus pandemic. Ideas, tips, and suggestions for online implementation were conveyed from the YRE curriculum developers to all organizations using their programs. YRE educators also reported being able to email the developers with specific questions assisted their transition plans for completing program activities online.

> The foundation that we use a lot of their curriculum, they constantly were updating their programming and adding in new things and reaching out and offering trainings for us on how to implement these programs in a virtual format. So actually, relying on them to help us out was really beneficial. [Participant 2][Focus Group]

YRE curriculum developers or YRE organizations were typically the entities that provided training opportunities both at the start of the YRE educators' career and during the shift into online programming. Educators recalled being trained in their YRE curriculum initially through methods like lecturing, role playing, note taking, activity exploration, and group discussion. Some educators were offered additional training opportunities by their organizations on topics such as trust-based relationships with youth and trauma-informed practice. Having the proper training supported YRE educators as they prepared to teach YRE in-person pre-coronavirus pandemic. When the coronavirus pandemic began, some educators felt training on

online implementation was not a necessity, though being oriented with new technology was helpful.

> Not that we needed to get trained how to do an online training, but if you haven't been in these things…I remember at first, we didn't know how it was going to work, and I remember the first couple of times we were like, "is this how it's supposed to go?" [Participant 3][Focus Group]

Although some educators did, many educators did not, receive formal training to transition their implementation online, and instead had to figure the process out on their own or within their organizational teams.

> We did do a training with [YRE curriculum developers] on how to shift some of the content to be virtual friendly. So we did have that, but beyond that, not too much. It was kind of just winging it as we went. [Participant 1][Interview]

Through these experiences, YRE educators effortfully worked to maintain connections so that they would be able to provide a YRE experience to youth during the coronavirus pandemic. Being able to successfully develop a connection and create a meaningful experience for youth was dependent on YRE educators sustaining relationships with the school systems and community organizations in which they conducted programming (Code 1: Managing the Transition with Schools). These gatekeepers were not the only necessary entities needed to develop an online YRE programming experience though. YRE agencies, curriculum developers, and other educators were crucial supports for the YRE educators as they conceptualized and prepared for the upcoming pivot into online implementation (Code 2: Feeling Supported). Some YRE agencies were supportive through online trainings, professional development, or other supplied resources (Code 5: Training). YRE curriculum developers provided tips and tricks for

implementing their programs through online modalities and worked with YRE educators to develop and refine these suggestions (Code 3: Collaborating and Working with Program Developers). Lastly, other YRE educators were perceived as supports during this process as they assisted each other with planning and preparation for the transition to online implementation and through sharing experiences during this study's focus groups (Code 4: Supporting Each Other (Facilitators)).

2.3 Sub-Category Retaining Connections through Technology.

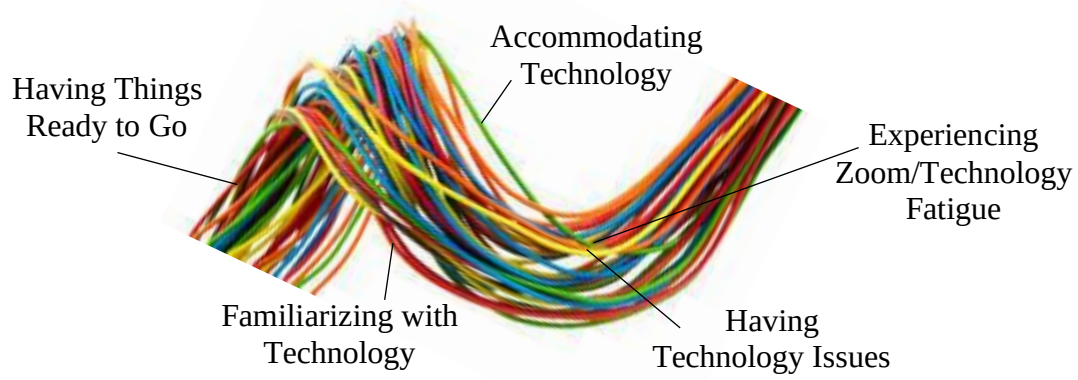
Overview of Sub-Category 2.3. As community partners approved a programming shift into online implementation, YRE educators had to determine the best way to create a meaningful experience through online implementation. Given that the coronavirus pandemic was an unexpected historical event, YRE educators hurriedly tried to figure out new technology that was not set up to handle the educators' programming needs as described below. Though the process of familiarizing themselves with technology was ongoing and sometimes challenging, YRE educators did so to retain the connections they had with youth, schools, teachers, and community agencies as shown in Figure 7: Retaining Connections Through Technology.

This sub-category explains the efforts of YRE educators of Retaining Connections Through Technology as they transitioned into online implementation due to the coronavirus pandemic. Resources such as a familiarity with audio/visual equipment or experience recording online YRE programming prepared some educators for the transition to online programming. Regardless of previous experience, all YRE educators faced the task of becoming familiar with the technology needed to implement programming online (e.g., computers, Zoom, Microsoft Teams). Although many online platforms (e.g., Zoom) were not designed for optimal online YRE programming, platforms adapted to meet the needs of academic and YRE educators alike

due to the coronavirus pandemic. As YRE educators and youth began to use technology for YRE programming they experienced technological challenges that impacted their ability to connect through technology such as internet outages. After a while, YRE educators indicated their own fatigue with the increased use of technology for programming, meetings, and everyday life, and perceived their youth to be experiencing fatigue as well. The codes within this category existed along a timeline during the transition to online education as seen in the wires on Figure 7.

Figure 7

Sub-Category Three of Category Two: Retaining Connections Through Technology



Note. Figure 7 depicts sub-category three (retaining connections through technology) of category two (building and maintaining connections).

Findings of Sub-Category 2.3: Retaining Connections Through Technology. YRE educators faced a new task of identifying, utilizing, and navigating new technologies in order to maintain connections with youth. In a step-like transition into online implementation, YRE educators first recorded themselves teaching program lessons asynchronously and then moved into synchronous online implementation. Within the first step, YRE educators recorded videos of themselves teaching the program and then shared the recordings with schoolteachers or youth. In the videos, educators attempted to stay interactive, indicating when a video should be paused so that youth could respond to a prompt or complete an activity. Within the second step, YRE

educators moved into live online implementation with youth which encompassed a new challenge of navigating online virtual platforms.

> We were one of the first to launch our content and not give up on our youth just because of Covid and therefore, it created a really great landscape for us to transition to first asynchronous content and then move to doing virtual facilitation live, so it was pretty cool how that worked out. [Participant 7][Focus Group]

Several educators already had previous experience with audio-visual technology and/or recording YRE lessons, considering this experience as a valuable resource that made transitioning to online an easier process. For instance, YRE educators who were familiar with audio and visual recording devices, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams reported a quicker shift into online implementation.

> For us, it was kind of a pretty easy transition to do online, because we had the stuff ready, and so we actually did quite a bit online. [Participant 3][Focus Group]

Some organizations and educators had experience recording YRE lessons pre-coronavirus pandemic to provide YouTube content or to review previously learned material with their youth ahead of the current in-person session. YRE educators with a transient population (e.g., justice-involved) discussed posting recorded program content pre-coronavirus pandemic to a YouTube channel for youth who left their facility before the end of programming. Others recorded summaries of the previously taught lesson to watch at the beginning of a session when in-person with their youth. Educators reported that students who were already used to seeing their YRE educators through the recorded review videos seemed to have an easier transition when watching the YRE educators later, during the coronavirus pandemic through their online platform.

> At the time, we also had been conditioning our students to get used to seeing us behind the screen because we would do little vignettes of ourselves recapping the lesson material behind the camera… by the time we transitioned, they were already used to seeing us… some of the things that we did prior laid the foundation for us to launch quickly and it was seamless because, by the time schools were ready to live stream in and do all of that capacity, we were already ready for the nuance that virtual capability brings. [Participant 7][Interview]

Though some YRE educators were familiar with various technology ahead of the coronavirus pandemic, they viewed youth as the technology experts and tried to incorporate technologies they may be familiar with (e.g., Kahoot, polls). Zoom was mentioned to be the most utilized online delivery platform and was not previously well-known by the YRE educators. However, over time, YRE educators reported that they became used to using Zoom and were able to navigate online multitasking more fluidly. For instance, online multitasking included teaching online, reading PowerPoint slides, sharing the educators' computer screen, recording the lesson, reading the online chat box, launching polls, creating breakout rooms, and engaging youth. Online implementation through Zoom even allowed some educators to view their notes more easily while teaching, making it easier to remember all the content needing to be covered.

> When the whole Zoom thing started, nobody knew what Zoom was. Well, few people did prior to covid. Now Zoom is like a household name. [Participant 6][Focus Group]

Adaptations and accommodations that online platforms made over time made them easier to use. Zoom, and other similar platforms, initially had limits; Zoom was a paid service and could only be utilized for up to 30 minutes. At first, YRE educators had to adapt their curriculum to fit within the time limits which sometimes meant cutting program content or time to connect

with youth. Nonetheless, technologies were more accommodating over time and expanded to better fit the needs of educators and their participants.

> They [Zoom] didn't have free access. Because it was a 30-minute limit, we had to play around that, and our curriculum is supposed to be at least 45 minutes…I guess resources that we had in the beginning, is what made it difficult [to be successful]. But I think as the time was passing, platforms were accommodating; schools were accommodating. I think it made it much easier on us as facilitators to adjust and provide the services to the students. [Participant 10][Focus Group]

Part of familiarizing themselves with new technology included various technological issues. As mentioned previously, some youth did not have access to computers and were therefore provided one through a school or community center. Another collective challenge revolved around access to stable internet. At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, some youth did not have internet access because of their family's inability to pay for a service that was expensive and not deemed a necessity. Within many communities, internet companies offered free or reduced internet during the coronavirus pandemic; however, internet speeds were unreliable and slow. As large amounts of people accessed the internet within the same location and at the same time of day due to being at home because of the coronavirus pandemic, the internet would kick youth off the online delivery platform as internet outages occurred. With so many disruptions to the internet, it was sometimes tough for YRE educators to teach, keep track of letting youth back into their online session after being kicked out, and keep everyone up to date on the material being covered. Nonetheless, YRE educators continued to program through technology issues.

> The speed just wasn't that great. So, it was tough, because you get multiple people at a time, they go on the internet. So that will be one of the things that would be people getting kicked out and coming back in and getting kicked out and have to let them back in. [Participant 9][Interview]

With the considerable shift in educational activities switching to virtual means, YRE educators felt a general sense of fatigue from their youth and experienced the virtual fatigue themselves. YRE educators reported that not only did youth appear to be tired of computers and virtual interactions, but specifically experienced Zoom/technology fatigue which can be described as an overstimulation of visual stimuli through online means which can induce social, psychological, or physical exhaustion (Bullock et al., 2022). Though educators conveyed difficulty moving beyond Zoom fatigue, they continued to try to connect with and engage their youth, as will be described in the next sub-category.

> One thing that we all had in common was talking about Zoom fatigue in the beginning. Definitely that was one of the common topics. [Participant 10][Focus Group]

Retaining connections with youth through online YRE programming was not an easy adjustment. YRE educators faced the challenge of familiarizing themselves with new technologies (Code 2: Familiarizing with Technology) while simultaneously adapting YRE program content and approaches to adhere to the technological restraints (Code 3: Accommodating Technology). While this process was easier for those with previous technological experience (Code 1: Having Things Ready to Go), all educators lacked control over some of the technological difficulties. As cities provided resources, like free or reduced internet, some challenges (e.g., no internet access) were alleviated, while others (e.g., unstable internet) arose (Code 4: Having Technology Issues). Despite the potential challenges, YRE

educators attempted to push through the universally felt technology-fatigue to provide an engaging YRE experience and connect with their youth (Code 5: Experiencing Zoom/Technology Fatigue). Pushing through the fatigue and technological challenges, YRE educators can recoil the frayed wires (i.e., elements of connecting) that were loosened due to the coronavirus pandemic displayed in Figure 4 to build and maintain connections with youth through technology.

2.4 Sub-Category Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities.

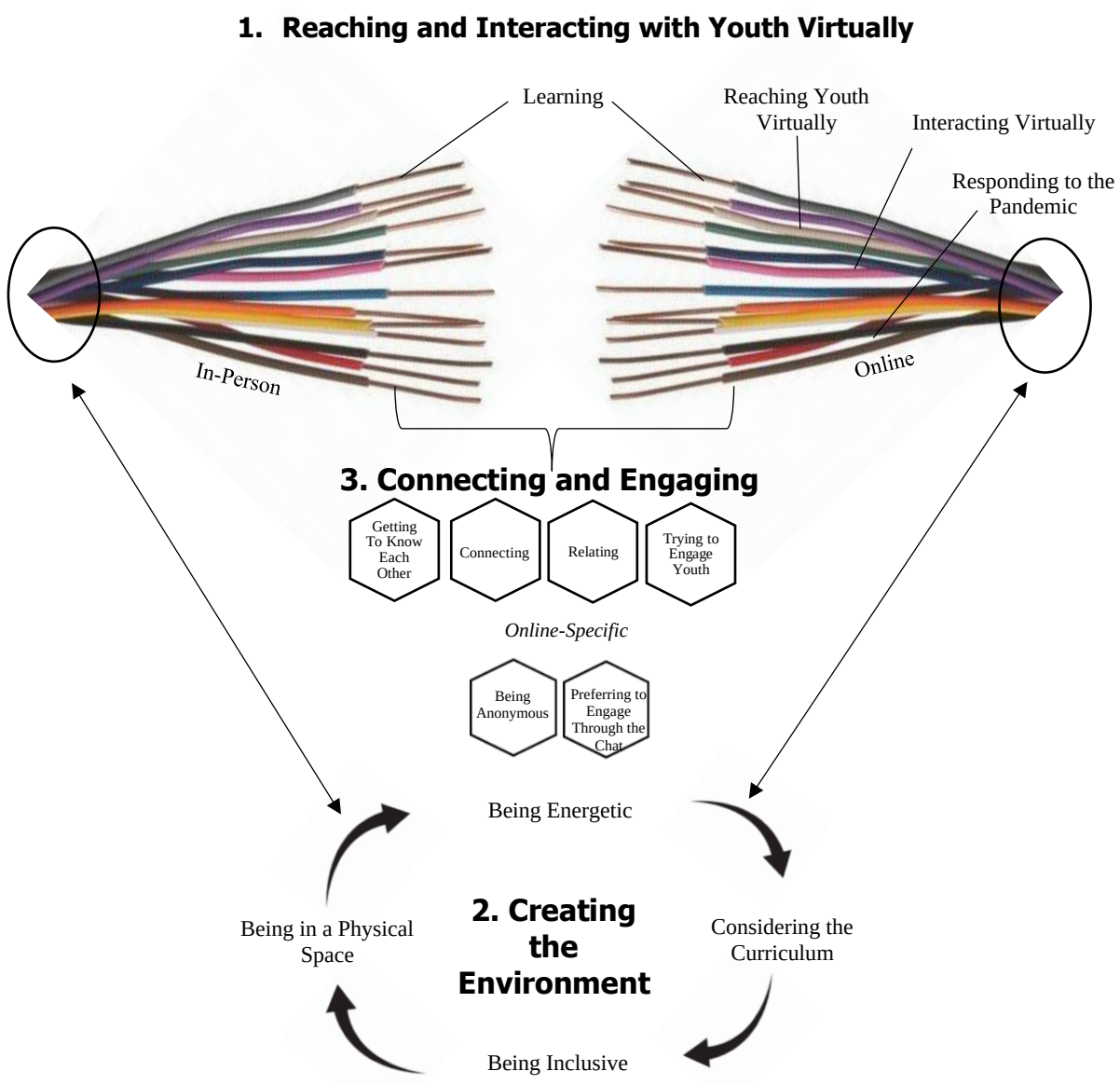
Overview of Sub-Category 2.4. Sub-Category 2.4, Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities, is expansive of the elements of connections with, and engagement of, youth that were perceived by educators as indicative of success. Previous methods that worked to connect with and engage youth in-person were no longer viable options for YRE educators because online implementation drastically shifted educators' perceptions of interpersonal connection and ways of knowing if youth were engaged. In-person perceptions of engagement stemmed from visual and verbal cues. In contrast, online engagement was largely void of visual and verbal cues because youth preferred to have their cameras off and instead primarily consisted of written cues. When shifting to reconsider what virtual interaction entailed and create an environment that was safe, inclusive, and fun, results indicate that YRE educators can establish an online implementation presence that bolsters their ability to successfully connect and engage with youth through three sub-sub-category concepts. Methods YRE educators used to create an online environment that were supportive of building authentic connections and encouraging engagement are discussed below in Analytic Results, Category Two.

Figure 8 indicates the process of connecting and engaging youth across in-person and online modalities as seen in the two sections of wires (i.e., in-person and online) at the top of the

diagram. Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities was central to the educators' perceptions of success and is divided among three sub-sub-category concepts: (i) reaching and interacting with youth virtually; (ii) creating the environment; and (iii) connecting and engaging. Figure 8 illustrates the second sub-category Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities, with the varying parts of the wires representing each sub-sub-category concept (i through iii). In Figure 8, Reaching and Interacting with Youth Virtually is indicated by the online wires (right). However, once connected to the in-person wires (left), they tell the story of how reaching and interacting with youth were altered in the process of transitioning online due to the coronavirus pandemic through specific codes such as learning, reaching youth virtually, interacting virtually, and responding to the pandemic. Moving to the bottom of the figure, Creating the Environment: Category 2.4.2, is indicated at the base of both sets of wires. Both in-person and online, YRE educators expressed the importance of creating an environment that was inclusive, safe, and fun. In bridging the two modalities, Connecting and Engaging: Category 2.4.3, is displayed in the center of the two sets of wires. The process educators' express for attempting to connect with and engage their youth during YRE programming was both similar and distinct across modalities. Specific codes describing the practices include connecting, getting to know each other, relating, trying to engage youth, and two online-specific codes: being anonymous and preferring to engage through the online chat.

Figure 8

Sub-Category Four of Category Two: Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities



Note. Figure 8 depicts sub-category four (connecting and engaging youth across modalities) of category two (building and maintaining connections). Connecting and engaging youth across modalities is encompassed by three sub-category concepts: 1. reaching and interacting with youth virtually, 2. creating the environment, and 3. connecting and engaging youth.

2.4.1 Reaching and Interacting with Youth Virtually. The coronavirus pandemic did not just impact YRE educators' ability to reach more youth, it noticeably impacted the YRE

experience as implementation transitioned online. Interacting with youth through an online format was a process that gradually, over time became more normal. YRE educators mentioned some youth had resistance for engaging in YRE virtually at first and that the process of online interaction was slow. Some contemplated that it may have been harder for youth who were naturally shyer to be online. However, YRE educators overwhelmingly expressed that not only did online implementation allow for more youth to interact and participate at the same time, but youth were more willing to open up online. Educators considered this may be due to the anonymity online can provide.

> I've also seen that through virtual a lot of kids, actually a lot more kids, probably express themselves more and they share more because they don't have to show their cameras, so they're kind of anonymous in some aspects, right? So instead of being in a room full of kids and being scared of, "what am I going to say? Are they going to judge me?" Stuff like that, it changed things. [Participant 11][Interview]

Extending this concept, educators mentioned youths' cameras were predominantly off during YRE programming unless class expectations for keeping cameras on was set at the beginning of programming and encouraged throughout. For those that did have cameras on, YRE educators commented the visual focus would be through odd angles like pointed at the ceiling or forehead rather than straight on. For those with youth who did not turn their cameras on at all, it was difficult to see non-verbal cues like body language or facial expressions.

> iGen, or our younger students, they were okay with you seeing forehead and above, like whatever's above them. So, you're not getting that natural sort of positioning the same way you would in-person...If your camera's off you have no body language to go off of.

> No head, no eyebrows, no facial. You just really don't even know if they're there. [Participant 7][Interview]

Therefore, YRE educators had to reconsider how to ensure that youth were learning from the YRE program online. When in-person, educators mentioned the ability to see the learning that was happening as youth became excited or showed cues of content mastery.

> Young people, if they were encouraging each other, they could fist bump or high five and sort of you know…it was very much in real time, a very genuine experience, especially when they were learning the information and you could see the light bulbs going off. [Participant 7][Focus Group]

Many times in-person learning occurred through hands on activities. Being able to physically manipulate objects, move around in a space, and have informal talk more easily during activities helped youth stay focused, engaged, and boosted energy.

> When we talk about Lesson 12 or 11 that talks about sex, and it has the quiz with true or false right? I'll take true on one side of the wall, false on the other side. They actually have to get up out of their seats and you have to go to which side they think, if it's true or false… we try and just make it as hands on as possible, making sure they are getting out of their seats. [Participant 9][Interview]

When YRE educators considered how learning changed when conducting programming online, they first noted that they had to learn what worked and what did not by trying things out and seeing the outcome. Educators experienced the challenge of adapting learning for online implementation, stating it allowed them to tap into different learning styles both personally and for their youth.

> I was trying to already come up with ideas in my head of how to make things virtual. So yeah, that was kind of stressful, it was kind of fun, in a way, I got to use a lot of creative problem solving and critical thinking. [Participant 1][Interview]

Though educators were able to entice some creativity into their learning plans, they did have to alter their expectations. Youth were no longer able to work on their own without educator supervision; educators commented that activities and tasks needed more oversight to ensure they were being accomplished. In response to this lack of youths' focus, educators shifted their practices by lecturing less and changing tasks or activities more frequently (see Table 7). Pre-coronavirus pandemic learning was dictated more by the educator or curriculum outline whereas online learning shifted toward a more intentional focus on the youths' learning needs.

> More where I feel like it used to be on my time where I have this class planned out; like this is 10 minutes, this will be 15 minutes, this will be 20 minutes, now it's more like this was 5 minutes and then we need to switch to something else. The longest I've got youth is for a good 10 minutes, then we've got to switch to something else. [Participant 9][Interview]

Table 7

Practices of YRE Teaching and Engagement Before and During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Before the Pandemic	During the Pandemic
1. Youth and educator movement around the room during activities	1. Polls through the online platform
2. Hands-on activities	2. Gamification through platforms like Kahoot!™
3. Out loud discussions	3. Online chat box discussions
4. Shifting of activities is based on educator schedule	4. Shifting of activities is based on youth focus and engagement

Note. Table 7 displays various teaching methods used by youth relationship educators before and during the coronavirus pandemic.

These changes in learning were not just a result of transitioning to online implementation; the coronavirus pandemic altered the process of learning and youths' capacities for staying on task. Everyone involved had to figure out what life, much less YRE programming, looked like within a pandemic. Educators and students alike were stuck at home, unable to travel or socialize face to face. YRE educators conveyed attempts to support their youth and communities holistically by providing resources like food, emotional support, and YRE program materials; some educators went as far as to drop individual material packets and goodie baskets off at their youths' homes. This, however, did not stop some families from prohibiting their youth to engage in virtual learning or YRE programming.

> We distinctly had parents walk up to school officials and school boards, never mind the free WIFI installed in the homes, never mind the free laptops that were all given out by the big agencies and the big businesses. We had parents walk up to school and said y'all can't see what's going on in my house. Call us back when school starts. [Participant 7][Focus Group]

YRE educators saw the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, mentioning that many effects were negative, traumatic, and may not even be fully recognized until well after the pandemic. Within trying to understand the universal, societal trauma, YRE educators also worked to recognize individual trauma. Online education meant that students' stressors followed them throughout the day; they did not have the opportunity to visit different environments and some youth were perceived by YRE educators as being depressed or in survival mode. Because of the inability to escape stressors, some youth seemed disengaged online when they were perceived to be overwhelmed or triggered. This challenged YRE educators when attempting to

find a balance between being sensitive to collective and individual trauma, but also trying to get their youth to behave and engage.

> I feel like a lot of them seem kind of apathetic and so trying to find a balance between understanding the trauma they've been through but also pushing them and challenging them to get their act together. [Participant 1][Interview]

Missing a year of school or experiencing a year or more with a constantly changing school environment due to the coronavirus pandemic, appeared to make youth less familiar and comfortable with structure. YRE educators reported youth acted less mature and seemed to be lacking in emotional regulation and socialization techniques because of this interruption from the coronavirus pandemic. While in session, youth were frequently reported as more distracted and less focused, initiating YRE educators to shift their teaching methods to pay stricter attention to youth. Educators now felt they needed to have more patience with youth and had to oversee youths' work more closely to ensure it was done. Owing to these experiences, YRE educators do not think going back to pre-coronavirus pandemic YRE implementation is possible. Moving forward, YRE educators think YRE will be done differently as they work to be more sensitive to their youths' experiences. Considering the rewiring of Figure 8, the wires cannot be reconnected as if they were never separated; instead, they must be reshaped in a new way that ensures the connection is stable. Similarly for YRE educators, the process of connecting with youth was shaped differently after they experienced virtual interaction.

> Approaching it [YRE] with a little extra sensitivity, because some of our young people may have been in abusive homes that they had just not shared or expressed. So, because they had to endure that, or they had to witness it, they might be a little more...ACEs

> [adverse childhood experiences] may be higher, but that also means that they may not be as responsive to certain stimuli that maybe they once were. [Participant 7][Interview]

Since the coronavirus pandemic prompted a drastic shift into online implementation, many youth were not used to interacting virtually and therefore needed to become more acclimated over time (Code 2: Interacting Virtually). Once they did however, online programming seemed to expand interactions with more youth participating and being willing to share (Code 1: Reaching Youth Virtually). While interactions were expanded, learning was more challengingly altered (Code 3: Learning). The online learning environment was transformed to be more pointedly youth-focus which supported their need for flexible structure, less lecturing, and more frequent changes in topic or activities due to being online and the stress of the coronavirus pandemic (Code 4: Responding to the Pandemic).

2.4.2 Creating the Environment. Moving to the base of the wires (i.e., Creating the Environment) in Figure 8, educators create and mold their programming environment to support the ability to reach and interact with youth virtually as just discussed. Creating the classroom environment takes time to get to know the youth and intentionally cultivate the classroom culture. Ultimately, YRE educators hope to create an environment that is fun for youth so that they enjoy the YRE experience. However, a YRE experience is unlikely to be fun if important fundamental elements (e.g., expectations, inclusion, authenticity) are not adhered to. As previously mentioned, YRE educators frequently started programming by setting expectations with youth. This process was done with youth so that YRE educators could lead the expectations, but jointly construct the class expectations so that youth would be more apt to follow them. Giving youth ownership of the experience aided YRE educators in creating a welcoming environment that was fun and supportive.

> You have to create an atmosphere too. If you have a good, kind of fun atmosphere, then you won't have any problems. [Participant 12][Interview]

Being energetic and enthusiastic was a way in which YRE educators worked to promote a fun environment. This meant leaving their own personal challenges (e.g., stress, relational challenges, financial challenges) outside of the classroom in order to maintain the excitement around programming. Remaining energetic was an essential component of building the connection with youth as YRE educators perceived that youths' energies were dependent and built upon the educators' energy. Youth were thought to have a keen sense for reading the educator and would respond with similar levels of enthusiasm. Having energy when moving to an online format was somewhat harder for YRE educators as they indicated they had to emphasize that energy more through virtual means.

> We try to have facilitators that just bring the energy. So that helps; you can't let the teenagers know. They're completely authentic and they know if you're not feeling it. They can read you like a deck of cards. So you have to bring it, that's what I've noticed. If you're excited, they're excited. [Participant 12][Interview]

Fun classroom environments are supported by content that is relatable and reinforced by inclusive and safe atmospheres. YRE educators express a fondness for the programs they teach, and the content provided. However, they also recognize that they are teaching the same information across diverse youth. Cultural relevancy was a concern YRE educators expressed as they wanted to be inclusive to all cultures, while maintaining fidelity to their programming.

> I think one of the greatest challenges to this curriculum has been to make it culturally relevant and make it presentable to our particular demographic and you know, and when I say culturally, I don't just mean race and ethnicity, I mean subcultures and all the

different things that we deal with depending on what part of the United States that you're from. [Participant 6][Focus Group]

Though YRE programs were acknowledged to be continually updated, many educators had to individually consider cultural relevancy and inclusivity for their specific youth. To make the curriculum and their programming more inclusive to better connect with their youth, YRE educators felt it was important to pay attention to the youth they worked with. This may mean being privy to information about the cultures and subcultures, but it could also include using more inclusive language. For instance, educators mentioned trying to use a diverse selection of examples with individuals of varying sexualities and nonbinary language. This shift in inclusive language was not automatically known though. YRE educators felt they needed more support in knowing what language to use and feeling supported by their organizations and curriculum developers to do so.

> As far as support goes, it's just education on inclusivity things and not just LGBT, but that's hugely within relationship education. We need to get way more educated, our educators need to know the language, how to be inclusive, and how to see different cultures and subcultures and different ways people interact with each other based on their backgrounds and educators need education on that, and the relationship curricula developers aren't necessarily the ones providing that. [Participant 5][Focus Group]

While this may not have previously been at the forefront of YRE, educators mention they are starting to see inclusivity becoming a primary objective and some of their organizations are working to offer various trainings on topics of diversity and inclusion. This comfort with diverse youth and knowledge on how to foster inclusive environments aided YRE educators in creating both in-person and online environments that were structured for vulnerability and connections

between both youth and the educators, and amongst youth. Verbal-language considerations were not the only element impacting the classroom climate; YRE educators made note of the physical space in-person programming supplied. When YRE programming was set in-person, educators were able to sit with their students, move around the room, and reported enjoying being able to connect with youth in a physical space. Part of this experience was the ability to get youth out of their seats to experience the curriculum in a hands-on way, but also to interact with the youth.

> I was with the kids, I would go into the classroom. I would be with them… But literally sit at a round table with them, move our desks to sit in circles, we would communicate with them. We would do stuff together, very hands on activities on the whiteboard, walk around classrooms, trust activities, I mean actual getting up and moving around… For me, one of my favorite parts was I was going into the juvenile detention facility and going right in with the kids into their classroom that they have through everything. And just literally being with them face to face, breaking down that barrier. [Participant 2][Focus Group]

By breaking down the barriers, creating the safe, secure, inclusive environment, and showing youth that the YRE educators care about them, YRE educators commented that they were able to create connections with youth that allowed the youth to feel comfortable confiding in them. YRE curricula include sensitive content topics that may intimately relate to a youth's experiences (e.g., relationship challenges, intimate partner violence, substance abuse, conflict). In-person this might look like a youth pulling an educator to the side during or after the session to talk which was noticeable to others in the room. Whereas YRE educators commented that online, youth were able to private message them to discuss sensitive or personal topics without the worry of others in the room judging them, wanting to know what was being said, or being

aware of what was going on. In-person, educators were more physically accessible to youth, however, online, educators were accessible in a way that allowed youth more privacy, promoting the feeling of a secure environment.

> They kind of let themselves open up a little bit, and again, that depends on the person as well. Online or in-person, I think online it was a little bit easier for them to have a side chat. Like "hey can I talk to you in a breakout room?" and it's like, okay let's get this. Instead of when you're in a group full of people where they don't want to be picked on or they don't want people to know their issue. So, it's difficult. [Participant 12][Interview]

In-person and online, YRE educators consciously worked to foster an environment that was conducive to creating connections with their youth (Code 1: Creating the Environment). In-person, YRE educators were able to be physically present with their youth to build energy and engagement through hands-on activities (Code 2: Being in a Physical Space). When online, energy was intentionally considered in order to keep the youth interested and motivated (Code 3: Being Energetic). Regardless of the modality, in order to meaningfully connect with their youth, YRE educators felt they needed to use inclusive language and examples to create an environment that facilitated openness for diverse youth and experiences (Code 4: Being Inclusive and Code 5: Considering the Curriculum). The next sub-category concept expands on how these experiences differed in-person and online, but the foundation that allowed youth to feel comfortable engaging and have a desire to make connections was similar across modalities.

2.4.3. Connecting and Engaging Youth. Creating connections with youth was a main component perceived as important to YRE educators. Throughout programming, YRE educators endeavored connect with youth by showing and expressing that they cared about and appreciated the youth; this was many times shown through encouragement and opening a space for youth to

feel heard rather than solely lectured at. Part of this connection was supported as educators became more familiar with their community and youth, with many educators mentioning consciously working to know and call each youth by name. As YRE educators got to know their youth, some felt like they had similar backgrounds, and some were conflicted as to if they felt more similar or dissimilar to youth. For those who felt like they had different backgrounds and demographics than their youth, they still expressed their life experiences were relatable to the experiences of their youth.

> Even though our circumstances weren't exactly the same, the feelings and emotions that they might have evoked are the same, and so trying to relate to them on that level. [Participant 9][Interview]

For educators who shared similar backgrounds or demographics with youth, they viewed the commonalities as assets in building connections making it easier to connect, increasing relatability, and aiding in trust building. Younger YRE educators felt like their closeness in age to their youth bolstered the youths' perceptions of them as being relatable, though those who were more distanced in age from their youth did not report that their age made them less relatable. Life circumstances and experiences was a major way educators tried to relate to their youth citing things like home instability, familial incarceration, and familial substance abuse. Relating to youth was certainly a balance though. Educators did not want to be perceived from their youth as trying too hard to be relatable.

> As soon as I feel like I'm cool, two days later I'm not cool anymore. We don't do that anymore and I'm just like damn, I just learned that two days ago. [Participant 6][Focus Group]

Relating to youth not only helps to create a connection but can generate a perceived sense of buy-in from the youth to the YRE program. To do this, YRE educators mentioned needing to remember what it was like to be a teenager and empathizing with what youth are going through. Once acknowledging that perspective, authenticity was collectively regarded as an influence on relatability. Authenticity from the YRE educators' perspectives referred to not trying to be someone they were not, being true to their experiences, and using their natural characteristics (e.g., wit, humor, intelligence) in interactions. YRE educators needed to show up as their authentic selves because putting on a façade would ruin chances of meaningfully connecting with the youth. Authenticity was also extended to the youth. Building an environment where youth could be themselves allowed for mutuality in genuine interactions and connections.

> You have to be authentic. You have to allow yourself to be who you are because the one thing about youth is they can smell weakness and they can smell faintness like a wolverine. So you have to be yourself and you're allowed to be stupid, you're allowed to be smart, you're allowed to be a goofball, but the second you turn fake you've lost them. [Participant 12][Interview]

When the coronavirus pandemic shifted this process of connecting to online methods, authenticity was still an important consideration, however the process of connecting with youth had to adapt. Initially, connecting with youth virtually was perceived as harder. A process that generally happened naturally in-person, was now specifically scheduled into the online programming as intentional time to connect. In-person, YRE educators would greet youth by shaking their hands, asking how their day was going, or commenting on their attire. Online, educators got to know their youth through icebreaker, or 'get to know you,' activities at the beginning of each session. It was not uncommon for YRE educators to spend a considerable

amount of their programming time doing icebreaker activities; however, they were perceived as worthwhile because they fostered connection, were perceived from the educators as being enjoyable to youth and were perceived as making youth more engaged online.

> We spent a good portion of the class getting to know them. For example, we would start class with a would you rather question or something like, “if you could time travel anywhere, where would you travel to?” And we’d listen to each student's individual answer and let them have time for that, and it was so fun. I loved hearing their answers. They loved that too, and they looked forward to doing those little icebreaker questions, and it did take up sometimes like 20 minutes, but it seemed worth it because they seemed much more engaged with us. [Participant 1][Focus Group]

Connection and engagement went hand in hand though recognizing and understanding what engagement looked like was much more challenging for YRE educators online. When in-person, educators used visual and verbal cues like eye contact, body language, vocal engagement, and tone of voice to indicate if youth were engaged. Online this was challenging as YRE educators commented that their youth preferred to have their cameras off and could get away with this as there were not many ways in which to mandate youth to have their cameras on. Some youth were not able to have their cameras on if they did not have a computer with a camera or had poor internet connectivity. Nonetheless, some educators were able to mandate or encourage youths’ cameras be turned on. Therefore, in an online environment, the youth were perceived as having more comfort behind the anonymity of a screen. Initially, when youth did not turn their cameras on, YRE educators perceived them as being less engaged because they were unable to visually see the same cues for engagement as they did when in-person.

> We can share with students that turning on their cameras is highly encouraged, but we cannot mandate it. Once the youth found out that they could "get away" with not turning their cameras on, that kind of tanked the engagement piece, and so we had to pull ourselves up by the bootstraps and find out what are they tuning into, and how are they interacting with that material and so we're in the age of youth engaging with Youtubers probably better than their families in some regard. [Participant 7][Focus Group]

Though the process of having youth engage online was gradual, being online was perceived as giving youth more confidence to engage and interact because they were more willing to share than compared to in-person. In-person, they were perceived as not wanting to speak as much in front of their peers. As such, the chat feature through online platforms like Zoom, became the preferred method of interacting. Trial and error helped educators understand how to best use the chat feature. When a group or class of youth logged into the online platform as a whole, rather than individually, they were unable to use the chat box to entice individual comments. Similarly, over time YRE educators realized it would be beneficial if one educator focused on teaching while the other monitored and responded to the chat.

> They didn't want to turn on their cameras and get involved with their mic. So they would use the chat box and they would just answer my questions or agree or disagree within the chat box. [Participant 10][Focus Group]

> We dealt with the same thing with the chat, and you know, you got to have that outlet. And we actually had a facilitator kind of monitor the chat and would just be the chat person that would respond to everybody doing that. And it really helped because a lot of kids don't want to, you know, they'd rather chat and that's fine. You've got to meet them where they're at. [Participant 12][Focus Group]

Online features, like the chat, polls, and interactive games like Kahoot, also made it possible for more youth to participate than in-person. In-person, YRE educators may have had a few youth share, or only have time to hear from some of the group, but online everyone was able to express their thoughts and opinions on the material being covered. These types of engagement tools were viewed as fun by educators and perceived as being enjoyed by the youth. Because YRE educators were mostly unable to see or hear their youth due to the online implementation with limited cameras turned on, they had to reconsider how they knew their youth were engaged and connecting with both them and the material.

> In-person you could, not often but sometimes, you could be in a room and ask a question and it just be silent or maybe like one or two people answer. But with the chat, everyone has an opportunity to answer because they're not talking over each other in the polls and things, and it seems a little more exciting that everyone gets to have their own opinion. [Participant 1][Interview]

Some youth were slow to engage because this pivot into online implementation was new. However, as they became comfortable and familiar with the online process, and as YRE educators encouraged participation, youth participation and interaction returned to normal; and as previously mentioned, may have even exceeded in-person engagement given that more youth were interacting at one time. Seeing youth have fun and engage in the YRE program and desiring to build connections with each other and their YRE educator, demonstrated to YRE educators they were successfully creating meaningful YRE connections and experiences.

> We also notice those patterns which tells me that it was more successful than not by way of engagement, even though cameras were off. Because what happened at the conclusion

of that program is that students were, by the last week, saying “I don't want to leave here.” How can we exchange usernames? [Participant 7][Interview]

In summary, Connecting and Engaging with Youth, the third sub-category of sub-category 4, was a process YRE educators built upon both in-person and online as shown in Figure 8 (Code 6: Trying to Engage Youth). Regardless of modality, YRE educators showed real concern and care for their youth and brought that into their efforts to connect with them (Code 3: Connecting). In the process of caring for and connecting with youth, YRE educators recognized relatability as notable. Being relatable to their youth was sometimes a balancing process between trying to relate and not being relatable at all; however, no matter if educators felt they were similar or not similar to their youth, they found ways to relate to them (Code 5: Relating). One way was by being themselves as authentically as possible and prompting their youth to do the same. Efforts towards authenticity were perceived as boosting engagement as youth opened up, engaged, and YRE educators were able to begin getting to know their youth (Code 4: Getting to Know Each Other). Within Figure 8, the relationships and connections made between YRE educators and youth were what reunited the wires back together once YRE programming was transferred to a new modality.

The relationships and connections between YRE educators and youth shifted as the modality transitioned to online education. YRE educators found that they needed to pivot their perception of how to connect with and engage youth differently online than in-person. In-person engagement was recognized through verbal and visual cues (e.g., head nod, body language, eye contact) whereas online, engagement was predominantly through non-verbal written cues (Code 2: Preferring to Engage through the Chat). These written cues were in the form of polls, chat responses, and gamification because youth were more willing to share responses if they could be

online and/or remain anonymous behind the computer screen (Code 1: Being Anonymous). As these cues for engagement and the process for connecting was different in-person versus online, many of these tactics to engage youth were intentionally scheduled when the shift into online occurred whereas they more naturally happened in-person.

In reflection upon Category Two, Building and Maintaining Connections, connections and meaning within the YRE experience drive the process of being successful. In Figure 4, partnerships are not solely built or maintained; YRE educators and agencies are continuously building new connections within and outside their partnerships and maintaining those connections. The coronavirus pandemic initiated an abrupt shift which could have resulted in a severed wire or ending partnership, but through the processes of Building Community Partnerships (2.1), Maintaining Community Partnerships (2.2), Retaining Connections through Technology (2.3), and Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities (2.4), YRE educators rewired their connections into a new fusion while navigating the transition to online education because of the coronavirus pandemic.

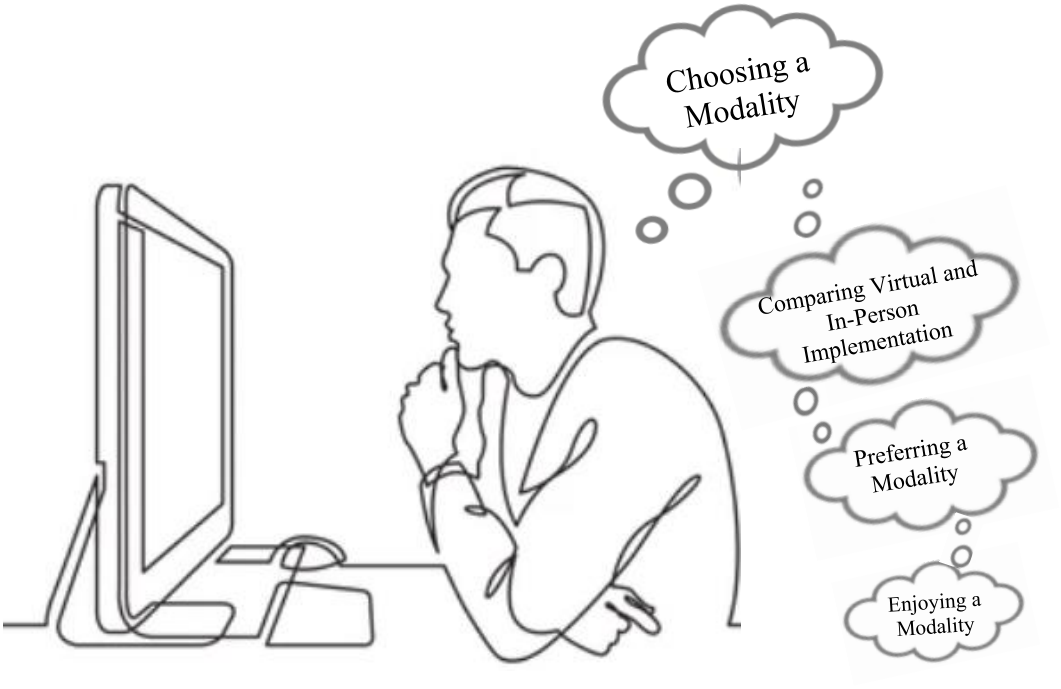
Category Three: Moving Forward for Success

Overview of Category 3. Identifying how this experience of transitioning to online implementation during the coronavirus pandemic shaped the YRE educators' views of YRE programming, the way YRE educators thought about what they wanted for YRE programming post-coronavirus pandemic is represented in Sub-Category Three: Moving Forward for Success. The hierarchy of thought bubbles in Figure 9 shows the thought process that occurred for YRE educators as they decided how in-person and online modalities would play a role in determining what success looked like for them moving forward. When thinking through the process of choosing a modality moving forward, YRE educators compared in-person and online modalities,

determined their preference for a modality, and acknowledged their enjoyment for in-person and/or online programming (see Appendix H). Later discussed is the sentiment of YRE educators that though in-person is their preference, they want to continue programming through both modalities to connect and engage with youth.

Figure 9

Category Three: Moving Forward for Success



Note. This figure depicts the sub-categories and codes that make up category 3: moving forward for success.

Findings of Category 3: Moving Forward for Success. In focus groups and interviews, YRE educators reflected on the process of pivoting to online that occurred due to the coronavirus pandemic and how that influenced their feelings of being successful. When considering the meaningful connections they make with youth and their feelings on in-person versus online implementation, YRE educators overwhelmingly expressed fond feelings of in-person implementation. Educators voiced loving the experience of teaching youth in-person and having

the opportunity to meet various youth through the experience. Some discussed the excitement they felt when they were able to teach within their favorite schools and had a sense of responsibility toward the youth they worked with. When the coronavirus pandemic impacted their ability to physically go into schools and community settings to interact with their youth, they felt disappointed as they originally perceived their opportunity to connect with their youth as being taken away.

> I was super bummed because I'm like, these are my kids; these are my youth. My favorite schools are coming up. I'm going to meet some of the coolest youth, and they always need this and love this. [Participant 5][Focus Group]

When the pivot into online implementation occurred, YRE educators retrospectively reflected on a perception that both good and bad experiences ensued. Some felt conflicted when comparing online and in-person delivery modalities. YRE educators diverged on their perceptions of delivery modality ease; some were not certain which modality they felt was easier while others were clearly in favor of either online or in-person teaching due to its ease. Grounded theory allows for this variation in modality ease and would suggest an area for future research to uncover the conditions to determine what perceptions are included in modality ease (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). When reflecting on online implementation, some educators liked being able to teach through an online delivery modality. They expressed online implementation to be fun, effective, and handy. However, there was also the perspective that online implementation was difficult, stressful, and required more effort than in-person implementation.

> Sometimes I was like, "was it easier to teach like this [online], or was it not?" I don't know. It's kind of weird. Sometimes it was easier, sometimes it wasn't. [Participant 3][Focus Group]

Many educators enjoyed both modalities; however, there was a preference from the educators for in-person implementation and a perceived sense that their youth mainly prefer in-person YRE as well, though some educators were not certain which modality their youth prefer. Regardless of their preference for online or in-person delivery modality, YRE educators recognized both modalities provided meaningful and valuable experiences; however, they acknowledge that there may be a balance of pros and cons when it comes to choosing a delivery modality moving forward. The coronavirus pandemic not only changed YRE programming during the height of its outbreak but changes the way YRE educators move forward when considering how to deliver programming and create meaningful connections.

> I would say yes [the pandemic will change the way we do things] … I think that having the online option as a resource is just really, really handy. You know it's like having all your different tools in your tool belt, then you just have one more in there for those special circumstances. [Participant 4][Focus Group]

While many of the YRE educators were ready to go back to teaching in-person, they professed that online delivery modalities opened new opportunities during the coronavirus pandemic and when moving forward. In-person implementation was mentioned as not always the practical option and therefore, being able to capitalize on the best components of online and in-person delivery modalities in the future would be beneficial. Due to the considerable shift in perception of success with online YRE programming, YRE educators want the option to continue doing both in-person and online programming. This may look different for various educators but incorporating a hybrid model that builds in online experiences or providing both in-person and online YRE programs may be the preference for YRE educators as they strive to create meaningful experiences moving forward.

> The hope is that we're able to do both or have the option for virtual and then definitely have the option for in-person. Both of them hold a lot of great value. [Participant 11][Interview]

In reflection on their experiences of transitioning to online YRE implementation, YRE educators' perceptions of success evolved. Choosing a Modality Moving Forward in relation to what was most successful, was not as simple as preferring in-person teaching (Code 3: Preferring a Modality). YRE educators found that they enjoyed teaching both in-person and online (Code 1: Enjoying a Modality). Thinking about how the process of pivoting to an online modality because of the coronavirus pandemic went, YRE educators began with the process of figuring out how to transition their programs to an online format, navigating technological challenges, reframing what online engagement entailed, and came out of the experience with a new perspective on online implementation. In considering online versus in-person implementation (Code 2: Comparing Virtual and In-Person Implementation), online implementation became a desirable option and modality for creating successful YRE experiences. In combination of their preference and recognition of the value of both modalities, YRE educators want the field of YRE to move forward with a combination of in-person and online implementation while also melding the strengths each modality experience produced to successfully connect with youth (Code 4: Choosing a Modality). Figure 9 displays this process of the YRE educator in thought as they considered these components in the determination of YRE program progression through either an online or in-person modality.

Summary

In summary, the three main categories that emerged from the analysis: (i.) Choosing to Continue; (ii.) Building and Maintaining Connections; and (iii.) Moving Forward for Success

constitute the core category: Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect. Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect is the theory of how YRE educators transitioned to online programming because of the coronavirus pandemic and their perceptions of what success looks like through online YRE programming. In the next chapter, the implications for understanding how these findings can be applied in practice and in future research will be discussed.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study sought to understand how youth relationship educators determined success with online teaching and how they transitioned from in-person to online YRE implementation at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Success when transitioning to online implementation of YRE was determined through the continued effort to create meaningful connections with youth and provide a YRE experience that was impactful. YRE educators chose to continue programming because of its perceived impact on their youth, even though the coronavirus pandemic presented an unexpected challenge. This process of figuring out online technologies and teaching aided in maintaining connections they had already built and would continue to build. In shifting their practices to fit an online modality, YRE educators found new methods to engage and connect with their youth that would be beneficial to incorporate when moving forward with YRE programming. From the findings, five qualities impacted YRE educators' perceptions of success: (i.) connecting with youth to make an impact, (ii.) having supportive partnerships through which to reinforce the process of meaningfully connecting, (iii.) adapting to promote inclusivity, (iv.) getting to know youth on a deeper level to encourage connections and engagement, and (v.) reconsidering what success is through connections and engagement. Explained below are each of these five qualities impacting educators' perceptions of success.

i. Connecting with Youth to Make an Impact

When answering the research question to understand how YRE educators determine success, the results indicate connections and the impact those connections have on youths' lives are meaningful. The elements of the ABC-X model (i.e., resource, support, appraisal), sensitized me during data analysis that YRE educators in this study appraised their youth as needing YRE programming (Hill, 1958; Zaidi, 2022). As mentioned above, youth relationship education are

intervention and prevention programs that include content on a myriad of relational topics and skills including, but not limited to, relationship and sexual decision making, communication, conflict management, relationship separation, awareness and prevention of intimate partner violence and substance use, and career planning (Futris et al., 2017; Janssens et al., 2020; McElwain et al., 2017; Savasuk-Luxton et al., 2018; Scott & Karberg, 2015; Simpson et al., 2018). This appraisal, or perception, of the value of YRE programming and the connections made during implementation is a driving motivator for YRE educators in their work and effort within YRE programming.

YRE educators' perceptions of youths' need for the YRE programming and resulting connections were not deterred by the coronavirus pandemic, and in fact YRE educators' perceptions of youths' need for programming and connections were perhaps intensified by the experience. As noted under sub-subcategory 2.4.1, Reaching and Interacting with Youth Virtually, some educators thought life would return to normal after a few weeks at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. In this study, two years into experiencing the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, YRE educators retrospectively considered how the coronavirus pandemic impacted them, their youth, and how it altered their perceptions of success. YRE educators' ability to see the program's impact on youth did not change, but the recognition of expressions of enjoyment were transformed as detailed in sub-subcategory 2.4.3: Connecting and Engaging. Visual and verbal cues of enjoyment were more prevalent pre-coronavirus pandemic. Online, YRE educators more frequently relied on written expressions of enjoyment or their own perceptions of youths' enjoyment through participation during the coronavirus pandemic. Interestingly, YRE educators also considered the importance of conducting the program during the coronavirus pandemic as they perceived youth were experiencing isolation, depression, and

loneliness. When youth were mandated to quarantine at home, YRE educators felt their programming, by means of educator perception and youth feedback, as being some of the only interaction and connections youth were able to make.

Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionist perspective would suggest that in building and maintaining connections through interactions, YRE educators and youth are altering their meaning and association for how they connect with and view each other. Though YRE educators mentioned they may not make a meaningful connection with all their youth, or that all youth may not feel the same impact from the YRE experience, the ones that do are worth the effort. The stories shared about experiences and memories YRE educators have about these interactions with youth, show the types of experiences resulting in a transformed sense of meaning for both educators and youth. Specifically, the story shared (above) about a YRE educator and their student exhibiting suicidal ideation demonstrates the importance of connecting and the difference a YRE educator is able to make in their youths' lives. If YRE educators are focused solely on transmission of content as determinants of success, they may not be focused on the connections made with youth. While the content is important and valuable, being taught that content from an individual who is perceived as caring, interested in the youth, and authentic may make a life-saving difference.

ii. Having Supportive Partnerships through which to Reinforce the Process of Meaningfully Connecting

Though YRE educators in this study chose to continue programming through an online modality during the coronavirus pandemic, it was not necessarily an easy transition. When analyzing the data with an awareness of the sensitizing concepts (e.g., supports, perceptions, resources (Hill, 1958)), the partnerships YRE had were seen as impactful to their transitional

experience. As viewed by YRE educators, community partners (e.g., school systems, teachers, community organizations) were both a barrier and a provider of support. These partnerships were developed and fostered over time. However, the partner sites had to navigate the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic themselves while figuring out how that would influence the YRE programming. Once the community partners were more secure in their own adaptations, they were then better able to decide how to move forward with YRE programming. The positive partnerships YRE educators built with the partner sites helped them continue programming and convey the impact of the experience. These positive interactions YRE educators experienced while implementing YRE programming in-person pre-coronavirus pandemic, were likely to have nurtured affirmative symbolic meaning with teachers, as indicated by YRE educators' statements that some teachers found the YRE experience to be important enough to write into their curriculum plans.

YRE educators also perceived their agencies and co-educators to be a support. Within a symbolic interaction lens, educators who had the perception that the agency they worked with was not supportive, did not put effort into continuing to program during the coronavirus pandemic, or were not understanding of the educators' desires for additional training or knowledge (e.g., trauma training, inclusive language) were communicative about their intentions to distance themselves from those agencies. Contrarily, YRE educators whose agencies were supportive, offered professional development, and worked as part of a team reported those qualities encouraged them to continue working with the agency to conduct YRE programming. The team-like nature in preparing to transition to online implementation spread the burden across multiple educators. Sharing resources and materials amongst educators helped reduce stress and educator burnout. Though many of the educators did work as a team, those who felt they carried

the brunt of the load to transition YRE content and implementation plans to an online format were less likely to view their agency or co-educators as a support during this transitional time.

iii. Adapting to Promote Inclusivity

Inclusivity and cultural awareness were concepts mentioned when understanding YRE educators' experiences teaching their programs and in trying to connect with their youth. Though educators express a love for the curricula they use, they recognize that the curricula are not universally inclusive to all youth. In following active learning theory, educators concluded that the curricula needed modifications for cultural relevancy and inclusivity by experiencing the disconnect that occurred when educators perceived youth did not relate to the language or examples. In the process of learning by doing, YRE educators were able to see changes in receptivity when they tried various examples and shared stories that better fit the population they were teaching whether that was based on elements of culture, subculture, ethnicity, race, or sexuality.

This appraisal that the curricula were not designed in ways to overtly support inclusivity was likely a strain on educators during the transition to an online format. They not only had to consider how to transform their materials and curricula to fit an online modality but also had to consider how to improve inclusivity while considering fidelity. This may have made the stressor of transitioning to an online modality more challenging for YRE educators. Similarly, some educators reported their organizations were not supportive in encouraging changes or providing professional development for educators that would lead to more inclusive and culturally relevant program implementation. The combined negative perception and lack of support possibly made the determination of feeling successful when transitioning to online seem less attainable.

When implementing YRE programming online or in-person, YRE educators want support in navigating inclusivity. To recognize and understand the importance of the subcultures of their youth, YRE educators must get to know their youth. However, being aware of these culture and subcultures, using inclusive language, and having diverse examples would make it easier to provide a YRE experience that was meaningful to more youth and ultimately bolster YRE educators' perceptions of success. Also mentioned was the sense that youth read and respond based on YRE educators' energy. It is possible that this concept of energy is comprehensive of the educator's comfort in teaching the YRE program to diverse youth and in being able to connect with diverse youth. If this is so, it would be important for YRE educators to exhibit comfort and enthusiasm for inclusivity as YRE educators perceived feelings of inclusivity to promote safe and vulnerable learning environments. These safe, vulnerable learning environments were in turn perceived to benefit the process of building connections.

iv. Getting to Know Youth on a Deeper Level to Encourage Connections and Engagement

The process of building connections with youth started when recruiting through the community partners for some YRE educators as evidenced by their surface-level discussions with youth to entice them to join the program. When YRE programming was in-person, educators would informally get to know and check in with youth at the beginning of their programming times together. As youth were settling into the space and their seats for the lesson, these methods included things like shaking their hands, asking them how they have been doing, and commenting on items of expression such as clothing. Online, some of these were much harder as educators were no longer able to physically connect with youth and many times unable to notice the visual cues, such as clothing, to converse with youth to connect. Therefore, some YRE educators shifted their practices to have formally planned time each session to connect with

youth through icebreakers. These icebreakers transferred the focus to the YRE educator to determine what the topic of connection would be about but seemed to induce engagement and interest from the youth at the start of each programming session.

It is plausible that these icebreaker activities at the beginning of sessions aided YRE educators in setting the tone of the session to both encourage participation and seem like fun discussions rather than an academic experience. YRE educators viewed the ability to bring energy into the programming as human capital. From this perspective, it might be logical that educators also feel more or less successful with their daily ability to successfully create meaningful connections and YRE experiences based on their sense of energy. For instance, if an educator felt less energized and assured of their potential to make the day's session fun, they may also perceive themselves as less successful during that session.

Showing up to the YRE implementation as authentic and real could also greatly set the tone for YRE sessions. Educators who recognized their ability to relate to youth regardless of their life circumstances seemed to perceive themselves as better able to connect with youth. Though having similar life circumstances and demographics as the population served were beneficial in connecting with youth, they were not essential. These findings are similar to research conducted by Ketring et al. (2017) with adult CRE populations showing that many demographics (e.g., ethnicity, marital status, education), though not all, are not indicative of connections or the participant-facilitator alliance. For instance within this study, a YRE educator commented that though they had not experienced the instability of growing up in a low-income family, they understood the instability of moving around due to being in a military family and translated that experience in a way that resonated with their youths' experiences. The ability to make youth feel cared for, heard, appreciated, and understood were the impactful elements when

trying to build connections. These elements helped to provide youth a space that broke down barriers to allow them to be their own authentic selves, feel safe, and be vulnerable enough to discuss sensitive topics.

Getting to know youth regardless of if it is through a structured or informal process, being authentic, showing youth compassion and kindness, and demonstrating an appreciation for what youth think and have to say can aid YRE educators in creating meaningful connections with youth. These interactions are also likely important for youths' perceptions when especially considering justice-involved populations. These youth may be accustomed to the adults that they interact with daily, holding perceptions or stereotypes about them that sway the adults' attitudes or behaviors when working with the youth. Translating research from De Rosa (2018) about the application of symbolic interactionism within the juvenile justice system, when YRE educators work with all, but specifically justice-involved, youth, they are creating new meanings in their interactions with youth as they get to know each other. For youth who may be high-risk, high-need, or low-SES, these altered meanings and connections with an adult in an authority role may positively modify their perceptions of authority figures and may allow the youth and YRE educator to create connections impactful for the YRE experience and the youths' lives.

v. Reconsidering what Success is Through Connections and Engagement

Findings from this study support the literature stating that methods for successful learning and academic engagement do not automatically translate into an online environment (Lemay et al., 2021). As mentioned in the previous section, youth engagement was fostered by having a connection with youth. Therefore, one engagement tactic that was not different across modalities was the intention YRE educators used in calling youth by their name. However, many of the perceived indicators of engagement in-person were not applicable ways of gauging engagement

online. When in-person, YRE educators perceived themselves as successfully engaging youth when youth were visually engrossed (e.g., eye contact, body language, tone of voice) or through their verbal participation. In-person YRE educators also appreciated the ability to estimate youths' focus, engagement, and energy by moving around the room and being in physical proximity to them. These cues indicated to educators if they needed to change their teaching methods, invite more energy into the room, or check in with a specific youth.

When programming turned to an online modality, educators were no longer able to rely on visual or verbal cues due to the tendency for youth to leave their cameras off and prefer to engage in the chat box. Instead, educators had to shift their thinking and recognition of what engagement through an online modality entailed. Contribution through written (e.g., chat box) or participation (e.g., Kahoot™, poll, Mentimeter™) cues were indicators of engagement during online education. Though this was a gradual process of engagement built over time, YRE educators cherished the opportunity to give all youth a voice through these engagement tools. It is possible that YRE educators viewed the process of youth engaging through an online modality as gradual because of the meanings they had previously associated with verbal and visual cues. Since the same cues did not translate into an online modality, it may be that it took time for new symbolic interactions to occur before YRE educators experienced a shift in how youth were meaningfully engaging.

During this process of creating new meanings and interactions, YRE educators were actively learning how to translate in-person practices and expectations to an online format; this may have been another reason YRE educators viewed engagement as a gradual process. Educators used their own critical learning and problem-solving skills as they learned through trial-and-error processes to better understand engagement. For instance, YRE educators realized

over time that youth should log into the online platform individually rather than as a group to entice individual thought as opposed to groupthink or answers. Educators also had to navigate technological challenges such as internet outages and poor connectivity. As many of the YRE educators were implementing with youth classified as at-risk, low-SES, and some reaching rural youth, these technological challenges were perceived as prevalent barriers or challenges that made it more difficult to meaningfully connect (both interpersonally and technologically connect).

Technological challenges were not the only component of online learning and engagement impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. YRE educators felt that the academic uncertainty where youth were, in some cases, back and forth between in-person and online academic environments or online for an extended amount of time, negatively impacted their socio-emotional development, maturity, ability to focus, and comfort with structure. Researchers studying academic settings during the coronavirus pandemic have found similar shifts in youth learners including limited learner motivation, decreased youth engagement, less focus and concentration, increased distractions, and increased frustration with technical difficulties (Besser et al., 2020; Nambiar, 2020; Tucker & Quintero-Ares, 2021). These changes combined with the Zoom/technological fatigue and collective trauma exacerbated the challenge of learning how to transition to an online modality and successfully engage youth online. However, YRE educators were sensitive to these circumstances and were able to continue processing the experience through the process of doing and figuring out how to move forward. In their reflections, having these experiences and learning new ways to successfully connect and engage with youth is something YRE educators plan to incorporate into their future YRE implementation.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This study provided a unique perspective on the process and determination of success for YRE educators when transitioning to online implementation. Success has been infrequently studied from the perspective of the educator, especially within youth relationship education. Following a grounded theory approach, this study had an appropriate sample size as grounded theory considers the sample to be adequate once the data are robust in developing the theory (Andrews et al., 2012; Glaser, 1998). Considering data collection, theoretical sampling was conducted at two levels (i.e., 3 focus groups, 5 interviews) to continue developing and refining the theory (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Whiteside et al., 2012). During the process of theoretical sampling, coding took place concurrently which informed the sampling process. Likewise, because the theory and findings are grounded in the data, my interpretation during the analytic process had to be either confirmed or denied by the data.

Though this study takes a novel approach to determining youth relationship educators' determination of success, it is not without limitations. In considering validity of grounded theory Glaser (1978) proposed the concepts of fit, work, and grab. Fit states that categories must fit the data and not be pre-conceived or data discarded to preserve a preexisting theory or concept (Glaser, 1978, p. 5). As with many grounded theories, the categories within this study were generated directly from the data and quotes were incorporated throughout to support the presentation of the categories. Glaser (1978) also discusses the concept of refit, which recognizes that categories can emerge quickly and must therefore be refit as new data arise or in order to more fully encompass all data. Originally within this study, the categories from data analysis were contextually heavy and focused on the pivot that occurred due to the coronavirus pandemic. A process of theoretical sensitization occurred, arising from the analysis process of determining the relationships between the theory concepts and determining their significance, which initiated

a refit of the data to capture the full emergent story from the data which was still grounded in the context but allowed more of the processes and properties to emerge. As is typical within grounded theory, my distinct experiences and views supplied a lens through which I analyzed the data, and this would be different than another researcher. Therefore, another researcher could have fit and refit the data differently, resulting in a different theory of success, though still fitting the data.

Work is conceptually linked to the relevance of the theory (Glaser, 1978). Glaser (1978) states, "Grounded theory arrives at relevance, because it allows core process and processes to emerge (p.5)." Work and grab work in tandem as grab is the portion of validity that states the theory must be interesting (Glaser, 1978). This work moves beyond the previously investigated elements of success in an academic setting to discover the interpersonal connections at the heart of success for youth relationship educators. This qualitatively derived new theory will be modified, as all grounded theories are, as they are implemented and further tested (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1998) state, "the merit of a substantive theory lies in its ability to speak specifically for the populations from which it was derived and to apply back to them" (p. 267). In grounded theory, it is recommended that the researcher conduct participant checks where the theory is discussed with the participants to determine credibility. The grab of this work is limited, as extensive formal participant checks have not occurred to determine the credibility of the resultant theory. However, through an informal participant check process, I have discussed the core category of Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect with YRE educators (both participants and non-participants) who have validated the feelings of meaningful connections in their perceptions of successfully implementing their programming.

As previously mentioned, I have been a family life educator for 6 years and specifically a youth relationship educator for 4 of those years, I also train YRE educators across the United States through the Dibble Institute. Through an interpretive approach to grounded theory, my experiences and knowledge in these roles (i.e., YRE educator and trainer), are influential and strengthening during the data analysis and interpretation process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, not only is it important to discuss my positionality and reflection on the findings as a researcher, but also as a YRE educator to whom these findings have implications. Initiating this work, I had preconceived notions that educators were not likely to have had training or experience with online YRE implementation, had a passion for the work they were doing within YRE, and that the coronavirus pandemic had an influence on educators' perceptions of success. These notions, arising from my practice experiences, influenced the focus of the study, and informed the study design, research questions, and data collection questions in ways that situated the resulting theory within the field of practice. In recognition of the potential influence of my perceptions, I was deliberate when analyzing data to utilize the constant comparative method to ensure findings (e.g., codes, concepts, categories) were driven by the data.

While not encompassing of all YRE educators' experiences, I can shed light on the personal work and relevance of the theory from my own experience as a youth relationship educator. Though I was not in a position where I needed to make the choice to continue programming due to the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, I did experience a temporary pause in my implementation of YRE and chose to return to YRE due to my passion for the connective processes and meaningful experiences for both my youth and me. I find relevance in the concept of seeing myself as being successful when I meaningfully connect with youth, though this was not what I had originally realized or previously considered in my own practice. For instance,

when I recognize youth as vulnerably and openly engaging with me or being interested in sharing their personal experiences, I feel like I have created a connection with them that supports my ability to help them thoughtfully consider their relationships and prompt healthy decision making. As an educator of other YRE educators, I also recognize many of these concepts as topics discussed within training (e.g., inclusivity, technology challenges, getting to know youth, etc.) and perceive them as relevant to the educators I train.

Regarding a limitation within recruitment of YRE educators, one facet of the recruitment process occurred through the Dibble Institute which may have invited an agency capture of the determination of perceived success. Though YRE educators were recruited through both the Dibble Institute and family science discussion board blog posts, it is possible that individuals may have had similar experiences due to their experience and use of the curricula published by The Dibble Institute. The possibility of this occurring was addressed by sampling a diverse group of YRE educators from across the U.S.; however, many educators were using curricula published by the Dibble Institute. Individuals recruited through the Dibble Institute may have been influenced by my dual role as both the researcher and a contracted employee as a Master Trainer for the Dibble Institute. The information letter and my introductory speech to participants expressed that the Dibble Institute was not involved in the study. Therefore, I stated that the Dibble Institute would not be made aware of who participated, nor what was said. However, it is possible that participants may have still been influenced through the agency capture and my dual role. For instance, YRE educators expressed the desire for YRE curriculum developers to create more inclusive curriculum materials, this topic may have been mentioned if the YRE educators perceived I had an influential role in updating the curricula they use. However, when considering conversations of topics such as YRE curriculum development and YRE curriculum developers

which could directly relate to the role of the Dibble Institute, participants who were not recruited through the Dibble Institute corroborated similar sentiments (e.g., a need for inclusive curriculum language) as those recruited through the Dibble Institute.

Another potential consideration is the use of Zoom to conduct focus groups and interviews. In utilizing Zoom to conduct data collection, I was able to sample a greater range of YRE educators who were outside of my locational proximity and provide more flexible arrangements with their schedules due to the virtual nature of Zoom. Zoom also has a built-in transcription service which initiated a rudimentary transcript of each focus group or interview. However, disadvantages to using Zoom included similar challenges discussed by the YRE educators in this study. Occasionally either the participants' or my internet signal would be poor, resulting in lags. Surg (2021) suggest some additional limitations or challenges of collecting data virtually include the participant needing to download Zoom if they did not already have the platform, verify their Zoom was working, potentially forget about virtual focus group appointments, and potentially increase difficulties for individuals who were less familiar with technology. I did experience two participants arriving late to focus groups which caused the entire group to pause in order for me to provide the introductory speech and for the new participant to introduce themselves. Though I waited a brief moment until a natural pause in the conversation occurred to reiterate the information letter previously distributed to participants, this may have interrupted the train of thought or flow of the conversation. For instance, participants may have been passionate about a specific topic and due to the pause in conversation decided not to share once restarting the conversation; if this occurred, some data that would have otherwise been shared by the participant may have been left out. The next section details the implications resulting from the theory and findings.

Chapter VI: Conclusion

Youth relationship education is an important and growing sector of relationship education and the family science field. While youth relationship education is gaining momentum, research on adult relationship education is more abundant, suggesting an opportunity for increased awareness around the distinct characteristics as they pertain to youth. Given that youth and adults are at different developmental stages and researchers recommend a specific consideration towards youth-focused learning (Verhoeven et al., 2019; Wolfe, 2001), some of the recommendations within this study are validating to findings and recommendations based within adult-focused relationship education populations, as is later discussed. However, adult and youth relationship education researchers alike are moving towards implementation science to better understanding the learning processes and environment to uncover how to produce effective programs and participant outcomes (Hawkins, 2018; Stanley et al., 2020). As researchers aim to discover the effectiveness of YRE programming, this work can inform the future of conducting successful and effective YRE programming. Specifically, the findings from this study discovered the perceptions of youth relationship educators in determining success, and the process of transitioning from in-person to online program implementation during the coronavirus pandemic. Success was determined through YRE educators' perceptions of having cultivated meaningful connections with, and experiences for, their youth. Since general perceptions of YRE educators, much less perceptions of success and a contextualization within the coronavirus pandemic, are newly emergent in YRE literature, using a grounded theory approach established a foundational theory formed from lived experiences for which to initiate applied changes and future research.

As researchers have not previously explored perceptions of success within youth relationship education, much of the supporting literature was pulled from K-12-based academic

sources. Within an academic setting, indicators of online success concentrated on perceptions of motivation, focus, and student learning outcomes (Besser et al., 2020; Coomey & Stephenson, 2018; Literat, 2021; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Nambiar, 2020; Tucker & Quintero-Ares, 2021). Though there were some mentions of engagement being an indicator of successful online teaching and learning (Coomey & Stephenson, 2018; Menchaca & Bekele, 2008; Nambiar, 2020), academic-based research does not seem to exhibit the same importance for cultivating meaningful connections and experiences as was found in this study. It is not that content mastery, memory, or focus were not important within YRE, but that YRE and academic settings consider different topics and are intended for distinctly different purposes. YRE is centered within foundational concepts of relationships (e.g., romantic, familial, friendly) that combine fact and youths' opinions which allow youth more autonomy and exploration in their learning.

These meaningful connections and experiences are seen through the impact on youth, whether that be through content memory and mastery, vulnerable exchanges, eager participation, or perceived influence on life decisions. YRE educators in this study perceive themselves as being able to make real, meaningful changes in their youths' lives through their work and previous research supports the notion that facilitation can be influential for program effectiveness (Ballard, 2020; Bradford et al., 2012; Durlak & Dupre, 2008; Futris et al., 2017; Higginbotham & Myler, 2010). Therefore, assisting YRE educators through resources and supports to continue fostering authentic connections through inclusive YRE experiences are likely to increase feelings of success and may spillover into youth program outcomes. From this work, the field of youth relationship education may be able to cultivate an initial framework for moving into a post-coronavirus pandemic way of conducting and considering youth relationship education.

Though the pivot into an online modality was focused within the context of the coronavirus pandemic, the results are not contextually exclusive to the coronavirus pandemic. Corbin and Strauss (1990) state the aim when building a theory is to describe the phenomena through the contexts, conditions, and properties that produced the theoretical explanation (p. 9). The unexpected nature of the historical event shaped this experience and may have produced some unique considerations as a result (e.g., maintaining community partnerships, considering the timeline). For example, the process of creating and adapting relationship education curricula is typically a lengthier process involving input from multiple sources and time to refine the edits while the processes detailed within this study needed to happen quickly in order to continue programming. Considering the learning that occurred for YRE educators through their experiences, educators' learning translates beyond the context of the coronavirus pandemic. YRE educators have expressed the desire to utilize the knowledge gained from these experiences and hope to incorporate successful elements from both in-person and online implementation. As such, this work is valuable in considering the implications and future research of youth relationship education.

Implications and Future Research

Table 8 shows the implications from this work for future research and practice. In brief, future research within program evaluation should: (1a.) more expansively incorporate qualitative data, and (1b.) measure perceptions and explanations (i.e., process, context) of success from YRE educators' and youths' perspectives. Researchers interested in YRE educators and programming should: (1c.) determine if the perceptions of success are indicative of youth outcomes; (1d.) understand how to best build connections within YRE; (1e.) explore the processes of creating a trusting relationship through an online modality; and (1f.) determine the

impact of inclusive environments on youths' classroom behavior, receptivity and expressions of inclusivity, and program outcomes.

An overview of practice recommendations for YRE curriculum developers includes: (2a.) design programs with youth-focused learning in mind and intended for full implementation online as well as online booster sessions for curricula intended to be taught in-person; (2b.) incorporate intentional ways to promote engagement from all youth in-person into curriculum designs; and (2c.) encompass inclusive language and examples in all YRE curricula. YRE agencies and organizations should: (2d.) train educators on ways to cultivate connections with youth; and researchers and practitioners who are interested in YRE should: (2e.) develop training or guidelines for YRE organizations on considerations of success and educator support.

Table 8

Implications and Future Research

Field of Implication	Recommendation	Intended Target
Future Research	**1a.** Integrate qualitative questions on pre-and-post-program surveys to understand the facilitator-participant alliance	Program Evaluation Researchers
Future Research	**1b.** Measure facilitators' success through both youth and educator perspectives on post surveys	Program Evaluation Researchers
Future Research	**1c.** Determine if youth relationship educators' perceptions of success are indicative of improvements in youth outcomes at the individual and classroom level	Researchers
Future Research	**1d.** From youths' perspectives, understand the elements and processes for building connections with youth relationship educators	Researchers
Future Research	**1e.** Explore the process and mechanisms associated with creating trust to boost engagement and connection through online modalities	Researchers
Future Research	**1f.** Understand the process of creating inclusive youth relationship education environments and its impact on youths' classroom behavior, expressions of inclusivity, and program outcomes	Researchers
Practice	**2a.** Create online youth relationship education based in youth-focused pedagogy	YRE Curriculum Developers
Practice	**2b.** Incorporate engagement techniques found to be successful online, in-person to procure better youth engagement	YRE Educators
Practice	**2c.** Adapt youth relationship education programs to be more inclusive	YRE Curriculum Developers and YRE Educators
Practice	**2d.** Provide training on online teaching and cultivating connections with youth to YRE educators	YRE Agencies and Organizations
Practice	**2e.** Develop training or guidelines for YRE program managers and organizations on considerations of success and YRE educator support	YRE researchers and practitioners

Note. This table displays the implications, recommendations, and suggestions for future research as outlined within the conclusion.

Implications for Future Research. Moving forward in our understanding of the YRE field, supporting YRE educators, and conducting effective YRE programming, six avenues for future research emerge as important.

1a. Perceptions of success are currently a developing concept within the field of YRE. As such, much is still yet to be understood in determining the role of meaningful connections within program evaluation. Incorporating qualitative data into program evaluation plans may indicate YRE educators' and youths' feelings of meaning, connection, and engagement through descriptively rich data. Therefore, program evaluation researchers should include open-ended questions in pre-and-post program surveys. Previous research with adult couples in therapy and relationship education programs has shown these connections to be indicative of participant outcomes (Bradford et al., 2012; Ketring et al., 2017); however, YRE researchers have yet to comprehensively include open-ended questions in program evaluation to understand how the relationship between youth and their YRE educator are perceived by youth or the educator. If YRE program evaluators can better understand the facilitator-participant alliance, they may be better able to identify moderators when measuring pre-and-post program outcomes as identifying moderators of program effects was also encouraged by McElwain et al. (2017) in their meta-analytic review of YRE.

1b. Measures of facilitator quality and fidelity are gaining attention in RE program evaluation though they have not trickled down into YRE enough to become universally utilized in evaluative YRE practices. The findings from this work suggest that as YRE educators view their success through meaningful connections and experiences with youth. Pairing these perceptions of success with the knowledge that adult RE populations have improved outcomes if there is a connective relationship with the RE educator, program evaluation researchers should include measures to better understand these connections and the resulting outcomes. Both youth and YRE educators should be surveyed on the quantitative measures to determine if both youth and YRE educators' perceptions of quality, connection, and experience indicate improved youth

outcomes, if one perspective is more salient than the other, or if youth differ from adult RE populations and show no impact on improved outcomes.

1c. This research sought to understand success from an educators' perspective, which, as mentioned, is under-researched in both academic and relationship education and found meaningful experiences and connections to indicate perceived success. Organizations receive grant funding to support implementation of YRE programs, which are contingent on success or effectiveness as shown through participant outcomes rather than connections and positive experiences. Therefore, an important next step in research is to determine if and how YRE educators' perceptions of success correlate to youths' program outcomes. As educators mentioned they may not connect with all youth, this should be measured at both the individual and class-cohort level. Moderation analyses may show the influence of the individually perceived connection when assessing pre-and-post program outcomes.

1d. Since connections were indicative of success for YRE educators, future research should expand upon these findings by understanding the components, from youths' perspectives, that aid or hinder their feelings of connections to YRE educators. With an adult couple population, Ketring et al. (2017) suggest the need to understand which educator characteristics are most productive in building connections with the participants; likewise, with a youth-focused population, youth may gravitate toward educators with specific traits (e.g., humor, empathy). As researchers begin to understand the process of connecting from both the youth and educators' perspectives, YRE educators' practices can adapt to best suit the connective process. Understanding if these character traits are equally important in-person as online will also aid educators as they attempt to connect with youth across modalities. YRE educators and youth

may invest more time and energy into the programming if YRE educators are taught methods to connect with youth.

1e. Supporting the process of connecting, is the understanding of how to build a trusting relationship. YRE educators discuss potentially sensitive content (e.g., relationships, intimate partner violence, sexual decision-making) with youth. Exhibiting trustworthiness may boost the likelihood of youth wanting to connect with, and open up to, the YRE educator. Creating trust within an academic or interpersonal setting is not new within literature. However, research is still uncovering how YRE educators can develop trust with youth through an online format.

1f. When Building and Maintaining Connections (Category Two) with youth, YRE educators expressed the necessity to create an inclusive and safe environment. While logically, feeling safe and included would lead YRE educators to think youth would be more apt to be open to the YRE experience and educators, future research should dive deeper into determining the process of creating a safe, inclusive environment. Simultaneously, the analysis here indicates that researchers should use mixed methods, conducting both quantitative and qualitative research to establish how youths' impressions of the educator's comfort with diverse youth, use of inclusive language and examples, and effort of cultural awareness influence the youths' own comfort and expressions towards inclusivity, as well as its impact on classroom behavior. For instance, if an educator seems disinterested in using inclusive language or understanding the group's subculture, will the youth also be less inclined toward contributing to an inclusive environment? Quantitative research will allow researchers to affirm changes through more objective statistics and better assess large quantities of participants. Qualitative research is beneficial when researching areas of information where not much is known. Qualitative research also allows researchers to incorporate the context and perceptions while also providing

evidentiary support to the quantitative data. These suggested next steps can propel research in the field of youth relationship education to continue producing thoughtful educators and effective programming.

Implications for Practice. Determining how the findings can be applied within the field of YRE, five implications for practice are discussed as they pertain to YRE curriculum developers, educators, and organizations.

2a. Relationship education programs targeted toward youth populations are limited and many are designed to be delivered in-person. With pre-coronavirus pandemic implementation predominantly in school or community settings, YRE educators did not need to consider online YRE. Although the findings focus on educators' perceptions of success, the data also shows that educators underwent a strenuous and tedious process to adapt in-person YRE programs to fit an online modality, impacting the educators' perceptions of success. Some educators were provided trainings from their curriculum developers on methods and suggestions to adapt the curricula for an online modality; however, others did not. Moving forward, YRE curriculum developers should either create YRE curricula intended for online implementation and/or include adaptations for online implementation built into the curriculum manual. Online YRE reduced barriers and established increased YRE programming; therefore, YRE educators indicated an intent to implement YRE both in-person and online in the future. When considering transient populations such as youth in foster care and justice-involved youth, online programming can supply a way to reach populations that may not be in one locational setting throughout the duration of programming. Online booster sessions may aid youths' retention of previously received YRE programming. These sessions can be conducted outside of the specific classroom or cohort that the previous YRE sessions were taken with. This would allow YRE educators to

follow up on program implementation and longitudinal evaluation with large numbers of youth while retaining most of their programming efforts for new first-time YRE sessions and youth.

YRE curriculum developers should also consider youth-focused learning when creating and adapting YRE curricula. As previously mentioned, andragogy and pedagogy have differing elements. Andragogy, or adult teaching and learning, involves more self-directed and self-motivated learning whereas pedagogy, or child teaching and learning, is more educator-dependent and led (Knowles, 1968). Though youth developmentally fall along the spectrum from child to adult, they are not fully in either developmental category. Assessing the teaching and learning occurring within YRE, there appears to be a disconnect between YRE program directors and YRE educators with 54% of directors and only 29% of educators reporting that they provide the same programming to youth as they do adults (Scott et al., 2017). Within the report by Scott et al. (2017), the authors suggest that the discrepancy may be because educators are able to make changes during programming to best fit their population. With only 29% of educators reporting that they provide the same programming to adults and youth alike, this is an indicator that modifications to best fit youths' needs are occurring whether they fit within preplanned fidelity criteria or not. Therefore, authorized curriculum adaptations and considerations should focus on youth and their developmentally appropriate learning needs. For instance, some YRE curricula already support youth in exploring their identities through the incorporation of discussions that prompt youth to consider their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on relationship content without a clear right or wrong response. As icebreaker activities were encouraging for engagement, curriculum plans could include icebreaker activities structured toward memory retention of the previous lessons. Similarly, as previous research of youths' online learning within the coronavirus pandemic has discovered that youth have less focus, less motivation, higher stress,

and increased feelings of overload, YRE curriculum developers should structure online YRE curricula in ways that build motivation through fun activities (Besser et al., 2020; Literat, 2021). Interspersing activities with lecturing within programming may help to keep youth focused and engaged online.

2b. When creating or adapting YRE curricula intended for either online or in-person implementation, YRE curriculum developers can also consider incorporating connection and engagement methods to increase participation from multiple youth simultaneously. Previous researchers have considered the importance of engaging and connecting with participants in relationship education (Bradford et al., 2012; Futris et al., 2017; Ketring et al., 2017); however, the importance of simultaneous engagement from youth in relationship education programming has not been addressed. For instance, utilizing technology to integrate engagement tools including, but not limited to, polls, gamification, and word clouds, gives each youth the opportunity to express their thought, opinion, or question while reducing barriers previously recognized within in-person education engagement. For example, in-person, YRE educators stated that when youth are shy or have a fear of being incorrect, they may not share their thought or opinion on the content or activity concepts. YRE educators may also not have had time during their session to allow each youth to share their thoughts, opinions, or questions, limiting the responses they were able to gather. Limiting responses may also limit the ability to connect with youth. If youth feel like they are not heard or given the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions on the content, they may not feel valued and may disengage from the YRE educator and programming.

2c. With the intention of involving all youth, YRE curriculum developers should strive to write inclusively in their language and examples. Previous research of youth relationship

education has shown differences in outcomes based on elements of diversity (Adler-Baeder et al., 2007) and call for the need of educators within family life education to be aware of how different experiences or demographics impact the educational experience (Adler-Baeder et al., 2007; Ballard, 2020; Bradford et al., 2012). Therefore, at the curriculum level, YRE curriculum developers can accomplish this by conducting focus groups or interviews with those involved in YRE programming (e.g., YRE educators and youth). Sampling various populations should provide insight into diverse cultural and subcultural suggestions for improved inclusivity of youth in YRE programming. By incorporating individuals of varied backgrounds and life circumstances, YRE curriculum developers may also be able to include real life experiences from individuals who can relate to diverse youth. To modify the inclusive language to best fit their youth, YRE educators should also be cognizant of their youths' cultures and subcultures. YRE agencies can provide initial demographic and background details on the youth at large; however, YRE educators will need to become aware of the nuances of each group during their programming sessions. Combining inclusive curricula with culturally aware educators, YRE implementation may result in increased youth receptivity toward programming.

2d. YRE educators should receive training on techniques for cultivating connections with youth because of the importance of creating meaningful connections found in this study. Hawkins (2018) outlines the importance of training educators to effectively deliver curricula content. However, researchers who have previously studied relationship education with adult populations also support and call for the need to train educators on connection methods (Bradford et al., 2012; Ketring et al., 2017). Ketring et al. (2017) specifically suggest that for adult-focused couple relationship education, training educators how to show care and concern for their participants may aid in creating connections. Ballard (2020) states the importance of

training, but also personal characteristics of empathy, flexibility, and emotional stability on successful facilitation. Agencies should provide training for YRE educators both initially and on a continuing basis on topics such as emotional intelligence, working with trauma impacted youth, cultural awareness, and youth development (i.e., mental, physical, social, and emotional). The ABC-X model assumes that individuals undergo a process of adaptation when a stressor event occurs (Hill, 1958). The supports, perceptions, and resources someone has or does not have during the stressor event can impact the resulting outcome and determination of crisis (Hill, 1958). Therefore, the supports, perceptions, and resources of YRE educators during their transition to online implementation of YRE programming served as the theoretical inputs that sensitized me to the data as potentially impactful when developing the theory. Specifically, I found that YRE educators indicated that they feel supported when their organizations provide resources such as professional development training opportunities. Contrarily, not supplying desired personal development opportunities is perceived as a lack of support as mentioned in sub-category 2.2: Maintaining Community Partnerships. Since YRE educators mentioned the intent to use both in-person and online delivery modalities, YRE agencies should incorporate trainings that not only prepare educators to teach online, but also to translate their additional trainings and skills to an online format. These opportunities for training and professional development on online education and connection building, may aid YRE educators as they seek to figure out how to meaningfully connect with diverse youth.

2e. The final implication and recommendation for practice is for researchers interested in YRE educators. For organizations to utilize this information to inform their practice, training and/or guidelines that outline the components of success and YRE educator support should be developed. Training documents could include information on the elements of success, how those

elements differ in-person compared to online, and how best to support their educators within these perceptions of success.

These five recommendations for practice are proposed for YRE curriculum developers, agencies, educators, and researchers (see Table 8). In review, YRE curriculum developers should create curricula based in youth andragogy, create online specific curricula and/or include adaptations for online delivery, and structure program language and examples around inclusivity. YRE agencies can support their educators by offering trainings and professional development opportunities to strengthen their educator's knowledge on how to implement online and ways to connect with various youth. YRE educators can actively work to become aware of their youth's cultures and sub-cultures to make small adaptations of YRE curricula to best fit their populations. Educators can also incorporate online engagement techniques (polls, games, etc.) when in-person to elicit increased youth engagement. Finally, YRE researchers such as myself, should develop guidelines and trainings for YRE agencies to support their YRE educators based on the features of success.

Concluding Remarks

Within the middle and high school years, which were the targeted youth for YRE educators in this study, many youth begin forming relationships, indicating an opportunity for relational programming. YRE educators are molding and supporting youth in their knowledge and skills to lead healthy romantic relationships currently and in the future. Developmentally and socially, youth relationship education can make a meaningful impact on youths' lives as research has shown romantic relationships to spill over into many other aspects of life (e.g., mental health, academia, identity, career) (McElwain et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2018). Youth have been found to have idealistic expectations for relationships (McElwain et al., 2017), paired with a tendency

to make emotional compared to rational decisions, while also lacking in impulse control (Wolfe, 2001). As the relational habits that youth form are liable to influence their adult relational habits (McElwain et al., 2017), YRE is highly beneficial for youth. YRE educators perceive their efforts to creating meaningful connections and YRE experiences for youth as equally impactful. Increased efforts to support YRE educators, improve YRE experiences for both educators and youth, and bolster youth outcomes is likely to have positive impacts on youths' well-being and YRE educators' perceptions of successfully implementing their programming.

Continuing to value the perceptions and lived experiences of youth relationship educators through further research and practical supports will enhance YRE for both the educators and youth. This study provides insight into training and supporting YRE educators moving forward, and ways in which to shed light on a developing area of relationship education. In understanding how and why YRE educators meaningfully connect with their youth, researchers, educators, curriculum developers, and practitioners can adapt YRE to expansively impact more youth. If the goal of youth relationship education is to provide prevention programming to increase relational knowledge/skills, decrease risky decision-making, promote optimal development, and improve well-being, then YRE educators need the resources and supports to feel successful in leading the charge to do so.

References

Adler-Baeder, F., Bradford, A., Skuban, E., Lucier-Greer, M., Ketring, S., & Smith, T. (2010). Demographic predictors of relationship and marriage education participants' pre and post program relational and individual functioning. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy and Education, 9*(2), 113–132.

Adler-Baeder, F., Kerpelman, J. L., Schramm, D. G., Higginbotham, B., & Paulk, A. (2007). The impact of relationship education on adolescents of diverse backgrounds. *Family Relations, 56*(3), 291-303. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.00460.x

Almond, L., Vilches, S., Adler-Baeder, F., Samek, D., Dede Yildirim, E. (2021). *Exploring elements in a college service-learning course that promote teaching efficacy for community-based delivery of youth relationship education* [Unpublished manuscript]. Department of Human Development and Family Science, Auburn University.

American Federation of Teachers. (2000). *Distance education: Guidelines for good practice* [Report].

Andrews, L., Higgins, A., Andrews, M. W., & Lalor, J. G. (2012). Classic grounded theory to analyse secondary data: Reality and reflections. *The Grounded Theory Review, 11*(1), 12-26.

Avellar, S., Shiferaw, L., Ross, C., & Lee, J. (2021). *Supporting current and future healthy families: Final report on the 2015 cohort of healthy marriage grantees serving youth* [OPRE report 2021-171]. FaMLE: Fatherhood and Marriage Local Evaluation and Cross-Site Project. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/hmrf-final-report-2015-youth-grantees-oct-2021.pdf

Ballard, S. M. (2020). The practice of family life education: Toward an implementation framework. *Family Relations, 69*(3), 461-478. doi: 10.1111/fare.12443.

Barbee, A. P., Cunningham, M. R., van Zyl, M. A., Antle, B. F., & Langley, C. N. (2016). Impact of two adolescent pregnancy prevention interventions on risky sexual behavior: A three-arm cluster randomized control trial. *American Journal of Public Health, 106*, 85-90. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2016.303429

Berkel, C., Mauricio, A., Schoenfelder, E., & Sandler, I. (2011). Putting the pieces together: An integrated model of program implementation. *Prevention Science, 12*(2011), 23-33. DOI: 10.1007/s11121-010-0186-1

Besser, A., Flett, G., & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2020). Adaptability to a sudden transition to online learning during the covid-19 pandemic: Understanding the challenges for students. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*. DOI: 10.1037/stl0000198

Bhuasiri, W., Xaymoungkhoun, O., Zo, H., Rho, J. J., & Ciganek, A. P. (2012). Critical success factors for e-learning in developing countries: A comparative analysis between ICT experts and faculty. *Computers and Education, 58*(2012), 843-855. DOI: 10.1016/j.compedu.2011.10.010

Blumer, H. (1954). What is wrong with social theory? *American Sociological Review, 19*(1), 3-10. doi: 10.2307/2088165

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and method*. Prentice Hall, Inc.

Bongolan, R., Moir, E., & Baron, W. (Ed.). (2009). *Keys to the secondary classroom: A teacher's guide to the first months of school*. Sage.

Bowen, G. A. (2006). Grounded theory and sensitizing concepts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(3), 12-23. doi: 10.1177/160940690600500304

Bradford, A. B., Adler-Baeder, F., Ketring, S. A., Smith, T. A. (2012). The role of participant-facilitator demographic match in couple and relationship education. *Family Relations, 61*(1), 51-94. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2011.00679.x

Bradford, A. B., Erickson, C., Smith, T. A., Adler-Baeder, F., & Ketring, S. A. (2014). Adolescents' intentions to use relationship interventions by demographic group: Before and after a relationship education curriculum. *The American Journal of Family Therapy, 42*(4), 293-303.

Brower, N., MacArthur, S., Bradford, K., Albrecht, C., & Bunnell, J. (2012). Got dating: Outcomes of a teen 4-H relationship retreat. *Journal of Youth Development, 7*(1), 119-124. DOI: 10.5195/jyd.2012.156

Bullock, A., Colvin, A. D., & Jackson, M. S. (2022). Zoom fatigue in the age of COVID-19. *Journal of Social Work in the Global Community, 6*(1), 2. DOI: 10.5590/JSWGC.2022.07.1.01

Catalano, A. J., Torff, B., & Anderson, K. S. (2021). Transitioning to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: Differences in access and participation among students in disadvantaged school districts. *The international Journal of Information and Learning Technology, 38(*2), 258-270. DOI: 10.1108/IJILT-06-2020-0111

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage Publications.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Collins, W. A., Welsh, D. P., & Furman, W. (2009). Adolescent romantic relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology, 60*, 631–652. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163459

Cooke, B. (2006). Competencies of a parent educator: What does a parent educator need to know and do? *Child Welfare, 85*(5), 785-802.

Coomey, M. & Stephenson, J. (2018). Online learning: It is all about dialogue, involvement, support and control – according to the research. In J. Stephenson (Ed.), *Teaching and learning online: Pedagogies for new technologies*. Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781315042527

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Quarterly, 13*(1), 3-19. DOI: 10.1007/BF00988593

Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (2014). Controversies in couple relationship education (CRE): Overlooked evidence and implications for research and policy. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 20*(4), 361-383. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/law0000025361

Czaplinski, I., Devine, C., Sillence, M., Fielding, A., Gaede, O., & Schrank, C. (2020). *Active learning in the time of the pandemic: Report from the eye of the storm* [Paper presentation]. ASCILITE 2020: Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education, Virtual conference. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/206823/

De Rosa, P. (2018). Psychoeducational approach of Vygotsky and its relationship with the Symbolic Interactionism: Application to the juvenile criminal responsibility and educational processes. *Propósitos Y Representaciones, 6*(2), 651-669. DOI: 10.20511/pyr2018.v6n2.246

DeBord, K., Bower, D., Goddard, H. W., Kirby, J., Kobbe, A. M., Myers-Walls, J. A., Mulroy, M., & Ozretich, R. A. (2002). *National Extension Parenting Educators' Framework*.

Derakhshandeh, Z. & Esmaeili, B. (2020). Active-learning in the online environment. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia, 29*(4), 299-311. https://www.learntechlib.org/primary/p/217506/

Durlak, J., & DuPre, E. (2008). Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 41*(3-4), 327-350. DOI: 10.1007/s10464-008-9165-0

Edley, N., & Litosseliti, L. (2010). Contemplating interviews and focus groups. In E. Litosseliti (Ed.), *Research Methods in Linguistics* (pp. 155-179). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Epting, L., K., Zinn, T. E., Buskist, C., & Buskist, W. (2004). Student perspectives on the distinction between ideal and typical teachers. *Teaching of Psychology, 31*(3), 181-206. DOI: 10.1207/s15328023top3103_5

Foreman, M., Michaels, C., Bible, J., Russell, L., Lannin, D. G., Yazedjian, A., Hynes, K., & Horton, A. (2021). *Best practices for teachers of youth relationship education programs*. [Conference Poster]. Online University Research Symposium, Illinois State University. https://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/urs2021psych/2/

Futris, T. G., Sutton, T. E., & Duncacn, J. C. (2017). Factors associated with romantic relationship self-efficacy following youth-focused relationship education. *Family Relations, 66*(5), 777-793.

Gardner, S. P. (2001). Evaluation of the "Connections: Relationships and Marriage" curriculum. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education, 19*(1), 1-14. http://www.natefacs.org/jfcse/vol19no1/v19no1gardner.pdf

Gardner, S. P., Giese, K., & Parrott, S. M. (2004). Evaluation of the Connections: Relationship and Marriage curriculum. *Family Relations, 53*(5), 521-527. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20456769

Gillett-Swan, J. (2017). The challenges of online learning supporting and engaging the isolated learner. *Journal of Learning Design, 10*(1), 20-30. doi: 10.5204/jld.v9i3.293.

Glaser, B. (1978). *Advances in the methodology of grounded theory: Theoretical sensitivity.* Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. (2001). *The grounded theory perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with description*. Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine Publishing Company.

Goddard, H. W., & Allen, J. D. (1991). *Using the ABC-X model to understand resilience*. ERIC. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED338965

Gonzalez, C. (2012). The relationship between approaches to teaching, approaches to e-teaching and perceptions of the teaching situation in relation to e-learning among higher education teachers. *Instructional Science, 40*(6), 975-998. doi: 10.1007/s11251-011-9198-x

Gurley, L. E. (2018). Educators' preparation to teach, perceived teaching presence, and perceived teaching presence behaviors in blended and online learning environments. *Online Learning Journal, 22*(2), 197-220. doi: 10.24059/olj.v22i2.1255

Hasnine, M., Ahmed, M., & Ueda, H. (2020). Towards post-pandemic active learning design by connecting strategies with technologies [Paper presentation]. World Conference on

Mobile, Blended and Seamless Learning, Virtual conference. https://www.iamlearn.org/mlearn2020_Proceedings/015_mLearn_2020_paper_20.pdf

Hawkins, A. J. (2017). Shifting the relationship education field to prioritize youth relationship education. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy, 47*(3), 165-180. doi: 10.1080/15332691.2017.1341355

Hawkins, A. J. (2018). Shifting the relationship education field to prioritize youth relationship education. Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 17(3), 165-180. DOI: 10.1080/15332691.2017.1341355

Hawkins, A. J., Stanley, S. M., Blanchard, V. L., & Albright, M. (2012). Exploring programmatic moderators of the effectiveness of marriage and relationship education programs: A meta-analytic study. *Behavior Therapy, 43*(2012), 77-87. DOI: 10.1016/j.beth.2010.12.006

Higginbotham, B., & Myler, C. (2010). The influence of facilitator and facilitation characteristics on participants' ratings of stepfamily education. *Family Relations, 59*(1), 74-86. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2009.00587.x

Hill, R. (1958). Generic features of families under stress. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services, 39*(2-3), 139-150. doi: 10.1177/1044389458039002-318

Hubler, D. S., & Burr, B. K. (2019). How an online education module influences attitudes toward relationship education: A randomized experiment. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension, 7*(1), 169-179.

Hughes, R., Bowers, J., Mitchell, E., Curtiss, S., & Ebata, A. (2012). Developing online family life prevention and education programs. *Family Relations, 61*(5), 711-727. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2012.00737.x

Ida, Z. S. (2017). What makes a good teacher? *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 5*(1), 141-147. doi: 10.13189/ujer.2017.050118

International Board of Standards for Training, Performance and Instruction. (2003). *Instructor competencies* [Report]. https://pdf4pro.com/view/2003-ibstpi-174-instructor-competencies-run2life-org-8339d.html

Janssens, A., Blake, S., Allwood, M, Ewing, J., & Barlow, A. (2020). Exploring the content and delivery of relationship skills education programmes for adolescents: A systematic review. *Sex Education, 20*(5), 494-516. DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2019.1697661

Jing. K., Kian, N., Mai, N., Yeen-Ju, H., Haw, L., & Fook, S. (2013). Designing opportunities to learn through online active learning environment. International Conference on Informatics and Creative Multimedia, Malaysia. DOI: 10.1109/ICICM.2013.23

Kamper, C. (1996). *Connections: Relationships and Marriage*. Berkeley, CA: The Dibble Institute.

Ketring, S., Bradfor, A., Davis, S., Adler-Baeder, F., McGill, J., Smith, T. (2017). The role of the facilitator in couple relationship education. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 43*(3), 374-390. DOI: 10.1111/jmft.12223

Kerpelman, J. L., Pittman, J. F., Adler-Baeder, F., Eryigit, S., & Paulk, A. (2009). Evaluation of a statewide youth-focused relationships education curriculum. *Journal of Adolescence, 32*, 1359–1370. DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2009.04.006.

Knowles, M. (1968). Andragogy, not pedagogy. *Adult Leadership, 16*(10), 350-352, 386.

Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Analyzing and Reporting Focus Group Results*. SAGE.

Lemay, D. J., Doleck, T., & Baselais, P. (2021). Transition to online teaching during the covid-19 pandemic. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-12. DOI: 10.1080/10494820.2021.1871633

Literat, I. (2021). "Teachers act like we're robots": TikTok as a window into youth experiences of online learning during covid-19. *AERA Open, 7*(1), 1-15. DOI: 10.1177/2332858421995537

Markman, H. J., & Rhoades, G. K. (2012). Relationship education research: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, *38*(1), 169-200. DOI: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2011.00247.x

McAllister, S., Duncan, S., & Hawkins, A. (2012). Examining the early evidence for self-directed marriage and relationship education: A meta-analytic study. *Family Relations, 61*(5), 742-755. DOI: 10.1111/j.1741-3729.2012.00736.x

McElwain, A., McGill, J., & Savasuk-Luxton, R. (2017). Youth relationship education: A meta-analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review, 82*, 499-507. DOI: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.09.036

Menchaca, M. P. & Bekele, T. A. (2008). Learner and instructor identified success factors in distance education. *Distance Education, 29*(3), 231-252. DOI: 10.1080/01587910802395771

Merriam, S. B. (2017). Adult learning theory: Evolution and future directions. PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning, 26(1), 21-37. https://www.iup.edu/pse/files/programs/graduate_programs_r/instructional_design_and_technology_ma/paace_journal_of_lifelong_learning/volume_26,_2017/merriam.pdf

Mitchell, D. (2014). Advancing grounded theory: Using theoretical frameworks within grounded theory studies. *The Qualitative Report, 19*(36), 1-11. doi: 10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1014

Morgan, D. (1996). Focus groups. *Annual Review of Sociology, 22*(1996), 129-152. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2083427

Morgan, H. (2020). Best practices for implementing remote learning during a pandemic. *The Clearing House Issue: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas, 93*(3), 135-141. DOI: 10.1080/00098655.2020.1751480

Nambiar, D. (2020). The impact of online learning during COVID-19: Students' and teachers' perspectives. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology, 8*(2), 783-793. doi: 10.25215/0802.094

National Council on Family Relations. (2020). *Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) credential: Standards & criteria*. https://www.ncfr.org/system/files/2020-07/Final_Standards%20and%20Criteria%202020.pdf

NAYCi, Ö. (2020). Student opinions regarding strengths and weakness of face to face and online teaching. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instructional Studies, 10*(1), 261-290. doi: 10.31704/ijocis.2020.009

Oomen-Early, J., & Murphy, L. (2009). Self-actualization and e-learning: A qualitative investigation of university faculty's perceived needs for effective online instruction. *International Journal on E-Learning, 8*(2), 223-240. https://www.learntechlib.org/p/26143/

Pearson, M. (2020). *Love Notes*. Berkeley, CA: The Dibble Institute.

Pearson, M. (2004/2007/2013/2018). *Relationship Smarts PLUS 4.0*. Berkeley, CA: The Dibble Institute.

Pound, P., Langford, R., & Campbell, R. (2016). What do young people think about their school-based sex and relationship education? A qualitative synthesis of young people's views and experiences. *BMJ Open, 6*, 1-4. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-011329

Pound, P., Denford, S., Shucksmith, J., Tanton, C., Johnson, A. M., Owen, J., Hutten, R., Mohan, L., Bonell, C., Abraham, C., & Campbell, R. (2017). What is best practice in sex and relationship education? A synthesis of evidence, including stakeholders' views. *BMJ Open, 7*, 1-11. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-014791

Puddy, R. W. & Wilkins, N. (2011). *Understanding evidence part 1: Best available research evidence. A guide to the continuum of evidence of effectiveness*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Rhoades, G. K. (2015). The effectiveness of Within Our Reach relationship education program for couples: Findings from a federal randomized trial. *Family Process, 54*(4), 672-685. DOI: 10.1111/famp.12148

Rieger, K. L. (2018). Discriminating among grounded theory approaches. *Nursing Inquiry, 26*(1), 1-12. DOI: 10.1111/non.12261

Savasuk-Luxton, R., Adler-Baeder, F., & Haselschwerdt, M. (2018). Understanding change in violence-related attitudes for adolescents in relationship education. *Journal of Adolescence, 63*(2018), 153-164. DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.12.012

Scott, M., & Karberg, E. (2015). *A snapshot of healthy marriage and relationship education programs for youth*. Child Trends.

Scott, M. E., Karberg, E., Huz, I., & Oster, M. (2017). *Healthy marriage and relationship education programs for youth: An in-depth study of federally funded programs* (Report No. 2017-74). Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children

and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/years_task_46_final_report_finalv2_b508.pdf

Sebastian, K. (2019). Distinguishing between the types of grounded theory: Classical, interpretive, and constructivist. *Journal for Social Though, 3*(1), 1-9. https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/jst/index

Simpson, B. M., Leonhardt, N. D., & Hawkins, A. J. (2018). Learning about love: A meta-analytic study of individually-oriented relationship education programs for adolescents and emerging adults. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 47*(3), 477–489.

Spencer, C. M. & Anderson, J. R. (2021). Online relationship education programs improve individual and relationship functioning: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 42*(2), 485-500. DOI: 10.1111/jmft.12491

Stanley, S. M., Carlson, R. G., Rhoades, G. K., Markman, H. J., Ritchie, L. L., & Hawkins, A. J. (2020). Best practices in relationship education focused on intimate relationships. *Family Relations, 69*(3), 497-519. DOI: 10.1111/fare.12419

Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Jenkins, N., Rhoades, G. K., Noll, L., & Ramos, L. (2006). *Within our reach leader manual*. Denver, CO: PREP Inc.

Strauss, A., L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Sage Publications.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Surg, A. J. (2021). Implementation of virtual focus groups for qualitative data collection in a global pandemic. *Elsevier Public Health Emergency Collection, 221*(5), 918-922. DOI: 10.1016/j.amjsurg.2020.10.009

Tanis, C. (2020). The seven principles of online learning: Feedback from faculty and alumni on its importance for teaching and learning. *Research in Learning Technology, 28*(2020), 1-25. DOI: 10.25304/rlt.v28.2319

Taylor, B. G., & Mumford, E. A. (2016). A national descriptive portrait of adolescent relationship abuse: Results from the National Survey of Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 31*, 963–988. DOI: 10.1177/0886260514564070

Tsang, K. K., & Jiang, L. (2018). Positive emotional experiences in teaching, teacher identity, and student behaviors: A symbolic interactionism perspective. *Schools: Studies in Education, 15*(2), 228-246. DOI: 10.1086/699890

Tucker, L. & Quintero-Ares, A. (2021). Professional learning communities as a faculty support during the COVID-19 transition to online learning. *Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 24*(1), 1-14.

Van Epp, J. (2010). *How to avoid falling for a jerk (or jerk-ette)* (5th ed.). Medina, OH: Author.

Verhoeven, M., Poorthuis, A., & Volman, M. (2019). The role of school in adolescents' identity development. A literature review. *Educational Psychology Review, 31*(35-63). DOI: 10.1007/s10648-018-9457-3

Walker, S. K., & Kim, H. (2015). Family educators' technology use and factors influencing technology acceptance attitudes. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 43*(4), 328-342. DOI: 10.1111/fcsr.12113

Weissbourd, R., Anderson, T. R., Cashin, A., & McIntyre, J. (2017). The talk: How adults can promote young people's healthy relationships and prevent misogyny and sexual harassment. Making Caring Common Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Available at: https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/thetalk

Whiteside, M., Mills, J., & McCalman, J. (2012). Using secondary data for grounded theory analysis. *Australian Social Work, 65*(4), 504-516. DOI: 10.1080/0312407X.2011.645165

Wolfe, P. (2001). *Brain matters: Translating research into classroom practice*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Zaidi, S. B. (2022). Situating sensitizing concepts in the constructivist-critical grounded theory method. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 21*, 1-6. DOI: 10.1177/16094069211061957

Appendix

Appendix A: Letter of Recruitment Support from the Dibble Institute

The Dibble Institute
Resources for Teaching Relationship Skills to Teens and Young Adults

February 16, 2021

Lindsey Almond
364 Jack Hampton Dr.
Auburn, AL 36830

Dear Lindsey Almond,

Thank you for including The Dibble Institute in your dissertation project. We understand that your proposed research project includes conducting focus groups with facilitators of youth-based relationship education programs.

We support your efforts and understand that the involvement of The Dibble Institute will assist you in accomplishing this project. We will work with you provide access to our clients for recruitment purposes.

As the President and Executive Director of the Dibble Institute, I have read through your proposed research and support the involvement of our organization in this project.

Should you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Catherine M Reed

Catherine M. Reed
President and Executive Director
(KayReed@DibbleInstitute.org)

P.O. Box 7881
Berkeley, CA 94707-0881
800.695.7975

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions

1.Tell me about the audience you teach and what pre-COVID teaching looked like for you.
2.How did you prepare for switching to an online format?
    a. Possible follow-ups:
        i. Were there any resources that aided this transition to teaching online?
        ii. What additional resources, knowledge, skills, supports, etc. would enable you to feel better prepared to teach online?
3.Describe how online teaching has gone for you so far.
    a. Possible follow-ups:
        i. What components of teaching youth relationship education online have gone well?
        ii. What components of teaching youth relationship education have not gone well?
        iii. What challenges have you faced?
4.How have your audiences responded to the transition to online?
    a. Possible follow-ups:
        i. How does audience engagement compare to face-to-face?
5.Will this impact how to teach youth relationship education in the future?
    a. Possible follow-ups:
        i. How so?
        ii. Why not?
6.Are there any other things you would like to share regarding your experiences teaching youth relationship education online?

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How did you become a youth relationship educator?
2. Are you familiar with the communities you work with? How so if yes?
3. In what ways do you find yourself similar or dissimilar to the youth you work with?
4. What did your training look like initially as a youth relationship educator?
5. Did you receive any training for online implementation?
6. How did you try to engage your youth in-person?
    a. How did you try to engage your youth online?
7. What tells or shows you that your youth are engaged?
8. How do you know if you successfully taught youth relationship education?
    a. Do you feel like your view of what success looks like is different with online implementation?
    b. What sorts of things would show that you successfully delivered your program pre-covid in-person? What about virtually during the coronavirus pandemic?
9. How do you view your age, life experiences, or relatability as influencing your feelings of being successful when teaching online?
10. In what ways do you think the coronavirus pandemic has impacted your youth?
11. Has the pandemic changed the way you approach youth relationship education? If yes, how so?

Appendix D: Focus Group Initial Categories

1. Choosing a modality moving forward
2. Experiencing something new
3. Comparing virtual and in-person
4. Transitioning timeline
5. Figuring it out
6. Choosing to continue
7. Preparing for the transition
8. Enjoying face to face
9. Enjoying online
10. Considering resources
11. Managing the transition with schools
12. Having community relationships
13. Teaching location
14. Collaborating and working with program developers
15. Supporting each other (facilitators)
16. Feeling supported
17. Receiving feedback
18. Training
19. Having a lot of responsibilities
20. Recording lessons
21. Being energetic
22. Being anonymous
23. Preferring to engage through the chat
24. Relating
25. Trying to engage youth
26. Interacting virtually
27. Connecting
28. Getting to know each other
29. Being in a physical space face to face
30. Creating the environment
31. Accommodating technology
32. Having things ready to go
33. Having technology issues
34. Experiencing Zoom and technology fatigue
35. Familiarizing with technology
36. Recruiting
37. Being inclusive
38. Considering the curriculum
39. Evaluating
40. Impacting youth
41. Serving youth
42. Reaching youth virtually
43. Responding to the pandemic
44. Learning

Appendix E: Table 3. Organization of Theory Categories and Sub-Categories

Table 3

Organization of Theory Categories and Sub-Categories

Core Category: Pivoting to Meaningfully Connect
Category 1: Choosing to Continue
Sub-category 1: Choosing to Continue
Category 2: Building and Maintaining Connections
Sub-category 1: Building Community Partnerships
Sub-category 2: Maintaining Community Partnerships
Sub-category 3: Retaining Connections Through Technology
Sub-category 4: Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities
Category 3: Moving Forward for Success
Sub-category 1: Choosing a Modality Moving Forward

Note. This table represents the core category which is made up of three overarching categories. Each of the three overarching categories is formed from sub-categories.

Appendix F: Table 4. Organization of Category One Sub-Categories and Codes

Table 4

Organization of Category One Sub-Categories and Codes

Category 1: Choosing to Continue
Sub-category 1: Choosing to Continue
Code 1: Choosing to Continue
Code 2: Impacting Youth
Code 3: Experiencing Something New
Code 4: Transitioning Timeline
Code 5: Figuring It Out
Code 6: Preparing for the Transition
Code 7: Having a Lot of Responsibilities

Note. This table represents overarching category one: choosing to continue. Choosing to continue is formed by one sub-category and seven codes.

Appendix G: Table 5. Organization of Category Two Sub-Categories and Codes

Table 5

Organization of Category Two Sub-Categories and Codes

Category 2: Building and Maintaining Connections
- **Sub-category 1**: Building Community Partnerships
  - **Code 1**: Serving Youth
  - **Code 2**: Having/Building Community Relationships
  - **Code 3**: Teaching Location
  - **Code 4**: Recruiting
- **Sub-category 2**: Maintaining Community Partnerships
  - **Code 1**: Managing the Transition with Schools
  - **Code 2**: Feeling Supported
  - **Code 3**: Collaborating and Working with Program Developers
  - **Code 4**: Supporting Each Other (Facilitators)
  - **Code 5**: Training
- **Sub-category 3**: Retaining Connections Through Technology
  - **Code 1**: Having Things Ready to Go
  - **Code 2**: Familiarizing with Technology
  - **Code 3**: Accommodating Technology
  - **Code 4**: Having Technology Issues
  - **Code 5**: Experiencing Zoom/Technology Fatigue
- **Sub-category 4**: Connecting and Engaging Youth Across Modalities
  - **Sub-category concept 1**: Reaching and Interacting with Youth Virtually
    - **Code 1**: Reaching Youth Virtually
    - **Code 2**: Interacting Virtually
    - **Code 3**: Learning
    - **Code 4**: Responding to the Pandemic
  - **Sub-category concept 2**: Creating the Environment
    - **Code 1**: Creating the Environment
    - **Code 2**: Being in a Physical Space
    - **Code 3**: Being Energetic
    - **Code 4**: Being Inclusive
    - **Code 5**: Considering the Curriculum
  - **Sub-category concept 3**: Connecting and Engaging
    - **Code 1**: Being Anonymous
    - **Code 2**: Preferring to Engage through the Chat
    - **Code 3**: Connecting
    - **Code 4**: Getting to Know Each Other
    - **Code 5**: Relating
    - **Code 6**: Trying to Engage Youth

Note. This table represents overarching category two: building and maintaining connections. Building and maintaining connections is formed by four sub-categories. Each sub-category is made up of codes with the exception of sub-category four which is formed by three sub-category concepts and resulting codes.

Appendix H: Table 6. Organization of Category Three Sub-Categories and Codes

Table 6

Organization of Category Three Sub-Categories and Codes

Category 3: Moving Forward for Success
Sub-category 1: Choosing a Modality Moving Forward
Code 1: Enjoying a Modality (Face to Face or Online)
Code 2: Comparing Virtual and In-Person Implementation
Code 3: Preferring a Modality
Code 4: Choosing a Modality

Note. This table represents overarching category three: moving forward for success. Moving forward for success is formed by one sub-category and four codes.