

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN FACILITATING THEIR CHILDREN'S LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

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The overall purpose of this study was to examine parents' role in the development of character among young athletes, with a particular focus on life skills development across learning contexts (i.e., sport, family, school). Participants were 20 parents (13 mothers, 7 fathers, $M_{\text{age}} = 46.8$ years, $SD = 4.6$) and 24 children (14 girls, 10 boys, $M_{\text{age}} = 14.3$ years, $SD = 1.3$) who competed in a variety of youth sports. Each participant completed an individual semistructured interview. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and data were analyzed using thematic analysis. We identified five strategies that parents used to facilitate their children's life skills development: reinforcing values and consistency; giving perspective and guiding; seizing teachable moments; instructing, reminding, and encouraging; and promoting independence. These findings highlight parents' role in character development among young athletes, and show that life skills are developed and reinforced, across learning contexts.

Keywords: character development; life skills learning contexts; youth sport; parents

Character development is a multifaceted and ongoing process of actualizing skills, virtues, thoughts, and feelings that are necessary for an individual to act coherently across life contexts (Lerner, 2018). Lerner (2004, 2018) proposed three factors that promote character development: (a) positive and sustained adult-youth

relationships, (b) opportunities for meaningful participation in different life contexts (e.g., family, school, sport, work), and (c) engagement in life skill building activities. Character development does not occur in isolation in individual life contexts. Rather, it is influenced by dynamic relations individuals experience

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Journal of Character Education, Volume 19(1–2), 2023, pp. 35–55
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ISSN 1543-1223
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within and between contexts, and it requires active attention and nurturing from caring adults (Nucci, 2017, 2019). Parents have been highlighted as the major source of support in character development (Theokas & Lerner, 2006) and the influence of parents on children's character extends beyond the family context. For example, parents exert a powerful influence on their children's developmental experiences in sport (Holt & Knight, 2014). In the current study we sought to examine parents' role in the development of character among young athletes, with a particular focus on life skills development across learning contexts (i.e., sport, family, school).

The concept of life skills offers one approach for studying character. Life skills have been defined as the physical, behavioral, or cognitive skills that can help individuals deal with demands and challenges of everyday life (Hodge & Danish, 1999). Traditionally, character has been defined as a set of traits or virtues (Nucci, 2017), helping individuals to respect societal rules and possess standards for correct behaviors (Bruner et al., 2021). Youth sport can be a learning context in which young individuals develop life skills such as resilience, perseverance, teamwork, and hard work ethic (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2008). Such life skills are akin to character virtues. Indeed, youth sport researchers have previously described life skills as a "character virtue" (Holt et al., 2008, p. 290). Hence, there are connections between life skills and character virtues, whereby many of these virtues of character overlap with the life skills identified in the youth sport literature (Ronkainen et al., 2021).

Life Skills Development and Learning Contexts

Youth sport is an intriguing context in which to study character and life skills development because participation has been associated with both positive and negative developmental outcomes (Bean et al., 2014; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). And although

parents are often deeply involved in their children's sport participation, little is known about how parents influence their children's life skills development in sport or across other learning contexts. Indeed, to gain a complete understanding of life skills development among young athletes it is necessary to examine their experiences in sport as well as in other contexts (Jacobs et al., 2017; Jørgensen et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2017).

For example, in Pierce et al.'s (2017) model of life skills transfer through sport, life skills development is not limited to individuals' experiences in the sport context. Instead, Pierce et al. (2017) suggested that life skills development include relations with external assets (e.g., coaches, teachers, parents) that can facilitate or hinder life skills development and transfer across contexts. Furthermore, they theorized that sport, school, family, vocational, and extracurricular activities could be important learning contexts. Jacobs et al. (2017) hypothesized that congruence (i.e., the state of agreeing and coinciding) across learning contexts and between external assets – including parents, instructors, teachers, and coaches – are key to facilitate youths' life skills development. Along similar lines, the character development literature highlights that character development involves an individual's skillset, and the need to act coherently (i.e., the state or quality of being in harmony) across contexts (Lerner, 2018, 2019; Nucci, 2019). Thus, multiple learning contexts as well as the congruence and consistency across these contexts, are likely to influence youths' development of life skills.

Parenting takes place across learning contexts and in interactions between parents, their children, and external assets (Kerig, 2019). Family systems theory focuses on understanding parenting beyond the dyadic relationship within the family context (e.g., athlete-parent relationship) by focusing on the larger relationship systems with external assets across contexts (Bowen, 1993). Instead of considering the development of character and life skills in a two-person system (e.g., athlete-parent),

family systems theory considers the construct of triangulation, which refers to the idea that a dyad system is untenable if there is a conflict or confusion. Instead, triangles are considered the smallest, stable relationship unit (Bowen, 1993). In such cases, including a third person (e.g., a coach or teacher) could improve the experiences within the learning context (Rouquette et al., 2020). Rather than only focusing on the athlete-parent interactions within a context, family systems theory suggests a triangulated approach of athlete-parent and external asset across learning contexts could clarify the complex influences on athletes' character and life skills development. Thus, family systems provide a conceptual understanding of how parenting takes place across contexts (Kerig, 2019), and how individuals interact, within and across, learning contexts. As such, in the current study, we considered multiple life skills learning contexts rather than limiting our focus to the family or home context.

The study of life skills development among athletes has largely focused on high school sport context (e.g., Camiré, 2014; Camiré et al., 2013; Forneris et al., 2012; Holt et al., 2008; Pierce et al., 2017). For example, Pierce et al. (2019) looked at 12 teacher-coaches' perceptions of life skills development and transfer from sport to other life contexts. Participants believed that life skills development starts in the family context, reflecting the role that parents can play in promoting life skills. The teacher-coaches also emphasized the importance of parents' philosophy, actions, and having high expectations across contexts to help their child's life skills process. Pierce et al. (2019) recommended that future studies examine youths' relationships across multiple contexts and parents' influence in life skills development and transfer.

Jørgensen et al. (2020) examined life skills development among 11 junior elite athletes. These athletes developed life skills across four learning contexts: sport, school, work, and family. Within the family context, the athletes talked about parents promoting life skills development by fostering a sense of indepen-

dence and creating opportunities to develop life skills as a part of family life (e.g., cooking, accounting, chores). Parents appeared to have the most significant influence on life skills development during early adolescence (12–16 years of age). Jørgensen et al.'s findings suggested that parents play a key role in their child's life skills development, highlighting both the areas of life skills learning contexts and parents' influence on life skills development as important areas for future investigation.

Some studies have examined relations between parental behaviors and children's life skills development in sport. Mossman and Cronin (2019) found that parents of 317 soccer players (aged 10–16 years) used praise and understanding to help them develop life skills (e.g., teamwork, goal setting, leadership). However, parents' perspectives were not examined in this study (only children completed the survey). Interestingly, Mossman et al. (2021) reported that parents had the smallest impact on children's life skills development in the sport context given the limited time they spend in their children's training and competition. Rather, they argued that parents are more likely to influence life skills development outside the sport context. Kramers et al. (2022) found that parenting strategies such as encouraging, tailoring feedback, and establishing expectations supported life skills development among soccer players (aged 8–16 years). Beyond these studies, research on parents' influence on their children's development of life skills in sport and other related learning contexts is limited. In fact, Holt et al.'s (2017) qualitative meta-synthesis of sport-based positive youth development literature showed that only nine of the 63 studies explored parents' role in youth sport. None focused specifically on how parents can promote life skills development across multiple learning contexts.

Harwood et al. (2019) argued that many studies of parenting in relation to youth sport tend to oversimplify parenting by not considering the broader dynamics of family life and parenting across other contexts (e.g., school,

sport). Similarly, with few exceptions (e.g., Jørgensen et al., 2020), studies of life skills development among young athletes tend to focus on the sport context in isolation without considering the dynamic relations between youth and their parents across learning contexts. Harwood et al. (2019) argued that “we risk creating an incomplete and potentially misleading picture of how parents influence young people” (p. 68) when considering parenting involvement in isolated contexts. As such, understanding how children and their parents might experience life skills development across contexts is necessary.

Purpose and Research Question

Researchers should examine attributes (e.g., life skills), individuals (e.g., parents), and contexts (e.g., school, sport, family) of character development (Lerner, 2019; Lerner & Callina, 2014). In this study, we sought to offer an innovative perspective on character development by focusing on life skills development from the perspectives of parents and their children. The purpose of this study was to examine parents’ role in the development of character among young athletes, with a particular focus on life skills development across learning contexts.

METHOD

This study was guided by an interpretivist paradigm. From an ontological perspective, an interpretivist approach involves understanding individuals’ contextual and subjective realities, and individuals’ experiences of their social world (Thorne et al., 2004). The interpretivist epistemology is focused on individuals’ knowledge, which is assumed to be culturally derived and historically situated (Scotland, 2012). Thus, the role of an interpretivist researcher is to understand how such knowledge is created, acquired, and communicated. By examining the similarities within participants’ subjective experiences, it is pos-

sible to come to new understandings, explore concepts, and make meanings (Thorne et al., 1997).

Participants and Recruitment

Research ethics board approval was obtained before participant recruitment. A purposeful criterion-based sampling technique was used to identify participants (Patton, 2015). The sampling criteria for the children were that they must: (a) be 12–16 years of age (the period when parents may have the most significant influence on life skills development among competitive athletes; Jørgensen et al., 2020) and (b) have competed at a provincial (i.e., state or regional) level in their main sport. This level of competition was selected because it represents intense involvement in competitive sport, and such involvement has been associated with factors that may both promote and challenge children’s personal and social development (Holt & Knight, 2014). We recruited the parent who was most highly involved in their children’s sporting activities (see Pynn et al., 2019). No restrictions were imposed on the sample in terms of gender or sport type. The researchers contacted representatives of local and provincial youth sport organizations and provided descriptions of the study and sampling criteria. The representatives were asked to send the study information letter to potential participants in their organizations. Contact information for the lead researcher was included and interested participants contacted her. The lead researcher had been a coach with one club from which participants were recruited. For this club in particular, it was important that an indirect recruitment strategy was used (i.e., letters were sent by organizational representatives rather than direct solicitation from the researcher). Furthermore, participants from this club ($n = 7$) were interviewed by one of the coresearchers.

Nineteen families¹ participated in the study. The sample was comprised of 20 parents (13 mothers, 7 fathers, $M_{\text{age}} = 46.8$ years, $SD =$

4.6) and 24 of their children (14 girls, 10 boys, $M_{\text{age}} = 14.3$ years, $SD = 1.3$). In one family both parents were interviewed because they indicated they were both highly involved in their children's sport, and in four families two children were interviewed. Parents self-identified their cultural and/or ethnic background. Participants reported that they were Caucasian ($n = 16$), African-Canadian ($n = 1$), Filipino-Canadian ($n = 1$), and one family described themselves as "immigrant parents." In terms of the educational attainment of the parents, they reported having completed a PhD ($n = 2$), master's ($n = 4$), bachelor's ($n = 8$), college diploma ($n = 4$), and high school ($n = 1$). One participant had not graduated from high school. Eighteen parents had participated in organized youth sports in their own childhood. Two parents currently coached one of their children and eight parents had coached their children in the past. The children competed in variety of youth sports at eligible competition levels, namely biathlon ($n = 9$), basketball ($n = 5$), volleyball ($n = 4$), hockey ($n = 2$), dance ($n = 1$), football ($n = 1$), freestyle skiing ($n = 1$), and soccer ($n = 1$).

Data Collection

This study took place in Alberta, Canada. Each participant completed one in-person individual interview. The interviews were conducted in quiet locations at sport facilities. Parents were interviewed during practices and children were interviewed either before or after practices. Prior to commencement of the interviews, the interviewer explained the study and all participants provided written informed consent prior to the onset of their interviews. All interviews were audio recorded. Interviews with athletes averaged 37.7 minutes ($SD = 8.3$) and interviews with parents averaged 63.6 minutes ($SD = 17.0$).

The semistructured interviews were organized around interview guides, but these guides were used in a flexible manner to ensure a conversational approach. Following a rapport building and demographic section, the

parent and child interview guides each included four main themes: life skills, teachable moments, parenting style, and concluding thoughts. The guides contained follow-up questions and probes to help elicit greater detail in participant responses and to ensure a conversational approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As part of the interview preamble, participants were introduced to the concept of life skills. Life skills were described as physical, behavioral, or cognitive skills required to deal with the demands and challenges in life. These types of skills may be used both inside and outside of sport and have the potential to be beneficial in sport and other learning contexts. Copies of the interview guide for athletes and parents are included in the Appendices.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim with identifying information removed. Each participant was assigned a code consisting of an A or a P, indicating athlete or parent, and a number shared by all members of the family (i.e., A1 and P1 are members of the family 1). Four family units had multiple eligible youth athletes who agreed to participate in the study (i.e., families 6, 11, 14, and 19) in which an additional lower-case letter was appended to the code to differentiate children within the same family (e.g., A6a and A6b). Additionally, both parents in family 11 participated because one parent was most involved in one child's sport and the other parent was the most involved parent in the other children's sports (i.e., P11a and P11b).

Data analysis was guided by the principles of Braun and Clarke's (2020) thematic analysis. Our analytic approach was similar to the codebook thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2018), with the exception that we began with a data-driven (i.e., inductive) approach rather than a predetermined coding frame. We sought to develop semantic themes, which requires interpretation of surface meanings of data (Clarke et al., 2015). To execute the analysis, we used Braun and Clarke's (2020) six-phase

procedure for thematic analysis, moving back and forth through the phases as the analysis progressed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; Braun et al., 2016). These analytic phases were: (a) gaining familiarity with the data; (b) coding the data; (c) generating initial themes; (d) developing and reviewing themes; (e) refining, defining, and naming themes; and (f) writing the research report.

In the first phase, transcripts were read multiple times. Additionally, summaries of each family unit were written in which notes were made regarding what life skills were reported, initial thoughts on how life skills were taught and learned, and family context (e.g., family demographics). In the second phase, initial codes were developed. The first and second author independently coded two family units then met to discuss codes and form an initial coding frame. The remaining family units were coded independently by the first two authors who met two more times throughout the coding process to discuss new codes and refine the coding frame. The third phase, generating initial themes, involved the researchers meeting to discuss the codes and which codes were similar and may be grouped together to form themes. In the fourth phase, the content of each theme was reviewed in detail to ensure that each coded segment of data pertained to the theme it was in and that coded segments within a theme were similar to each other and different from those in other themes. This process involved the first two authors systematically reviewing the contents of each theme, flagging any coded segment that may not have fit the theme, and meeting to discuss flagged segments until agreement was reached. In the fifth phase, themes were further refined, named, and a detailed description was written for each theme. The different themes represented strategies that parents used to facilitate life skills development, which informed the structure of the results. In the final phase, the most representative quotes of each theme were identified and were used to generate the research report.

Other data presentation techniques informed analysis in addition to thematic analysis. Data displays (see Miles & Huberman, 1994) were created to gain a better understanding of character development and life skill learning within and across each of the 19 families. Table 1 was created to summarize the specific strategies associated with life skills outcomes. Table 2 was developed to demonstrate the utilized strategies within each family, providing an overview of the between-family differences.

RESULTS

Children's character and life skills development occurred across the learning contexts of sport, family, and school. Parents used five strategies to help their children's life skills: (a) reinforcing values and consistency; (b) giving perspective and guiding; (c) seizing teachable moments; (d) instructing, reminding, and encouraging; and (e) promoting independence. As shown in Table 1, these strategies were linked to personal (e.g., hard work ethic, goal setting, organizational skills, confidence) and social life skills (e.g., respect, social skills, leadership).

Reported Life Skills Strategies

All family dyads reported a range of strategies to develop athletes' life skills. A summary of the number of families who provided responses in each of the overall strategies is provided in Table 2.

Reinforcing Values and Consistency

Parental values and creating consistency across learning contexts formed a foundation for life skills development. These values were often related to the personal life skills of respect, hard work ethic, and dedication. P5 shared that their family valued commitment across all contexts: "We try to reinforce that sense of duty, honor, commitment, and getting

TABLE 1
Life Skills Strategies and Associated Life Skills Outcomes

<i>Life Skills Strategies</i>	<i>Social Life Skills</i>	<i>Personal Life Skills</i>
• Reinforcing values and consistency	• Respect (9)	• Hard work ethic and dedication (9) • Goal setting (1) • Organizational skills and responsibility (1)
• Giving perspective and guiding	• Social skills and teamwork (2) • Respect (1)	• Hard work ethic and dedication (7) • Confidence (1)
• Seizing teachable moments	• Social skills and teamwork (4) • Respect (4) • Leadership (3)	• Hard work ethic and dedication (16) • Goal setting (3) • Confidence (2) • Organizational skills and responsibility (1)
• Instructing, reminding, and encouraging	• Social skills and teamwork (6) • Respect (4) • Leadership (1)	• Hard work ethic and dedication (30) • Organizational skills and responsibility (9) • Positivity (5) • Confidence (5) • Decision making (2) • Goal setting (2)
• Promoting independence	• Social skills and teamwork (6)	• Organizational skills and responsibility (18) • Hard work ethic and dedication (5) • Decision making (1)

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate how many participants talked about this life skill in relation to the strategy.

up and doing things is important. You got to put the effort in.” His son, A5, explained that their family put emphasis on dedication regardless of context. A5 said, “[My parents] tried to teach being involved in what you're doing. If you're doing something; commit to that one thing. Don't go in half-heartedly.” Sharing a similar perspective, A11b explained that within their family context “mom is really big on the hard work and good work ethic. [She] tries to teach us that through doing our chores consistently.... It doesn't matter what you do as long as you work hard.”

Parents also tried to use similarities between learning contexts to reinforce their values and facilitate life skills development. P5 emphasized that the sport and family contexts aligned well to promote their values. He explained that “[the sport context] helps reinforce the values that we're trying to instill in children. That's definitely an interplay there.

And obviously, that requires communication with the coaches and the parents.” Having consistency across contexts was seen as valuable “so there’s no mixed messages. They know when we’re at basketball, what I say there is about basketball and I’m serious about it, and what I’m saying at home, same deal, and same rules apply. I’m the same throughout” (P14).

Consistency between contexts was also noted by the young athletes. Like her mother, A11a had also picked up on the consistencies between sport and family contexts:

With my mom, especially, with the life lessons I have in sports, a lot like the emotional intelligence and the stuff where she talks to me about her views on it too. And it's usually the same as what [my volleyball coach] teaches us.

A17 also noticed similar expectations between school, family, and sport contexts, saying “[My parents] pretty much have the same

TABLE 2
Summary of the Families' Application of Life Skills Strategies

Life Skills Strategies	Dyad 1	Dyad 2	Dyad 3	Dyad 4	Dyad 5	Family 6	Dyad 7	Dyad 8	Dyad 9	Dyad 10	Famil y 11	Dyad 12	Dyad 13	Famil y 14	Dyad 15	Dyad 16	Dyad 17	Dyad 18	Family 19
Reinforcing values and consistency (15)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Giving perspective and guiding (15)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Seizing teachable moments (18)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Instructing, reminding, and encouraging (19)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promoting independence (18)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

expectations to always listen and work hard in practice and always do my best. And that's always at school, home, football, and other sports."

Giving Perspective and Guiding

Parents facilitated their children's life skills development by giving perspective and guiding. These strategies were used to promote life skills such as social skills and hard work ethic. For instance, P2 explained that her role involved "keeping things in perspective is often stepping back and seeing the bigger picture. I know I've said the words, 'in five years, how much will this have mattered?' Because it does sometimes put it in perspective." Parents tried to give their children a sense of perspective during times of adversity. A10 shared that her parents helped give her perspective in relation to challenges she had experienced in both school and sport contexts. She said, "I'll see it as something that I did bad but [my parents] are like, 'That wasn't bad. You're trying new things and maybe it didn't work out, but you should just keep trying it.'" A4 also shared that her dad helped her gain perspective on hard work ethic in both school and sport contexts. She said: "[If] I have a bad day at biathlon and I'll be upset about it, [or if] I'll get a low grade at school, [my dad] will be like, 'there's nothing you can do about it. So, train harder, study harder. It'll be okay.'"

Some parents discussed how they helped their children gain perspective across situations in different learning contexts. For example, P11b said:

I think pointing out when it comes up in in sport and then especially when it comes up at school or a classmate or whatever the case is.... And then just pointing it out and making it obvious when those things are happening and seeing how they deal with it.

Parents also used a guiding technique by asking questions to help their children "make those connections" (P13) and "connect the dots" (P11b) about life skills across learning

contexts. P11a emphasized her guiding role encompassed "continuously draw[ing] parallels" between the family and sport contexts. She used the guiding technique in the family context to teach her children about applying life skills in the school context. P11a said:

[I'm] continuously draw[ing] parallels. I think [it's helpful] when [life skills] is reinforced outside of home. School has been a great one ... making [life skills] explicit. [I ask them] "Hey, do you know what you just learned here? You remember feeling that success? Did you know that's the exact same over here to this new project? ... How did you break it down here?" And so constantly drawing those parallels, especially outside of home.

P5 explained how he tried to guide his children rather than make decisions for them. He shared how he would use guiding technique to help his son take advantage of opportunities to learn life skills across learning contexts:

I'm very much a guide. Here you go, here's the opportunity, [and] you need to take advantage of it. Not dictate what must be done and how it has to be done ... but I think it's more valuable to help them develop some of their [life] skills.

P6 summarized the importance of guiding: "You help guide them down that path, but it's their wheels that are turning to get to that end result. That's a better moment for them, and it's going to stick more."

Seizing Teachable Moments

Time and circumstance were important considerations for parents and how they influenced their children's life skills development. Seizing teachable moments were particularly used to promote children's life skills of respect, hard work ethic, and dedication. P11a saw the sport context as a venue that provided opportunities to teach her children about character and life skills. She said: "Those types of things get me excited, or when they lose or when they don't make a team. I mean, those are some of those moments where it's just perfect for character building." Her son, A11c, shared

how his parents made a point of saying “making a mistake is good because then you learn from it,” whether it was related to making mistakes in the family, school, or sport contexts. Specifically, making mistakes within the sport context was “a great opportunity to learn [life skills]” (P4), particularly hard work ethic and confidence. However, P14 noted the importance of also using the family context to find the right moment to check in and follow up on the life skills learned in sport:

You must give them a chance to process things, and sometimes the language that we use, they may not quite understand all of it, and so just checking in with her later [at home] too, to say: “remember what we talked about?” And: “you’re good with it, right?”

Building life skills was also about finding the right moment. In relation to sport, parents would typically find moments in the family context when the emotions associated with sport participation had passed. P2 emphasized the importance of using the family context as an opportunity to debrief teachable moments that arose in the sport context. She said:

I think when they come home from training, whether we’ve driven them or they just get home, [I ask]: “How did it go? What did you do? How was it? ... How would you deal with that differently?” ... The word would be debriefing and just talking about it. Not nitpicking it apart, but just: “How did you feel it went? What can you do to make it better?” Whether it’s on a team sport and relational stuff with the coaches or teammates,

P6 said that it was important to analyze the situation and appraise her child’s emotions to “figure out if your kids are ready to buy into that message. Because they’re not always going to buy it ... but I think there’s also times when they’re going to be more open to hearing it.”

Instructing, Reminding, and Encouraging

Parents facilitated life skills development by instructing, reminding, and encouraging

their children. Instruction of personal and social life skills—such as organizational skills, responsibility, hard work ethic, and respect—occurred by having explicit conversations and discussions with the children. A8 shared that the best way her mom helped with life skills development was through communication in the family context. She said:

My mom is really big about communicating [life skills] to me. If she has something to tell me, she’ll come to my room and just let it all out and I’ll just listen.... She’ll see something that I’ve done in a game or something and she’ll talk to me about it and then I’ll try to apply it next time.

P14 shared an example of how she had instructed her child in their family context about having conversations with adults in the sport context:

I always encourage my kids, if you’re struggling with something, or you have a question, go talk to the coach. And they’re like “oh no, I can’t.” And I said “well, let’s practice!” And without having that [instruction at home] they wouldn’t be able to have that conversation with another adult. So, we practice those conversations [at home] so that they can then go out there and talk to the coach or talk to the trainer.

Similarly, P2 shared that they had instructed their children about listening skills and respect for adults in their family context while drawing upon examples from sport and school contexts:

I know we’ve had a couple times where they come back [from practice] and I’m just like, “you should have listened to your coach. Just stop talking.” And I think that we’ve taught them that respect. It’s [the same] in school, when your teacher is talking, you’re not. When your coach is talking, you’re not. You’re listening and that’s what you’re there for.... For sure that’s a [life] skill that’s transferred to being coachable and ... respect.

A2 echoed her mom, emphasizing the importance of her parents’ reminders in the family context. She said:

I think [my parents] teach us really well how to interact with other people. Because you can do that

at school, but you just kind of do it yourself.... But at home, they can tell you how to talk nicely to your siblings and how to interact with [other] people as well.

Parents used the reminders to ensure or promote the application, demonstration, or use of a life skill. A10 shared it was helpful when her parents “remind me about my strong suits. In basketball or in school, because I do get down on myself often. ... [My parents would tell me], ‘no, keep trying! Try something else.’” A15 said parents’ reminders were helpful because “sometimes I just don’t even notice [life skills] and it’s really good to have that reminder.” P15 shared a similar point, explaining how they worked on teamwork skills, in the contexts of both family and sport. He said “we’ve really been working on team [skills] quite a bit, like off the court when we’re talking [at home] and she gets angry. But I’m always on her about being a good teammate.”

Encouraging life skills happened when parents urged their child to do something, for example, by putting in their best effort. A1 said: “My dad always tells me to never give up stuff, just keep pushing through.” A14b believed “the best way [parents] can help their children learn through sport is to encourage them to work 100% and to encourage them to try new things.” A19 said that parents should be “supporting us when we do well, [and] supporting us when we do badly,” referring to both sport and school contexts. A6 shared that her mom “encourages me to get out and do new activities, interact with new people, have new life experiences, and learn new [life] skills. She very much wants me to learn, as her big thing.” Overall, parents’ instructions, reminders, and encouragement facilitated children’s life skills development.

Promoting Independence

Parents used the family context to create opportunities for their children to practice and develop personal life skills (e.g., organizational skills, responsibility) and social life skills (e.g., communication) as a part of routine

family life. A6b shared how his parents tried to foster his independence at home, and “to be able to function on my own. Things like putting away your own dishes, doing dishes, making meals, packing lunches, scheduling plans, driving, ... laundry, tidy your room, have good habits, eat well, things like that.” A6b continued saying that his parents had “gradually added little responsibilities” across learning contexts. P6 explained that he expected his children, A6a and A6b, to be responsible across family and school contexts:

We expect [our] kids to help out around the house, so whether that be cleaning [their] rooms ... [and] they’re responsible for keeping their bathrooms clean and tidy. They’re responsible for doing their homework. They’re responsible for keeping us informed of what’s coming up in school, what we have to do.

Many parents and children gave examples of helping at home, doing chores, and being on top of their homework as opportunities to practice life skills in the family context. In A11a’s family, doing chores comes before other leisure activities and sports. She shared an example of how her parents stressed taking responsibility in both family and sport contexts:

If we don’t get our chores done, we won’t be hanging out with friends—which makes sense, you know? You must have everything done first. And then also, if we don’t get our stuff done at all, then we have to call our coaches and say we can’t make it [to practice] because we didn’t get this done. That comes first before we get to do our sport.

P11b also provided an example of how they had promoted independence in the school context, sharing an example from a conversation he had with his child in the family context. He said:

Something comes up at school and they’ll ask us a question about all this happened, and I don’t know what to do. And I’ll [say]: “Did you talk to your teacher?” “No.” “You go talk to your teacher.” ... We’re obviously here to support and help you but you need to be the one to take charge of things like this.

Parents described allowing their children to be independent and take responsibility could be helpful for life skills development. P2 noted promoting independence across contexts was important to help with her child's life skills development. She said:

They have a list. I don't pack for them. This is what you need to race, think about it, and get yourself ready. It's your job to be at the start line.... So even their schoolwork ... the same thing applies. You get the homework from the teacher, you understand that part, and if you need help, we'll help and figure it out, but I'm not phoning the teacher for you. I'm not going to the coach for you. You talk to the coach, and then we'll help. And just across life [contexts] in general: Find the information, and then come back and we'll figure it out.

By promoting independence, parents facilitated life skills by giving children space to try, fail, and use their life skills across learning contexts. P8 said:

I know that all lessons and life lessons, [whether it is] work harder; get in the gym ... or when you have conflict; go figure it out [and] solve it. So even though it's hard to see them struggle through that, I think that it's all beneficial.

DISCUSSION

This study examined parents' role in the development of character among young athletes, with a particular focus on life skills development across learning contexts. The findings illustrated how parents can influence their children's character development by using different strategies, many of which were applied across sport, school, and family contexts. The participants discussed five strategies of (a) reinforcing values and consistency; (b) giving perspective and guiding; (c) seizing teachable moments; (d) instructing, reminding, and encouraging; and (e) promoting independence as means to promote life skills. These findings provide new insights into how parents support life skills development, highlighting the role of parents across learning contexts, and ways in which parents sought consistent approaches

across contexts. For instance, parents used examples in relation to the family context that also applied to the sport context and vice versa. Thus, it appeared that many parents made connections across contexts to teach their children life skills. Overall, the results add to the literature by illuminating how parents support life skills among young athletes beyond the sport context in isolation (Jacobs et al., 2017; Jørgensen et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2017).

The participants in our study emphasized the importance of the sport, school, and family contexts on life skills development, which are consistent with predictions in life skills models (Jacobs et al., 2017; Pierce et al., 2017). The young athletes in the present study primarily highlighted interactions with their parents in the sport and family contexts as influencing their life skills development, whereas parents discussed what strategies they used across the three contexts to promote life skills. Although previous studies have highlighted a range of contextual strategies that external assets can use to support life skills within the sport context (e.g., Kramers et al., 2022), the current findings revealed five strategies that parents can use to support their children's life skills development across contexts.

For example, parents reinforced their values and created consistency across learning contexts, which formed a foundation for their children's life skills development. Parents reinforced their values (e.g., respect, honesty, commitment, hard work) across the contexts in which their children were involved. Previous life skills studies have suggested the importance of parents' philosophy within the family context (Pierce et al., 2019) and establishing boundaries and sharing expectations in the sport context (Kramers et al., 2022) as important to facilitate life skills development and transfer. Our findings expand the ways in which parents can utilize their philosophy and set boundaries by emphasizing their values as a reference point for life skills development. For example, parents tried to reinforce their values across contexts to better facilitate their children's life skills development.

In addition to reinforcing their values, parents also noted the importance of having consistency across contexts by ensuring consistent messages and creating connections across and between contexts. Researchers have discussed the importance of congruence to promote life skills (e.g., Jacobs et al., 2017; Kramers et al., 2022; Pierce et al., 2019). Congruence in life skills teaching is mainly concerned with agreement across contexts and between external assets (e.g., parents, instructors, teachers, and coaches), which is hypothesized as key to life skills development and transfer (Jacobs et al., 2017). Our findings add to the literature by specifying how parents' consistent messages and behaviors can facilitate their children's life skills development by helping them draw direct links between and across learning contexts.

Parents facilitated their children's life skills development by giving perspective and guiding. Specifically, parents used perspective taking to help their children take a step back and see the bigger picture, across situations and learning contexts. The perspective taking strategy was mainly used in the face of adversity, which is a strategy used by parents to help children with coping in sport (Knight et al., 2016; Neely et al., 2017; Tamminen & Holt, 2012) and develop psychological skills and characteristics (Dohme et al., 2021). Parents in the present study also used a guiding strategy to ask questions to teach their children life skills. A similar technique was identified by Dohme et al. (2021), whereby parents used questions to help their child reflect and learn psychological skills and characteristics from the sport context. The present study contributes to a broader understanding of how perspective-taking and guiding techniques can be used to make connections and draw parallels across and between learning contexts to facilitate life skills development.

Time and circumstance were important considerations for parents to seize teachable moments and influence their children's life skills development. In the youth sport literature, life skills teaching strategies have typi-

cally targeted the coach (e.g., Newman et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2018), and emphasized when and how to address life skills in the sport context (Mossman et al., 2021). The participants highlighted the importance of also using the family context to find the right moment to check in and follow up on the life skills learned in sport. For example, parents would typically find moments in the family context when the emotions associated with sport participation had passed. Thus, our findings suggest that even though parents might not be directly involved in the sport context (Mossman et al., 2021), they may still seize teachable moments. In their study, Tamminen et al. (2017) discussed that the nature and timing of conversations between parents and athletes during the car ride home from youth sport practices are valuable opportunities to debrief young athlete's experiences and performance within the sport context. Building on this work, the present study supports the idea that the timing and nature of parent communication is important for promoting positive sport experiences among young athletes (Knight et al., 2016; Tamminen et al., 2017).

Parents facilitated life skills development by instructing, reminding, and encouraging their child. Instructing life skills happened through having explicit conversations and discussions about life skills, which is a common strategy used to promote life skills in the sport context (Newman et al., 2021; Pierce et al., 2018). Parents in the present study discussed offering instructions and reminders mainly in the family context, which reflect more private settings (e.g., Knight et al., 2016; Kramers et al., 2022). These instructions, reminders, and encouragements discussed were mainly used as positive affirmation and praise, which has been positively correlated with promoting children's life skills development (Mossman & Cronin, 2019; Mossman et al., 2021).

The children were provided with opportunities to be independent and develop life skills as a part of their family context. For example, parents and children gave examples of helping at home, doing chores, being on top of their

homework as examples of opportunities to practice life skills. Such opportunities were seen as valuable to give children space to try, fail, and use their life skills across learning contexts. Promoting independence can be used to intentionally create learning opportunities for children to develop life skills (e.g., Dohme et al., 2021; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Neely & Holt, 2014), and is a cornerstone in autonomy supportive parenting (Holt et al., 2021; Pynn et al., 2019). In fact, a feature of exemplary parenting is being involved in the sport context, while simultaneously fostering children's independence (Pynn et al., 2019). As exemplified in this study, parents can promote life skills through promoting independence within and across learning context, which might be particularly relevant for youth with growing need of independence (Harwood & Knight, 2015).

Conceptually, the principle limitation of this study was that we did not examine all the components of character development (Nucci, 2017). Instead, we took a snapshot view of the components of character (Nucci, 2017), with a particular focus on life skills. Such view of a person and their contexts can enhance our understanding of character development if we understand that this snapshot is a moment during youths' development, rather than "reified and frozen entities" (Nucci, 2019, p. 74). Using such a one-point interview design to explore character and life skills experiences is a limitation because it is challenging to gain a complete picture of how families function to promote character. Another limitation of the study is that we did not extensively focus on challenges associated with promoting life skills and character development. These limitations should be balanced against our efforts to examine the contextualized picture of character and life skills development by taking various learning contexts and perspectives into account.

A strength of our study is that we considered the broader dynamics of family life and parenting across contexts (e.g., school, family; Harwood et al., 2019) rather than focusing on

sport in isolation as a potential context for life skills development (Jørgensen et al., 2020). In terms of future directions, idiographic (Lerner, 2019) and narrative analysis (Nucci, 2019) of character development could be helpful in examining how life skills may help youths' character. Specifically, it would be useful to further examine the influence of multiple learning contexts and the strategies external assets use both within and across contexts to facilitate life skills.

CONCLUSION

This study responded to calls for further research examining character development (Lerner, 2019), and the influence of parents on children's life skills beyond the family context (Harwood et al., 2019; Pierce et al., 2019). The reported life skills learning contexts were sport, family, and school, which are consistent with previous life skills research and theories (Jacobs et al., 2017; Jørgensen et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2017). Parents exert a critical role in their children's life skill development by using several strategies to promote life skills across multiple learning contexts. Specifically, parents who strive for consistency across contexts appear to facilitate their children's life skills development by helping them see connections between contexts, and applicability of their skills across contexts. Some of the findings in relation to consistency across contexts complements the life skills literature on how parents can use their values and philosophies as a reference point for life skills development (Kramers et al., 2022; Pierce et al., 2019). Ultimately, the findings may be useful to inform parent education initiatives, providing children and youth with better opportunities for overall character and life skills development across contexts.

NOTE

1. Parenting style data from a subsample of parents and athletes were used for a separate study

(Holt et al., 2021). No data or quotes were used in both studies.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE (ATHLETES)

Preamble

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your parent has already given consent for you to participate in this study, but we appreciate your participation, and it is completely voluntary. This study is looking to explore what life skills you developed through competitive sport, and how your parents helped you in learning these skills. The information we obtain will be used to write a research paper and to help improve youth sport in the future.

Life skills are defined as physical, behavioral, or cognitive skills required to deal with the demands and challenges in life. These types of skills may be used both inside and outside of sport and have the potential to benefit you in sport as well as help you outside of sport, such as in school.

For this interview I would like to remind you that there is no right or wrong answers. I am interested in your experiences and your memories.

- We will also record the interview; does that sound OK?
- [Gain verbal assent, mark on child assent form, and continue]
- [Turn recorder on]

Demographics (Ormond, 2019)

Before we start, I just have to ask a few brief demographic questions. I need this information for when I go to publish this study so I can describe the sample (e.g., mean age).

- How old are you?

- What grade are you in?
- What sport(s) do you play? [If several, what is your main sport]
- How long have you been playing this sport for?

Introduction

1. Let's get into some general questions about your involvement in [sport].

- How would you describe the level you compete at?
- How many days per week you train and compete in [sport]?
- Do you have any long-term goals in [sport]?
- What do you enjoy most about training and competing in [sport]?

Main Questions

Life skills development

I want to ask you about life skills you have learned from playing sport. By life skills I mean any behaviors that you may have learned in sport that have helped you in other areas of life (Neely et al., 2018a).

2. What are the most important things you have learned from playing sport that have been useful in other areas of your life? [Probe for examples and details]
 - Can you give me an example of how you use these skills in your life?
 - Can you explain why these skills are helpful in other areas of your life?
3. What types of life skills have you learnt from doing [sport]? [Interviewer to make a note of each life skill listed] (Jørgensen et al., 2020).

I am now going to ask you a couple of questions about each of the life skills. Don't worry if there is some overlap in your answers.

- Please explain what [type of life skill] means to you?
- How do you think you learned about [type of life skill]? [Probe for specific examples]
- Can you provide some examples of how you use [type of life skill] in your life away from [sport]?
- In what settings do you find [type of life skill] particularly helpful?

Parenting style and influence

4. I am interested in hearing more about how your parents might have helped you to learn any of the skills we have talked about. But first, how would you describe their parenting style? [explain what 'parenting style' means if child don't understand].

- What types of life skills do you think your parents have tried to teach you?
- Can you explain how your parents have helped you learn things from playing sport that have been useful in other areas of your life? [Probe for examples and details] (Neely et al., 2018a)
- Do you have any examples of how they have tried to teach you [type of life skill] at home?
- What are some of the best things your parents do to help you develop life skills?
- What do you think are some things your parents do that are not so helpful to learn these skills?

Competitive sport context

5. I'm also interested in talking some more about the club you are a part of and what you think about competing in [sport]. How would you describe your team/club? (Camiré et al., 2009)
 - How do you think [sport] have influenced the life skills we have talked

- about today? [Probe for examples and details]
- Can you explain how your coaches may have helped you learn things from playing sport that have been useful in other areas of your life? [Probe for examples and details] (Neely et al., 2018a)
 - How do you think other people in [sport] can help you to develop life skills?
 - How do you think other people in [sport] can hinder you from learning these skills?

Summary Questions

Now we have almost reached the end of the interview. I just have a few more questions to make sure we have not missed anything.

6. Of all the things we discussed today which life skills do you think are the most important?
 - Why are these skills important? (Jørgensen et al., 2020).
7. What advice would you give parents for teaching life skills through sport? (Neely et al., 2018a)
8. Finally, is there anything else about life skills and how they might be helpful that you want to mention that we have not covered, or you think we should talk about before we end the interview?

Thank you!

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE (PARENTS)

Demographics

Before we start, I just have to ask some demographic questions. I need this information for when I go to publish this study so I can describe the sample (e.g., mean age).

- How old are you?
- How many children do you have? What ages are they?
- What are/were their main sports?
- How much education have you completed (e.g., high school, diploma/degree, post-graduate degree)?
- What is your ethnic or cultural background?
- Were you involved in organized sport as a youth?
- Do you think youth sport influenced your development? (Camiré et al., 2009)

Introduction

1. What are some of your own best memories from sport? (Neely et al., 2018a)
 - As a sport parent, tell me about your best experience or memory in your child's sport
 - What would you say is the most challenging about being a sport parent?

Main Questions

Life skills and Learning Lessons

I want to hear about the life lessons you have had with your child in sport that have been useful as a teachable moment to help them learn skills they can draw from and use in life.

2. What would you say are the biggest life lesson your child has experienced in sport?
 - What skills do you think s/he developed from this experience that could be useful in life?
 - Why would you say this experience was particularly useful?
 - Did you try to help your child in this situation? If so, what did you do?
 - How do you think it went?
 - What would you do differently?

3. What types of teachable moments have you tried to take advantage of in your child's sport?
 - Do you try to provide any feedback on how s/he can learn from sport? (Holt et al., 2009)
 - How do you provide feedback?
 - How does your child respond to your feedback?
 - Do you think some of the ways you have tried to give feedback have been less effective?
4. How do you think competitive youth sport influence the learning lessons your child is exposed to in sport?
 - Do you have any examples of skills that have been promoted in this environment that can be useful to your child outside of sport?
 - What types of things do you do to reinforce these lessons in competitive sport? (Neely et al., 2018a)
 - Do you have any examples of things in the competitive sport environment that might hinder these learning lessons?
5. Have you had any teachable moments with your child at home, in your everyday life, that might have resulted as a useful skill they could use in sport?
 - What types of things (i.e., life skills) do you try to teach your child at home?
 - Do you have an example of an 'aha' moment when your child realized that s/he could use a skill both in sport and life?
6. Do you think your child need help from someone to realize a teachable moment? Why, or why not?
 - What do you think are most helpful for your child to learn from these learning lessons?

- What do you believe would detract from your child's learning?
- Who do you think play the biggest role in helping your child develop these skills through sport?

Parenting styles

7. One way to think of parenting is in terms of "parenting style"—which is your general approach to parenting. How would you describe your parenting style? (Holt et al., 2009; Pynn, 2018)
 - What kind of atmosphere do you try to create within your family (in general and specific to sport)?
 - What kind of rules or boundaries have you established at home?
 - Do you have the same expectations for your child in school or at home versus in sport?
 - Do you parent differently in different situations? Does your spouse (if applicable) have a similar or different parenting style to you? If different, how do you make it work?
 - Have there ever been any times when your general parenting style does not 'work' in sport? If so, can you explain?

Summary Questions

Now we have almost reached the end of the interview. I just have a few more questions to make sure we have not missed anything.

8. Do you think you have learned anything from the teachable moments you have had with your child?
9. What advice would you give to other parents on how to best support life skills development?
 - On the contrary, what would you say is the worst they can do?

10. Finally, do you have anything else to add about life skills development that we have not covered, or you think we should talk about before we end the interview?

Thank you!