PRIMED for Sport Coaching: A Mixed-Methods Pilot Study of a Six-Week Intervention

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PRIMED for Sport Coaching:
A Mixed-Methods Pilot Study of a Six-Week Intervention

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Abstract

This six-week pilot study was conducted using grounded theory from “What Works in Character Education” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014) and specifically the “PRIMED for Character Education” framework (Berkowitz, 2021) applied to 11 high school sport coaches. The three key ideas of focus were on whether the PRIMED framework could increase the coach-participants’ commitment to character education, self-efficacy as character educators, and self-identification as Servant Leaders in an effort to “nurture the flourishing of human goodness” (Berkowitz, 2021) of our youth and, in this case, specifically, high school student-athletes.

With millions of youth involved in sport in North America and across the world, the potential positive impact for good that sport coaches can play in the development of character is significant. The relevant literature in coaching for character training programs points to two major gaps in the literature: the need to establish grounded theory around what constitutes effective character education training programs for sport coaches, and a means to combat the “fade-out” effect prevalent in coaching for character training programs. It is integral that coaches are provided effective, evidence-based, training programs from which to influence their coaching behaviors and practices for character development.

This mixed methods (six-week) pilot study with high school sport coaches was the first of its kind to utilize the grounded, evidence-based theory of the PRIMED for Character Education framework while applying it to sport coaching. Qualitative research was the prioritized method of data collection in this study, though the quantitative
research data (though not statistically tested due to small sample size) also contributed important findings.

The primary findings of this short six-week pilot study with 11 high school sport coaches provide strong evidence that the PRIMED for Coaching for Character framework was applicable and relevant to their coaching and a way to increase their commitment to and self-efficacy for character education, as well as their self-identification as Servant Leaders with their sports teams. The two secondary findings of relevance to the field revealed that short interventions (brief orientation and length of time of study) could be effective; and the innovation of “weekly text prompts” could provide a possible solution to combat the “fade-out” effect. The findings from this pilot study can be built upon in future studies to enhance coaching for character training programs to benefit the millions of youth participating in sport each year.
Dedication

For my three children (Ella, Sophie, and Duke) and my amazing wife (Sara) who inspire me to be better and do better each day! And to all the students, athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators that I have been blessed to teach, coach, and work with over the past 25 years.
Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge the University of Missouri, St. Louis and the Center for Character & Citizenship for providing the most enriching Character Education program in the world. To my esteemed dissertation advisory committee, Dr. Marvin Berkowitz, Dr. Melinda Bier, Dr. Thomas Hoerr, Dr. David Shields, and Dr. James Shuls. Thank you for imparting your knowledge and expertise, and for your unfeigned support during this learning process over the past three years. I feel blessed to have had the “Dream Team” dissertation committee. As an understudy, I have been “PRIMED” by the best.

To my doctoral cohort team: Belinda, Emily, Erika, Kristen, Megan, and Tracy, thank you for locking arms on this three-year project and for your support until the end. “We got this!” We did it!

Dr. Christopher Funk, Dr. Kashina Bell, Dr. Dean Coble, Dr. Phillip Waalkes, and Dr. Mark Eichenlaub, thank you for your support along the way. And from the University of Florida, Dr. Michael Sagas, thank you for paying it forward.

I want to thank my seventh-grade English teacher, Mrs. Gloria Stahmer, for planting the seed for this accomplishment. I want to thank the two greatest sport coaches I ever had: my high school basketball coach, Kevin Hall, and my dad, John Paciorek. I appreciate you now more than ever.

To the two most impactful people in my life: my mom (Linda) who passed away when I was 12 years old -- her impact is eternal, and to my wife (Sara) who has supported me all the way. I love you!
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

The youth sport landscape in America has immense potential to positively impact more than 40 million children aged 6-18 each year (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2022). I have been a sport coach for the past 25 years at the middle school, high school, and collegiate levels, and my father recently retired as a youth coach of 50 plus years. I had the fortune of spending six years as a lead instructor and head coach at IMG Academy [originally known as International Management Group] in Bradenton, Florida, which is considered one of the most prestigious multi-sport training institutions in the world.

While at IMG back in 2015, I was giving my Monday morning overview presentation to the new baseball campers and parents about the character values that can be gained through sport participation, if intentional and deliberate about such character development. After sharing my ideas on coaching for character, I was approached by the father of one of the campers who shared the following story attesting to why he vowed never to coach again.

This father had just finished a spring baseball season as head coach of a local team of 10- and 11-year-old boys including his son who also played on the team. It was one of the last games of the season, and he decided to put one of his lesser skilled players, named Paulie, into the game to pitch. Coach’s team was winning by quite a bit, and he thought this would be a low-pressure opportunity to give Paulie (who had been working diligently to improve) his first chance to get on the mound and pitch for the final inning. Paulie struggled to get the other team’s batters out, and the parents in the stands began to get restless and concerned that the coach’s decision would cost them the game. They began yelling at the coach to get Paulie out of the game to preserve the win before it was
“too late.” Coach called time and headed to the mound to relieve his young pitcher and try to renew his confidence after a few parents were yelling profanities towards the young child. No sooner had the coach patted Paulie on the shoulder accompanied by a few words of encouragement, while simultaneously gesturing for a relief pitcher, that a star player approached the mound and said, “Leave Paulie in, Coach. He’s got this.” Coach was so inspired by his player’s support and Paulie’s grit and determination that he left him in the game. Upon returning to the bench, Coach heard the roar of disdain from the parents. However, Paulie ended up getting the final out, as the coach recalled having a memorable sigh of relief. The coach felt that his commitment to character development through the sport of baseball with his young players was completely pushed aside in the moment that he failed to capitalize on the “teachable moments” that I was speaking about that Monday morning at IMG. He told me that he failed to recognize the act of valor by his young, budding pitcher, and the care and compassion of his star player to have his teammate’s back, though he did commend them both the next time he saw them. That coach vowed to me that he would never coach again after that event, despite my efforts to convince him that his approach to sport as a vehicle for character development was desperately needed in youth sport.

The story above is occurring all over the country in amateur youth sport on a daily basis. Just the other day, I read in the news about a full-blown fight breaking out after an eight-year-old youth (Pop Warner) football game. The instigators and perpetrators of the fight were the adults and coaches, as the young players stood watching the madness ensue.
In analyzing the current trend in amateur youth sport, there is a clear need for stronger role modeling and mentoring by coaches of our children, including at the high school level. Having spent the last two and a half decades coaching youth sport, there seems to be a deeply entrenched notion in amateur youth sport that you are either winning on the scoreboard (or other extrinsic measures of success), or you are losing. This approach to youth sport coaching has proliferated a transactional leadership model that places excessive pressures on winning and the endless pursuit of extrinsic motivators (e.g., college scholarships, trophies, and championship rings). Such a transactional model often results in socio-negative/anti-social behaviors in young athletes (Anderson, 2010; Shields & Bredemeier, 2011; Shields et al., 2015a, 2015b).

A more preferred transformational, or Servant Leadership, approach firmly rooted in positive youth development (PYD) geared toward promoting socio-positive/pro-social character and moral life skills in student-athletes that are cultivated intrinsically is needed (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Sagas & Wigley, 2014; Shields & Bredemeier, 2011; Shields et al., 2015a, Shields et al., 2018). The focus of amateur youth sport must be reframed through a realization of the great potential to positively impact society that sport can have in the development of moral character in our next generation of leaders (Bredemeier & Shields, 2006; Paciorek, 2017; Shields & Bredemeier, 2009, 2011; Shields et al., 2015a, 2015b; Shields et al., 2018) and what evidence-based research finds works in effective character education (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Amateur sport coaches would be better suited promoting the 5 C’s of positive youth development: competence, confidence, connection, caring/compassion, and character development through sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2011; Lerner et al., 2000; Lerner et al., 2005;
Little, 1993) in the same manner of commitment to that of K-12 classroom educators, though the 5 C’s need to be advanced upon. However, the deeply entrenched notion in amateur youth sport that you are either winning on the scoreboard, or you are losing, leads to a different pedagogical direction than suggested from evidenced-based research on what works in effective character education (Berkowitz et al., 2017). Losing on the scoreboard does not mean that the experience has been a loss, as there is much to gain in certain other aspects of human development.

Close to 40 million youth participate annually in sport in the United States, and roughly 70-80% of all our country’s youth will participate in sport during their formative adolescent years (Holt, 2016; Lerner et al., n.d. [Research Brief received from researchers January 2022]; Aspen Institute Project Play website [2022]). Shields and Bredemeier, two of the leading researchers in the field of character development in amateur youth sport over the past 40 years, forewarned of the perils of allowing amateur youth sport to lose sight of its true intent, to build stronger moral character in our youth. “The roots of sport in the fertile soil of play may dry up when exposed to the heat of competition, and our vision of the human and humane potential of sport may blur when our eyes are on the prize more than the process” (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995, p. 2). Close to 30 years later, those involved in the amateur youth sport landscape are, indeed, losing, as our children are dropping out of sport (beyond normal attrition rates due to other interests) at earlier and earlier ages (Lerner et al., n.d. Research Brief; O’Sullivan, 2015).

Most researchers and practitioners of sport studies agree that amateur youth sport participation impacts the development of youth, resulting in both positive (pro-social) and negative (anti-social) developmental outcomes (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2021;
Anderson, 2010; Shields & Bredemeier, 2011; Shields et al., 2015). Similarly, researchers and practitioners in K-12 schools focused on character education and PYD continue to grapple with these tensions and seeming incongruencies in emphasis between academic performance outcomes and the social-emotional learning of children (Berkowitz, 2011, 2021; Hoerr, 2017; McClellan, 1999; Seider, 2012). The paradox of outcomes wished for and outcomes actually being witnessed (Anderson, 2010) in the amateur youth sport landscape point to a need for the sport coach leader to step up to the plate as key character educator and mentor of youth (Anderson-Butcher & Bates, 2021; Ehrmann & Jordan, 2011; Paciorek, 2017). The infusion of the principles of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977, 2008) in sport coach training programs to better cultivate character development in youth athletes can play a role in meeting this need (Camire et al., 2011; Gould & Carson, 2008). Servant Leadership will be discussed in a full section further in the review of literature.

The field of education provides a wealth of literature on “what works in character education” in schools (Berkowitz, 2011, 2021; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, 2007, 2014; Berkowitz et al., 2017; Bier, 2021) that amateur youth sport coaches and administrators can draw from. The following section will provide an extensive overview of the 40-year head start that academic education has on the youth sport landscape focused on character education.

**Character Education at Home**

Moral development starts at home. Parental influence is of the utmost import for character education in youth (Berkowitz, 2021; Berkowitz & Grych, 1998; Lickona, 1991). While not directly relevant to this study on coaching for character, it is worth
providing a brief overview of the research on parents’ influence at this point. Character education starts at home with parents, or a strong adult presence, as leaders of children. Lickona (1991) posits that the most supportive influencer of schools’ efforts to instill “values education” “...comes from parents who are looking for help in a world where it’s harder than ever to raise good children” (p. 21). In discussing the family’s role in character education, Lickona articulates that a child’s parents are their earliest primary moral influencers. As is discussed in the next section on character education in schools, Lickona (1991) points out that while teachers can certainly make a significant positive impact, children have different teachers each year but the same parents (p. 30).

Berkowitz and Grych (1998) provide detailed research on empirically supported strategies for “Fostering Goodness: Teaching parents to facilitate children’s moral development.” Their five-part, empirically based processes rooted in moral psychology provide parents with a roadmap for the moral development of their children. In juxtaposing the five keys to fostering moral goodness in children for parents to the framework of PRIMED (Berkowitz, 2021), many of the six design principles show up in the earlier research on parenting by Berkowitz and colleagues (2005, 2007, 2014, 2017). The key overlapping emphases are on the intentionality of moral character development, empowerment of voice and clear communication, nurturing supportiveness, modeling of moral behavior, and commitment to long-term development. Being a role model of character is not an option that parents can opt in or out of (even more so than teachers and coaches). “Rather, you become a role model because others look up to you, emulate you, and imitate you. It is thrust upon you” (Berkowitz, 2012, p. 31). Whether a parent chooses to be a positive, nurturing role model in one instance, or a negative, authoritarian
influence in another is clearly on the shoulders of parents and many people are a mixture of both.

**Character Education in Schools**

What do we know about the extant research around character education in youth programming in schools? The character development of youth has been a primary focus in educational institutions at least since the days of the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle. “Aristotle believed the purpose of school was to develop and exercise students’ potential for reasoning, form ethical character, and provide a skill and knowledge base” (The Roots of Educational Theory). Aristotle was focused on “transforming habits (doing)” during the formidable years of adolescence for the cultivation of “virtues (being)” (Berkowitz, 2021, p. 4). Long before Horace Mann created the first public “common” school system in the U.S., schoolteachers had clearly been appointed as shepherds to foster “good” ethical character in our country’s youth (Bernard McClellan, 1999). In his book, *Moral Education in America: Schools and the Shaping of Character from Colonial Times to the Present*, McClellan chronicles the significant role that school educators have played in our country’s quest to raise moral, high character citizens. Since the earliest of days in America, there has been an underlying anxiety and fear of adults underpinning a desire to train up our country’s youth in “moral education” (McClellan, 1999, p. 17). Likewise, sport coaches have been recognized as potential key players in the integral space of character education inside and outside of schools (Anderson et al., in press; Beller & Stoll, 1995; Ehrmann, & Jordan, 2011; Shields, 1995; Smith & Smoll, 1997; Summit, 2014).
It is important to differentiate between character, character development, and character education because these terms are integral to this study and will be referenced often. Berkowitz (2021) states, “Character is an aspect of the nature of the person, character development consists of the psychological processes that bring about the growth of character, and character education is the intentional nurturing of those developmental processes through the practice of families, schools, and other contexts” (p. 17), and those “other contexts” would include sport.

Kupperman (1991), Milson (2001) and Berkowitz (2021) advance the definition to include the effect of character beyond oneself. Kupperman states: “X’s character is X’s normal pattern of thought and action, especially in relation to matters affecting the happiness of others and of X, most especially in relation to moral choice” (p. 13). Milson states, “Character education may be defined as the process of developing in students an understanding of, a commitment to, and a tendency to behave in accordance with core ethical values” (p. 4). Finally, Berkowitz’s (2021) definition of character education is rooted in Aristotelian and Confucian principles focused on the educator forming habits of “being” and “doing” in their educational practices. He states, “Character education is how we be with others and then what we do as a consequence, in order to nurture the flourishing of their human goodness. Ideally, our inner character informs our outward living, and our outward living both represents and reciprocally transforms our inner being” (pp. 4, 5).

An important and often used correlative phrase to character education in K-12 schools is positive youth development (PYD). Some may argue that PYD is the umbrella term that character education nestles under, while others could argue the inverse
relationship with character education being the overarching key term. For the sake of this dissertation, these two terms correlate so closely with each other that I will not attempt to differentiate them. Character education and PYD are two terms frequently used in the field, and social-emotional learning has some common emphases. Falcao et al., (2020) point to the influential work by developmental psychologist, Richard Lerner (2005), “PYD focuses on fostering positive experiences to promote youth’s strength, potential, and competency” specifically speaking to the impact that “school, family, and community” play in youth development (2020, p. 611). PYD and character education will be expounded upon later as the research turns from the school setting to sport.

Shields (2011) presents four aspects of character “as the aim of education”:

**Intellectual, Moral, Civic, and Performance Character.** Table 1 (Shields, 2011, p. 52) lists Shields’ “Dimensions of Personal Character and the School Culture That Supports Them.” Intellectual Character is supported within a “culture of thinking,” Moral Character within a “culture of love and justice,” Civic Character within a “culture of service and engagement,” and Performance Character can be positively influenced from a “culture of quality and excellence” (p. 52). All four domains of character intersect and work together, but the moral domain is the meta-character, and should be prioritized (Berkowitz, 2021). We see parallels of these four dimensions of character in education played out in the world of sport. Two of these dimensions of character, specifically, moral and performance, will be expanded upon in greater depth later, as they are particularly relevant to the landscape of sport.
In School Programming

There is a growing amount of evidenced-based research and empirical data on effective character education programs in K-12 schools. Despite this fact, one should not build a strawman fallacy by assuming that the majority of classroom educators and school administrators are utilizing best practices in character education. “Wanting to effectively promote the development of character is not equivalent to knowing how to do so” (Berkowitz, et al., 2017). The schism between meeting academic standards and the social-emotional well-being of the whole student is an age-old aspirational task that many schools and school educators across the country have been working to effectively balance dating back to the early days of colonialism and continuing today (McClellan, 1999). Prioritizing student well-being in “nurturing the flourishing of human goodness” (Berkowitz, 2021) in all students is true character education.
Over the past two decades, career educators, youth psychologists, behavioral scientists, and educational centers and institutes have been collaborating around the specific topic of best practices, or “what works in character education” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, 2007, 2014, Berkowitz et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2021) in schools to guide school leaders [principals, teachers, and staff]. The difficulty for educational practitioners attempting to extract the best practices in character education is that the list of strategies is expansive and could be seen as unwieldy. Another frequently noted concern with character education is that teachers simply just do not have time for it with their plates being full. To this latter concern, leaders in the field of character education would argue that such educators are missing the point, as character education is the plate (Berkowitz, 2021).

It is important to expand on what character is and what impacts it more generally through character education. One of the original seminal articles on effective practices in character education was collaborated on by Berkowitz and Bier almost two decades ago in 2005. In this article, Berkowitz and Bier (2005) laid the foundation for much of the empirical research in character education up to this point. What has come to be known as the “What Works in Character Education” project began with the work of Berkowitz and Bier (2005) and was advanced and expanded upon through further research (Berkowitz, 2011, 2021; Berkowitz & Bier, 2007, 2014; Berkowitz et al., 2017). In a recent meta-analysis of the What Works in Character Education Research, Johnson et al. (2021) refer to the seminal work in the field by Berkowitz and Bier (2005) stating, “The largest review of character education literature was published by a project called What Works in Character Education (WWCE)” (p. 3). Johnson and colleagues emphasize the significant
impact that the WWCE project has had in “establishing an empirical foundation” for the field of character education.

The WWCE initial project (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, 2007) was commissioned with two main purposes: “generating (1) research-driven guidelines for character educators and (2) recommendations for needed future research in character education” (p. 1). Their 2005 article focused on three main objectives: to come up with clear definitions of the terminology around character and character education; to complete a thorough review of the research at the time on character education; and, finally, to draw conclusions. From their research, Berkowitz and Bier (2005) were able to not only establish clear guidelines for what counted as effective character education programs, but they also provided a table of “33 scientifically supported character education programs” which they analyzed and synthesized (p. 3). Through this groundbreaking WWCE project, Berkowitz and Bier were able to distill down six “Guidelines for Effective Practice” (many of which are still deeply embedded into current 2023 best practices in character education such as the need for models and mentors), as well as key strategies for “Turbo-Charging Character Education” (pp. 18-21).

Out of Berkowitz and Bier’s seminal (2005) article on “What Works in Character Education,” and decades of advancing the research, a succinct model or framework was developed that factors in the wealth of empirical research around character education in schools called the “PRIMED” framework for character education (Berkowitz, 2021).
PRIMED “Six Design Principles for Effective Character Education”

The PRIMED framework is the product of the accumulation of 40 years of dedicated service by Dr. Marvin Berkowitz and colleagues (and The Center for Character and Citizenship at the University of Missouri-St. Louis) to the field of character education in K-12 schools, and the “nurturing of the flourishing of human goodness” of youth. In working with top character educators, practitioners, and behavioral scientists throughout the world, Berkowitz’s summative work over 40 years shaped the framework for the six interrelated design principles of PRIMED (2021).

I believe that the manner in which Berkowitz and his colleagues have presented the PRIMED framework for cultivating K-12 school character education has great potential to impact the commitment and self-efficacy with which youth and amateur sport coaches deliver, adapt, and make character development a key emphasis with their players and teams. The president of one of the most prestigious character-focused organizations in the world, Dr. Arthur Schwartz, states, “PRIMED for Character Education is nothing short of an evidence-based roadmap for educators to help their students understand, care about, and practice the character strengths that will enable them to flourish in school, in the workplace, and as citizens” (Berkowitz, 2021, endorsement page).

The PRIMED framework (Berkowitz, 2021) has “Six Design Principles for Effective Character Education” in schools (p. 30, Table 4.1). For all six of the design principles, this study will seek to apply them to the landscape of sport. Each principle is defined as follows:
Prioritization: “Making educating for character development an authentic and salient priority in the mission, vision, policy, and practice of the school” (p. 30). [In applying prioritization of character to sport, this means it is more important than wins and losses.]

Relationships: “Intentionally and strategically nurturing healthy Relationships within and across all stakeholder groups” (p. 30). [In this case, athletes (including those on opposing teams), coaches, administrators, parents, officials, fans, family, etc.]

Intrinsic Motivation: “Nurturing the internalization of character and the Intrinsic Motivation to be a person of character and avoiding extrinsic motivators” (p. 30). [This can serve as a shift away from the instant gratification “trophy” generation in youth sport (Paciorek, 2017, pp. 25-31).]

Modeling: “All adults and other role Models embody and exemplify the character that they want to develop in students” (p. 30). [In this case, coaches need to accept this responsibility to act as a model of character, as well as team captains/leaders.]

Empowerment: “Creating a culture and governance structure that Empowers all stakeholders, by inviting their voices, listening to those voices, and seriously considering what they have to say, so that each one has the possibility of making a significant difference” (p. 30). [This is an area that many sport coaches struggle with, as they are often used to maintaining authoritarian, dictator-like control, rather than empowering athletes as leaders.]

Developmental Pedagogy: “Takes a Developmental perspective in its educational philosophy and practice by educating in ways that support the long-term learning and character development of students” (p. 30). [This would be a shift away from the
transactional, win-at-all-costs/zero-sum game narrative that prevails throughout the youth and amateur sport landscape (see Paciorek, 2017, pp. 27-31).]

The PRIMED model (Berkowitz, 2021) provides a framework, or roadmap, for traditional leaders in schools committed to character education and Servant Leadership to utilize in an effort to cultivate a positive and supportive environment in their schools and classrooms. Bier et al. (2021) posit that the principal or head of school is supremely integral in cultivating the culture and climate of a school. Bier (2021) states clearly the need for an emphasis on Servant Leadership amongst school administrators: “Teachers, their students, and the institution of K-12 education would be better served by principals educated and skilled in the practices of servant-leadership (SL)” (p. 28).

Because this study is focused on the role that sport team leadership plays in effective character education and development, and extracting best practices, it is important to build off the research on types of school leaders (e.g., principals and teachers). Two polarized forms of school leadership are the traditional (autocratic-authoritarian) model and the Servant Leadership approach (Clark, 2011; Engelhart, 2012). From what we know to be effective character education in schools, administrative leadership sets the tone for the school attitude and climate towards character education (Bier, 2021). In the upcoming section, a more detailed review of Servant Leadership will be provided as an alternative to the traditional leadership model.

**Servant Leadership Theoretical Framework**

**Servant Leadership** (Greenleaf, 1977) is not a new concept, though it has been “rediscovered by scholars” of late (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011, p. 249). While it is still rarely practiced in the world of sport coaching, it is becoming more commonplace in
business and school education. The founder of the principles of Servant Leadership, Robert Greenleaf, states, “The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (1991, p. 7).

Servant Leadership has been identified in the corporate business landscape as an empowering and effective way to lead through serving those with whom you are granted the opportunity to lead. Bier (2021) depicts Greenleaf’s conceptualization of Servant Leadership as a “virtues-based philosophy” of leadership committed to “relationships and persuasion rather than command and control” (p. 29). However, what separates Servant Leadership from other leadership approaches is its inherent moral domain (Jubilee Centre, retrieved February 5, 2022; Shields, 2011) which is an absolute imperative (Bier, 2021).

Former President of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership for 27 years, Larry C. Spears (2004), discussed Greenleaf’s ideas on Servant Leadership and how they could be effectively applied to various sectors and segments of society. Spears shared how Greenleaf presented an emerging, shifting focus away from the traditional autocratic or authoritarian models of leadership (Bier, 2021; Stone et al., 2004; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016) to more of a Servant Leadership approach displayed in teamwork, collaboration, empowerment of voice, and care communities (Spears, pp. 7 & 8).
Servant Leadership in Schools

Identifying the juxtaposition between the divergent approaches to **Autocratic-Authoritarian Leadership** and **Servant Leadership** (Spears, 2004) found in both school and sport is integral to this study. These polarized ends of the teaching/coaching continuum are two practiced leadership styles used by academic educators and sport coaches. Examples of the more traditional leadership in schools align closely to the **Autocratic-Authoritarian** model of leadership rooted back to the turn of the 20th century and the industrial revolution and Frederick Taylor’s SMT (scientific management theory) and transactional leadership (Yahaya, 2016), which is all about results and maximum efficiency, often at the expense of individual well-being (Laub, 1999). Bier (2021) presents the great need for leaders in schools, such as Principals, to ground themselves in practices of Servant Leadership, who prioritize “interpersonal relationships” over how most are “emphasizing the performance dimension” (p. 28) or task-oriented approach to managing or leading. Governmental over-emphasis on standardized test scores tied to financial support has pushed school leaders toward a hyper-focus on the performance dimension. In 2002, the government enacted the federal “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) Act under U.S. President George W. Bush with the intent to “scale up” school accountability towards student academic outcomes (Klein, 2015). The Obama Administration attempted to improve upon the NCLB with the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA), which went into effect in 2017 to address equal opportunity, especially in lower socio-economic areas, as well as to give more governance authority back to the individual states (Adler-Greene, 2019). However, the singular focus on performance outcomes (similar to winning in sport) measured by
standardized tests continues to proliferate a top-down transactional model of education across the United States today (Berkowitz et al., 2017).

Berkowitz et al., (2017) state that despite ineffective government policies in education, there are countless numbers and documented examples of educators (Abourjilie, 2000; Berger, 2003; Berkowitz, 2012; Berkowitz, Pelster & Johnston, 2012; Urban, 2008) who have been able to effectively break free from the more traditional transactional educator model. Such exemplary school educators fit the description of Servant Leaders or “Servant-Teachers” (Hays, 2008) with the authentic and nurturing care for their students. In their comprehensive review of the literature on Servant Leadership, Parris & Welty-Peachy (2013a) state that at the time of their comprehensive study, close to half of the research on Servant Leadership was done in educational environments, which emphasizes the point (Berkowitz et al., 2017) that teachers can play a large role as leaders in schools. However, such exemplars are far from the norm. Ellis (2016) highlights the “positional lens” or power structures in education between administration and students (p. 34) which rears its head in autocratic-authoritarianism and the transactional model (Parlar et al., 2022). Hays (2008) presents an opposing term to autocratic-authoritarianism through the term “Servant-Teacher” in describing how teachers who embody this approach to teaching [i.e., Abourjilie, 2000; Berger, 2003; Seider, 2012; Urban, 2008] have been able to prioritize student outcomes of empowerment, authenticity, peer collaboration and other learning behaviors that tend to naturally produce increased performance due to student engagement, connection, and joy for learning (p. 34).
In the world of sport, a similar commonly practiced transactional model of coaching remains the prevalent approach utilized by sport coaches, rooted in an excessive focus solely on results and other extrinsic measurements of success (Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Shields, 2011; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995, 2009, 2011; Shields et al., 2015a; Shields et al., 2018). This approach to coaching posits a “zero-sum game” entrenched in a win-lose equation, where athletes' sense of accomplishment is tied to results and extrinsic motivators. “Trials of communities working to break the zero-sum game,” the notion that in order to win someone else has to lose, show the challenges faced by real people and provide a historical perspective” (Boitano et al., 2017, p. 121). Shields and Bredemeier (2009) use the term “decompetition” in direct contrast with “true competition” in much of their research on sport over the past two decades to depict the divergent approaches to sport (which will be expanded upon further in this literature review). The transactional leadership coaching model is highly indicative of results or overall net performance and productivity as opposed to the principles of Servant Leadership.

In discussing character focused leadership, Bier (2021) states, “servant-leadership is the best available model of virtuous leadership (p. 40). Berkowitz (2011) concludes that “effective character education” programs provide frequent positive role models and mentors that come in the form of adults, older children, and even historical figures of influence. This “positive modeling” leads to the building of moral character strengths in youth (p. 155-156). When working with youth in either school or sport, it is important for the adult-mentor to model genuine care and concern for the children that they lead. Berkowitz (2021) asserts that until children know that you (teachers or coaches) authentically care about them, they will not care what you know and be receptive to your
mentorship. Adding emphasis, “The word caring may appear in more places in character education than perhaps any other character word” (p. 52). The profession of teaching our youth is one of the highest callings. In emphasizing the important role of educators as mentors, Berkowitz (2012) firmly declares that all educators “need to embrace that as a very powerful tool to foster the development of their students” (p. 36). For many students, a caring adult-mentor can make a significant difference in their lives, but it takes an effective educator who sees their profession as more than a job to care enough to be that mentor. Effective character educators are Servant Leaders (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Bier, 2021; Bier, 2020, Bier et al., 2021).

Drawing from Laub (1999), “Servant Leadership promotes the valuing and development of people” in an authentic manner that provides for the development of good in people and community. Servant Leaders are more focused on empowering those that they lead through the sharing of “power and status for the common good” of each individual and the organization as a whole, as well as those that the organization serves (p. 81). School administrators, classroom teachers, and school coaches, equally, can be effective character educators. Berkowitz and Bier, (2005) identify the “critical” need for professional development training for those engaged in character education positing that “while professional development is not often thought of as a pedagogical strategy, it is essential for effective pedagogy” (p. 7). The research above in “What Works in Character Education” is guiding much of the current professional development training for school educators in the field of character development.

The incessant demands on school administrators and teachers to meet standardized test thresholds in order to maintain government funding (NCLB and ESSA)
can seem to justify schools taking their focus off the character development of our youth as a number one priority in an effort to boost test scores. Berkowitz (2021) provides a cautionary tale of the noted dangers of educators and administrators teaching to the test for the sake of convenience, or, more likely, to affect student results in an effort to maintain job security. Rather, he challenges educators to “stop being distracted by the light and instead learn where the keys to character development really are” (pp. 7-8).

The 26th President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, cared deeply about educating our country’s youth in moral character. He warned of the perils of not focusing on moral development in schools: “To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society” (cited by Berkowitz, 2012, p. 10). However, as noted in the previous section, the overwhelming majority of schools still continue to put character education on the back burner (whether warranted or not) because they are shackled by the system of standardized testing accountability (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Berkowitz, 2021; Bier, 2021), or because educators need more clarity on how to best proceed in supporting student growth. Shifting to “Out of school” programs, there are examples in the literature that demonstrate success in youth character development: parents or adult-leaders at home, recreation center and after-school care programs, and sport programs.

Out of School Programming and Character Education

While parents and schools (discussed above) can have highly significant individual impact on children’s lives (for good or bad), there is an array of other out of school organizations and adult-leaders who can be a champion in the development of character in youth. Parents and schools cannot go at it alone when it comes to character education (Berkowitz, 2005). Renowned author of Eight Habits of the Heart: Embracing
the Values that Build Strong Communities, Clifton Taulbert, writes about the importance of “the human touch” by educators in the development of youth requiring positive “people to people” relationships in our communities (2006, p. 14). Social Theorist Marshall McLuhan’s theory of the “global village” (1967) highlights this idea that school educators need support from all other touch points in the lives of youth, as it takes a village to raise a child.

McClellan (1999), in his historical outline of moral education in America from the early days to the turn of the 21st century, highlighted the importance of multiple adult influencers of moral and character development in youth outside of schools (e.g., parents, church, recreational activities). A key advantage for those outside of schools who have the opportunities to provide youth character development is that they do not have to meet the demands and pressures of the students meeting state and national standardized test requirements. Because this excessive demand does not exist in out of school programs, it makes sense to turn there for the prioritization of character development in youth to learn from the research findings. While prioritization of moral character is the meta-design principle of the PRIMED framework, the “R” for relationships is the lynchpin to effective character education. Hoerr (2022), an expert in school leadership, emphasizes that “the strongest relationships are partnerships” rooted in a desire to build a deeper connection of trust (p. 7). With the burden of teaching to the test being lifted, parents and educators in out of school programs can take the time and invest the energy to build relationships of trust with students in their care. It is believed that more than ten million children in the U.S. participate in out of school training (OST) programming each year (Vandell et al., 2015).
Regarding traditional out of school programming, it is estimated that nearly 2.5 million youth in America are “paired with caring adults” in dyadic mentoring programs each year (Raposa et al., 2017). One of the more notable intergenerational one-on-one youth mentoring programs in the U.S. is the Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) of America program which is a non-profit that has been in existence since 1904. It claims to be the largest “donor- and volunteer-supported mentoring network” in the country. BBBS seeks to pair a caring and loving adult role model mentor with a youth mentee in need across the country to cultivate positive and lasting relationships of trust (Big Brothers Big Sisters website, retrieved March 28, 2022). A recent meta-analysis on the effects of 70 youth mentoring outcome studies seeking to promote positive youth development from 1975-2017 found a “statistically significant” effect with a “medium/moderate range” based on empirically based standards that aligned well with previous meta-analyses (Raposa et al., 2019, p. 423). Much of the developmental model for youth mentoring overlaps with the best practices discussed above on what works in character education and the flourishing of youth: Building relationships and connections of trust (Ruzek et al., 2016), social-emotional well-being and positive interactions with friends and family (Cavel & Elledge, 2014; Karcher et al., 2002), positive role modeling of values in character, as well as youth being able to see their “possible selves” in their mentors (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ruzek et al., 2016).

Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is another long-standing youth development organization whose mission is focused on character development or PYD. Hilliard et al., (2014) summarize the mission of BSA is to develop stronger character in youth, who in turn will be well-equipped to go out and positively impact others and the world. Vandell
et al. (2015) and Lynch et al. (2016) present and describe many out of school programs that provide effective youth character development such as: YMCA, 4-H, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, an array of other local recreational and learning centers (e.g., performing arts, chess clubs, music) and youth sport programming (on which the remainder of this research study will be primarily focused).

This section on out-of-school programming and the preceding section on in-school programs (excluding sport programming) presented a growing field focused on character education of youth. There were clear overlapping emphases on three of the key design principles of PRIMED, specifically, a prioritization on character development, building strong relationships of trust, and adult modeling of strong character. Moving into the upcoming section on character development in youth sport, Bates and Anderson-Butcher, (in print) and Ettekal et al., (2018) posit that while there is a significant amount of research on what works in schools [and we could say out-of-school programming], there is much less empirical data to draw from in sport. “Given the plethora of knowledge of what works in character education in schools (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014), classroom settings might serve as a starting point for understanding character education through sport” (Ettekal et al., 2018, p. 30).

The Importance of Fidelity

Before moving into youth development programs geared around sport, it bears noting that not all youth programming is “effective.” Berkowitz (2021) codifies such ineffectiveness in delivering on the intended learning and character outcomes as a “problem of transferring research knowledge to practice” (p. 3). He references an article from Sloboda et al., (2009) that concluded that the widely recognized youth drug
prevention program, D.A.R.E., was not only ineffective in reducing the likelihood of youth engaging in drugs and alcohol, but rather “in fact sometimes actually increased it” (2021, p. 3). Though the organization’s intentions were noble, their end result was detrimental. Another reason for ineffective youth programming is the delivery of the adult-leader, or what Berkowitz (2021) refers to as a “problem of fidelity” from a character education standpoint (pp. 3-4). The lack of fidelity of implementation could have multiple causes ranging from not following a program for the full intended amount of time, or, in the worst case, an unethical adult predator preying on the innocence of youth. Though the latter is rare, adult sexual predators are out there and such atrocious acts do occur (Greenwichtimes.com, 2022). What is not rare is the presence of emotional predators preying on innocent children. With the physical and emotional safety and well-being of our youth at stake, it is imperative that educators (both teachers and coaches) are both confident in and committed to being effective character educators.

**Character Development in Youth Sport**

In depicting where the youth sport landscape stands in regards to character and character development, the following two statements from two of the research thought leaders in the field of character education in sport warrant repeating: “The roots of sport in the fertile soil of play may dry up when exposed to the heat of competition, and our vision of the human and humane potential of sport may blur when our eyes are on the prize more than the process” (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995, p. 2). Close to 30 years later, those involved in the amateur youth sport landscape are, indeed, losing, as our children are dropping out of sport (beyond normal attrition rates due to other interests) at earlier and earlier ages (Lerner et al., 2022).
The research on character development in youth and amateur sport over the past four decades has produced mixed and controversial findings (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2021; Bates & Anderson-Butcher, in press; Bredemeier & Shields, 2006; Ettikal et al., 2018) that opposes the long-accepted notion that sport participation inherently leads to positive character development [prosocial behavior] (Anderson, 2010; Bredemeier & Shields, 1986 & 2006; Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Holt, 2016; Shields & Bredemeier, 2011; Shields et al., 2015a; Vandell et al., 2015). The findings on negative effects can be evidenced through a trend of youth “quitting” sport prematurely in the United States (Cote & Fraser-Thomas, 2008; Beatty & Fawyer, 2013; Farrey, 2008), higher reported instances of burnout and overuse injuries—both physical and psychological (Burgess & Naughton, 2010; Cote et al., 2007; Cote & Gilbert, 2009; Horton, 2013), or a quick internet search of the latest news headlines related to youth sports, as one will find countless stories that chronicle the lack of character from coaches, parents, administrators, and young athletes who mimic this behavior (McLaughlin & Lett, 2015; Rosenberg, 2016; Whiteside, 2014).

Having been the lead instructor at one of the country’s premier sport training academies, I can attest to the findings in the previous paragraph regarding an over-emphasis or even hyper-emphasis on performance character (Beatty & Fawyer, 2013; Farrey, 2008; Paciorek, 2017), at the sake of the three other vital dimensions of character that should be equally developed through education and sport (Shields & Bredemeier, 2011). A hyper-focus on results should not be misinterpreted as building performance character in youth sport. Performance character is cultivated through cultures focused on the process of quality and excellence, though too much focus on one’s performance can
cross the line into ego-focused socio-negative behaviors (Shields & Bredemeier, 2009). This idea of too much focus in one area is emphasized in the book *Fear Your Strengths* (2013) by leadership experts Kaplan and Kaiser, who forewarn of the perils of leaning too heavily on one specific strength or virtue. All four of these dimensions (moral, intellectual, civic, and performance) should complement each other in the development of character in our youth, and if one dimension should be prioritized, it should be moral character development, (Berkowitz, 2021) which supports individual strengths and virtues.

Referencing their work on “Smart and Good” Schools, Davidson and Lickona (2007) make the case that moral and performance character can and need to cohabitate in the nurturing of character in youth in schools: “We came to realize that character isn't just about ‘doing the right thing’ in an ethical sense [moral character]; it's also about doing our best work” (retrieved May 13, 2022). Similar to the research in schools, performance character seems to be most highly prized and even adored in sport (Farrey, 2008), though moral character can flourish alongside performance character in the athletics arena, if it is intentionally prioritized and modeled by coaches (Ehrmann & Jordan, 2011; Shields & Bredemeier, 2009; Shields et al., 2018). It is apparent that the current sport landscape mirrors the corporate business sector that is overly focused on performance character (and extrinsic motivators), which is very transactional in nature (Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Shields, 2011; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995, 2009, 2011). An increased emphasis on the moral domain of character is needed in youth sports to emphasize and teach character. Many authors argue that the sport coach can have a significantly influential impact on the development of character with their teams (Anderson-Butcher & Bates,
2021; Bates & Anderson-Butcher, in press; Ehrmann & Jordan, 2011; Ellis, 2016; Paciorek, 2017), as the subsequent section shows.

There is no doubt that sport coach-Servant Leaders are utilizing certain aspects of Greenleaf’s foundational principles in their daily coaching practices. Coach John Wooden, the legendary UCLA basketball coach and author of dozens of books on leadership and character building, is often pointed to and cited as a Servant Leader in the coaching world (Van Mullem & Stoll, 2012). Wooden was a “courageous steward” (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011, pp. 251) who knew how to hold his basketball players accountable for the good of themselves and their team. However, through closer scrutiny of Coach Wooden’s coaching practices, some could conclude that his approach, though loving and geared toward long-term player development, was highly autocratic and controlling (e.g., demanding that players put their socks on a specific way). Ellis (2016) states, “fully embracing a servant leadership approach to their craft, perhaps the servant-coach has the potential to offer their athletes a richer experience than the one they currently receive” (p. 34).

**Influence of Coach on Character Development**

Abourjilie (2000) states, “Within the school setting, it is the teachers and coaches who have the greatest amount of contact with the children and set the climate for interaction” (p. 25). In line with the research discussed on the power and influence of educational teachers (Berkowitz, 2021), sport coaches have been recognized as potential key players in the space of character education inside and outside of schools (Anderson-Butcher & Bates in press; Ehrmann & Jordan, 2011; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995; Smith & Smoll, 1997; Summit, 2013;). This distinguished duty as character educators is
validated by the fact that sport coaches can have an influential advantage over classroom teachers, as they tend to have a greater percentage of highly motivated students to coach and significant time to mentor them (Duda & Nicholls, 1992). Authors claim that a strong emphasis in character development from one’s sport coaches can have a positively transformative, long-term impact over one’s lifetime (Ehrmann & Jordan, 2011; Ellis, 2016; Hall et al., 2002; Hays, 2008; Laub, 1999; Paciorek, 2017). The “Laureus Sport for Good” executive director (Fraser, 2021) references the following quote by Nelson Mandela from his (2000) speech at their inaugural awards event which points to the impact of sport and ultimately the vast influence that a sport coach can have: “Sport has the power to change the world…it has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand” (2021, p. 1).

As stated in the introduction of this review of the relevant literature, in the education of youth in any domain, be it in school, out of school, or in sport, adult-leaders (e.g., teachers or coaches) can likely have a long-term developmental impact on the character of our youth (either for good or bad). Ellis (2016) analyzed a variety of leadership styles employed by youth leaders and specifically coaches in the world of sport. “In the crucible of sport, coaches play an important role in the lives of the athletes they coach” (Ellis, 2016, p. 5). Ellis (2016) studied NCAA soccer coaches and their soccer student-athletes’ character growth (or lack thereof) through the relationship between coaches’ intentionality towards being self-perceived Servant Leaders with their teams and their teams’ accruals of penalty cards. Ellis found that in his study there was, indeed, an inverse correlation between Servant Leader coaches and penalty cards. His
findings not only point to the great influence of sport coaches, but also the power of Servant Leadership as a preferred leadership style to build the relationships of trust with their athletes and teams to positively impact the character of those whom they coach.

Sport practitioners, Camire and colleagues (2011), provide one of the most salient depictions of the sport coaches’ potential impact: “Coaches are arguably the most important actors in the youth sport context and play an influential role in facilitating or hindering the development of youth. Despite the great impact they can have on youth development, most coaches have limited training or knowledge on how to structure suitable environments to facilitate youth development” (p. 92). Sadly, despite many coaches’ best intentions for character development, and the aspirational goal of influencing positive youth development, the overwhelming majority of coaches simply are not adequately trained in how to cultivate team culture and climate from which to intentionally develop character (Bates & Anderson-Butcher, in press; Camire et al., 2011; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2007), and the same can be said about school teachers and administrators as well. A recent study currently in press (Butcher & Anderson-Butcher) states, “Coaches’ lack of preparation, as well as access to quality training, is troubling given the growing majority of coaches are not coach-educators” (p. 4). Simply because our youth are participating in sport does not automatically assure that they are being positively influenced by their coaches in proven best practices of character education (Danish, et al., 2004; Gould & Carson, 2008). Without training of coach-leaders, opportunities for life-skill development of PYD and character can be missed out on (Bates & Anderson-Butcher, in press; Danish, et al., 2004; Paciorek, 2017; Petitpas, et al., 2005). Coach-training programs have been available for decades dating back to the
1970s, however, their lack of prioritization on character development does not align with “what works in character education” best practices.

**Sport Coaching Efficacy Development Programs**

The potential positive impact that a sport coach can have on the development of youth, coupled with increased displays of antisocial behavior in sport, has given rise to many character development interventions with the intent to address this damaging trend. An overview of the sequential progress of some of the seminal character development programs in sports is provided in this section. Before the mid-1970s, there was not much research on the efficacy of sport coaching. Attention to coach effectiveness training began to surface in the literature in the 1970s (Smith, et al., 1977; Smith, et al., 1979), but such coach training programs were very sparse, and the findings were even less available until the 1990s. It was during this time that Smith and Smoll (1997) published *Coaching the Coaches: Youth Sports as a Scientific and Applied Behavioral Setting*, which provided a measuring stick for the body of work that they had been engaged in over the prior two decades. Their work focused primarily on the X’s and O’s of performance development with little to no focus on the development of moral character.

Referring to their previous work (Smith, et al., 1979) in Coach Effectiveness Training (CET), the authors focused on five core principles: 1. Understanding the difference between professional sport models and the youth development model that they were concerned with; 2. Training the coach to have a positive approach to coaching; 3. Focus on an environment that the coach co-creates with the team through relationships of trust built on mutual obligations and commitments; 4. Adherence or compliance to shared team goals; 5. Lastly, coach training to seek out feedback either from the team or through
self-monitoring of behaviors. The components of CET were disseminated via a three-hour training workshop, along with a training manual that was given to all coach participants. At the time that Smith and colleagues’ article was published in 1997, the researchers had more than 1,300 youth sport coaches take part in their training. Their CET program, as well as other similar coach training programs discussed in this review of the literature, show evidence that coaches who partake in such trainings can gain an increased awareness and focus on character development over their short-term coaching behaviors. However, currently, in 2022, there is still limited empirical research on the effectiveness of such programs.

Falcao and colleagues (2012) and Naylor and colleagues (2013) each provide advancements to the literature geared toward coach training programs more focused around whole person development of their players and teams, rather than most of the training models that placed a higher premium on performance character over moral character. Falcao is focused specifically on positive youth development (PYD) through the lens of coaches involved in a specific coach training program that advocates for the equal development of performance character and moral character in sport teams and players.

Research by Falcao et al., (2012) evolved out of the work of Cote and colleagues (2003, 2009, 2010), who sought a mastery approach to learning rather than an ego or winning-at-all-costs approach. Cote’s athlete development model is summarized as the 4 C’s to include: competence, confidence, connection, and character/caring. The first two C’s seem to speak to the performance side of sport training, while the latter two are clearly situated in the development of moral character. Falcao and colleagues (2012)
reported that the coaches found that they gained increased knowledge on approaches and means for increasing team cohesion through athlete confidence, connection, and character development.

Falcao et al., (2012) stated that their mixed methods approach which was more qualitative in nature demonstrated positive impact from coach training programs, despite being a small study in a field that has a growing body of coach training programs with very limited empirical data. They stated, “More studies are necessary to better understand how the principles of youth development can be applied to sport, and how programs can be designed to teach coaches how to integrate youth development principles into their practice” (Falcao, et al., 2012, p. 442). They noted delivery and application challenges in long-term coach commitment to such coach training programs due to the lack of accountability and touch points after the initial training sessions (still noted as a continued concern by Bates & Anderson-Butcher [in press]). Falcao et al., (2012) utilized a mixed methods approach with four different data collection methods for strong triangulation: semi-structured interviews, pre- and post-surveys, research assistant observation field notes, and a research coordinator reflective journal, which have application to this current study (discussed in Methodology section).

Naylor et al., (2013) discuss what they describe as a “21st-Century Framework for Character Formation in Sports.” In their article, the researchers present a similar modern approach to building character along with increasing individual and team performance, which continues to this day to be highly contested amongst coaches, hyper-competitive parents (described by Shields and Bredemeier [2011] as not having the basic understanding of “true competition”) and sport administrators. Naylor et al. posit that
performance character and moral character are not at odds with each other and that they can actually flourish hand in hand with each other (2013). In working to create a prosocial environment in sport, the researchers present how to create a character-driven educational environment that moves away from the “what we do” mentality into a way for coaches to emphasize “who we are.” Naylor et al. also present the importance of creating moral environments for youth to grow, and how young athletes act or respond in reflection to the norms, behaviors, and values of their coach, a stakeholder with significant potential influence. The focus of this article is an attempt to shift away from what the authors see as a fallacy that too much focus on character takes away from performance and their belief that moral character can actually enhance performance. However, the existing literature has certainly not proven that increased moral character enhances performance.

“Unfortunately, as the saying goes, ‘The path to hell is paved with good intentions’” (Berkowitz, 2021 p. 1). Many of these programs or curricula show promise, but lack practical application, empowerment, specificity, and cultural awareness, as expressed in the research data (Bates & Anderson-Butcher, in press; Berkowitz, 2021; Berkowitz, et al., 2017; Bornstein, 2017; Ettekal et al., 2017 & 2018; Simpkins & Riggs 2014; Simpkins et al., 2017) and have challenges with user internalization and prioritization. Often, such character training programs require one-time seminars with facilitator fees, which can have prohibitive costs. There is some research on the many coaching training programs devised over the past 40 plus years to aid sport coaches in their efficacy and commitment to their craft of coaching their sport teams (Falcao, et al., 2012; Naylor, et al., 2013; Smith, et al., 1979; Smith & Smoll, 1997;) that clearly build
off each other and have advanced the research forward to some degree. However, the most critical void in sport coach training programs at that point was the lack of prioritization of emphasis on the moral dimension of the children and teen athletes’ development through sport, and a lack of empirical testing of them (Ettekal et al., 2017 & 2018; Shields & Bredemeier, 2009; Shields et al., 2015a, 2015b).

**Coach Training Programs with Prioritization of Moral Character Development**

Falcao et al. (2012) presented their findings that despite a growing body of coach training programs, there was very limited empirical data, and more research studies were needed to better understand how the principles of PYD can be applied to sport (p. 442). Six years later, Ettekal et al. (2018) reported similar findings that there is limited empirical data to draw from in sport. Currently, in 2023, there is still limited scientific research-based data on the effectiveness of coach training programs geared around the prioritization of moral character development. In examining the limited literature on coach effectiveness training programs that place an equal emphasis on moral character along with performance character, Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) is an organization that has been aspiring to do so.

PCA’s focus on the long-term development of coaches falls in line with previous work done in this area of training coaches to better develop character in their players through the vehicle of sport. PCA is one of the largest organizations in the world committed to such impactful work. PCA offers a two-hour interactive coach training workshop (typically with high school coaches) that typically occurs prior to the start of the sport season. A “trainer” from PCA comes to the location of the training (e.g., schools, recreation centers) and delivers the curriculum to the coaches. Upon completion
of the two-hour training program, the coaches receive certification as a PCA Double-Goal Coach, as well as books and other reference materials to use throughout the season. At the end of the season, each of the coaches completes a self-report survey (Thompson, 2010). PCA had trained more than 114,000 coaches as of 2014, and today they continue to provide training for coaches. Their most recognized program is fittingly named: “The Double-Goal Coach” (Thompson, 2003). The following three research studies (Ettekal et al., 2017; Ferris, et al., 2015; Holtzclaw, et al., 2019) focused on the delivery system and effectiveness of PCA’s coach training programs.

Ferris and colleagues (2015) from the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development (IARYD) at Tufts University conducted a qualitative study based on interviews with fifteen coaches who had completed PCA’s positive coaching workshop geared around the Double-Goal Coach model. The researchers found that the coaches who took part in the training found considerable value in it and hoped to utilize it to better their coaching. However, the coaches shared ways in which the PCA programming could be more effective and beneficial to their personal development as a coach. There were three themes that emerged out of the responses from the coaches: 1. Need for coach development; 2. Need for athlete development; 3. Importance of strong relationships between coaches and athletes. If applied, this could lead to progress, but Ferris et al., (2015) shared constructive feedback from the coaches through qualitative interviews and surveys. The length of the two-hour training session received mixed reviews from too long, too short, too rigid, boring, etc., while others found the two-hour training session to be highly beneficial, especially with the annual session, if the school’s administration is willing to pay for it each year, and thus continue the partnership with PCA. Of particular
relevance to this current dissertation study topic were the coaches’ responses regarding their feelings that the training program was too rigid, or “cookie cutter,” and that most issues that coaches are confronted with are not so generic. Other coaches responded that they wished the PCA training sessions could have been more interactive. In the limitations section, Ferris stated that future studies should focus on longitudinal data from coaches who continue the partnership with PCA over multiple years.

The study by Holtzclaw and colleagues (2019) a few years after Ferris et al., (2015) also investigated PCA’s Double-Goal Coach through the specific lens of positive youth development (PYD), due to its notoriety as one of the largest of hundreds of organizations devoted to building stronger character (prosocial behavior) in youth and coaches involved in sport (Thompson, 2003). Holtzclaw et al., (2019) cite some of the key contributors to the field of coach education and PYD in sport mentioned previously in this review of the literature (e.g., Smith & Smoll, 1979; Cote, et al., 2010). Thompson’s (2003; 2010) Double-Goal Coach has two primary goals: “to win and to use sports to teach positive character traits and life lessons” (Holtzclaw, et al., 2019, p. 312). Similar to Ferris et al., (2015), Holtzclaw et al., (2019) heavily utilized qualitative methodologies, but also added a mixed methodology to their study (of four measures, three were qualitative open-ended questions and interviews) with four swim coaches who had previously completed the PCA training. The format of the workshops delivered by PCA seemed to be very similar to those done with coaches in the Ferris study. Only three coaches completed the research project. Though this study seemed to have many limitations due to only a few coaches completing the pre- and post-surveys, themes developed that correlate to those from the Ferris study. Self-assessments from the
coaches resulted in increased awareness of their current coaching behavior, and how it could be improved upon to positively affect the relationships with their athletes and the development of a more positive environment. For instance, one coach stated that “the training workshop would give him ‘…more tools to help me better develop athletes’” (Holtzclaw et al., 2019, p. 318). This article lacked depth in data-driven support, and while some of the methodologies used could be beneficial to future studies, the article did not present much of a critical lens to add to the current research.

Dr. Richard Lerner and his colleagues at the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development followed through on their own future study recommendation via a 3-year longitudinal project in partnership with PCA which extends the two case studies (Ferris et al., 2015; Holtzclaw et al., 2019) to a longitudinal design (Ettekal et al., 2017). Through this longitudinal study, principal investigator, Lerner, led his team of researchers in collaboration with the PCA team, in an effort to bridge the gap between scientific research and the intentional application of character education (PYD) in sport. Ettekal et al.’s (2017) conclusions aligned closely with colleagues Ferris et al. (2015) in that the potential positive effects of PCA programming “were small and waned after the end of the sport season” (2017, p. 42). This “fade-out effect” could be remedied by more touch points and intentional follow-up sessions, both in and out of season (Ettekal et al., 2017). The most germane finding to this three-year longitudinal study of PCA was that Ettekal and colleagues (2017) concluded that what practitioners facilitating character development-focused sport programming constitute as valid and reliable data findings do not meet the rigor of evidence-based scientific data.
Most recently, the research from Bates & Anderson-Butcher (in press) has attempted to collect empirical data on their research questions around the influence that character education training programs for high school coaches have had on their “self-efficacy to engage in character-building strategies” with their teams, and their “satisfaction, likelihood to continue coaching.” These two key variables of Bates and Anderson-Butcher (in press) and their specific focus on high school coaches are very similar to the emphases in this current dissertation study, though their study collected strictly quantitative data via surveys from 3,669 coaches in their state. They created and piloted two of the measures and scales used in their surveys. The specific purposes of each of their two scales were: 1. “used to assess self-efficacy for engaging in sport-based character-building strategies,” and 2. “to assess coaches’ ability to support student-athletes on and off the field” (In press, p. 9).

Bates and Anderson-Butcher (in press) presented compelling findings for the value and need for increased coach training in character education. Their focus investigated the relationships between coaches’ level of participation and interest in character education and their self-efficacy. They reported that just over 40% of the coaches had never taken part in life-skill development, while only 40% had what they felt to be formal training in character and ethics in athletics. The coaches’ responses were over 70% in favor of receiving more training opportunities geared around character education. Additionally pertinent were the findings that coaches who received training around character education and topics on moral character and life skills training were more confident in their character development abilities with their teams. Lastly, coaches who had a higher interest in the topic of character development in sport reported higher
satisfaction in coaching and were more prone to continue coaching. Bates and Anderson-Butcher (in press) make a strong contribution to the research on coach training programs geared around moral character development, and there is great relevance to the current study. However, the authors point out a few key limitations to their own study, which are worth exploring, as these limitations further shine a light on the void in the literature that this current doctoral study sought to address, as noted in the subsequent section.

Bates and Anderson-Butcher (in press) highlight that while their research team was able to check for face and content validity in the creation of their scales and measures, the long-term reliability validity of those is still unknown. Another area that they mentioned was that in future studies it could be beneficial to explore whether the coach training impacted their perceptions and approach to coaching. However, the most important limitation noted by Bates and Anderson-Butcher (in press) pertains to the integrity, reliability, and fidelity of each of the character education training programs that each of the 3,669 different coaches received, which they referred to as the quality of the training. From an evaluative standpoint, the type, breadth, and depth of character education training programs that each coach took part in could have varied significantly from in-person training rooted firmly in empirical data on character education best practices and delivered over the span of a year, to online one-time workshops, to a coach reading a book written by a favorite high-profile coach. This current dissertation study sought to draw on the knowledge gleaned from Bates and Anderson-Butcher (in press) study, while directly addressing the authors’ three stated limitations and future research mentioned above.
The review of the literature presents small but incremental progress in the effectiveness of sport coaching training programs geared specifically around the intentional focus on the moral domain of character development (Bates & Anderson-Butcher, in press; Falcao et al., 2012; Naylor et al., 2013), but there is a void. There is limited empirical data on the effectiveness of the design and integration of sport coach character development programs for youth (Ettekal et al., 2017, 2018; Ferris et al., 2015; Holtzclaw et al., 2019), and there are little to no accountability measures in place and touch points with many of the character interventions past the initial training sessions to keep coaches committed and thereby to avoid the “fade-out effect” (Bornstein, 2017; Ettekal et al., 2017; Ferris et al., 2015; Holtzclaw et al., 2019; Simpkins et al., 2017). There remains a clear need for sport coaches to realize and understand that moral and performance character education can be delivered with equal fervor and self-efficacy to the training of sport itself. The cost of many of these character programs is high with limited additional touch points or refreshers. Lastly, there remains a gap between the research on effective practices and the design of applications. Despite the long-accepted notion that sport builds positive character, there is a trend of socio-negative/anti-social behaviors in young athletes involved in sport (Anderson, 2010; Shields & Bredemeier, 2011; Shields et al., 2015a, 2015b, Vella, 2019) which may justify the need to root the practices of character education in sport more firmly in empirically based best practices.

As a 25-year coach committed to character development, I have taken part in some of the above-mentioned programs (and even created my own), but these interventions can be clunky, rigid, and difficult to apply on a consistent basis in practices and games for sport coaches (Falcao, et al., 2012; Naylor, et al., 2013). Most importantly,
the above sport coach interventions that claim to prioritize character development and PYD are lacking empirically based evidence on program effectiveness (Ettekal et al., 2017 & 2018; Ferris, et al., 2015; Holtzclaw, et al., 2019). There is a clear need to establish grounded theory around what constitutes effective character education training programs for sport coaches.

Establishing Grounded Theory (Empirically Driven Moral Character Education/PYD in Sport Training Programs)

Holt and colleagues (2017) provided a meta-analysis of character education and PYD interventions for coaches over the past 40 years in an effort to establish a grounded theory to establish a framework in character education and PYD for sport coaches. Building off the work in sport coaching geared around PYD, Holt and colleagues (2017) conducted a qualitative meta-study of the existing literature proposing to be grounded in positive youth development in sport. Holt et al., (2017) started with the screening of 1,089 studies seeming to be focused on character education and PYD for coaches. With a team of three researchers observed by the lead investigator, Holt and colleagues took a thorough vetting process to initially filter it down to 455 due to the studies not fitting the select criteria. Of those 455, the research team reviewed abstracts to condense down to 130, and then once again to the final 63 studies that met the generic criteria of sport coach interventions geared around character development. These studies were then all coded using meta-synthesis relying on analytic approaches from grounded theory. The synthesis of these studies is where great value can be extracted. Holt et al., (2017) provide increased generalizability in numerous qualitative studies that have been done in the past. Single studies (e.g., Ettekal et al., 2017; Ferris, et al., 2015; Holtzclaw, et al., 2019;
Smith, et al., 1977; Smith, et al., 1979), are limited by small sample sizes and oftentimes homogenous samples. The results of their study (Holt, et al., 2017) were that PYD outcomes for sport coaches can be implicitly developed through a strong PYD climate.

Holt and colleagues (2017) focused on the need to address the gap between the research on this topic of character education/PYD and the practice of sport coaching. Their intent was to synthesize the data from qualitative studies to create new models. Their study focused on four interrelated challenges to effectively move the research forward for future researchers and practitioners (e.g., coaches or sport management professionals): There was a need for consolidation of the variety of qualitative deep studies conducted over the years on PYD development through sport. Secondly, there was a need to establish a greater understanding of the processes that contribute to the desired outcomes. Third, there was a need to address the significant divide between the research and the actual practice of PYD in sport. They sought to uncover why a focus on PYD or character development is not a prioritized part of coaching education programs and youth sport delivery programs/leagues. Lastly, this meta-study addressed the lack of theory in PYD studies and clear and proven interventions that practitioners (e.g., coaches or sport management professionals) can lean on for support in effectuating positive youth development with their sport teams. It is the opinion of the key researcher of this doctoral study that the PRIMED framework for character education can offer promise to address these four challenges presented by Holt and colleagues (2017) and provide support scaffolding for sport coaches.

Though Holt et al., (2017) admitted that weaknesses from the studies used in their meta-analysis lacked depth in clear methodologies and conceptual models and grounded
theory for the facilitation and delivery of PYD programming, there were conclusions presented that were relevant to this study. Those findings were that there are many outside factors that play a part in the influence of PYD in sport; strong PYD climate with caring adults/mentors leads to PYD outcomes; PYD goals combined with life skills training leads to a stronger PYD climate than PYD done alone; and utilizing sport as a delivery platform will increase PYD (Holt, et al., 2017).

Professional development accountability systems for coaches involved in the coaching intervention (Falcao et al., 2012) and interconnected outcomes can create a culture and climate in the sporting environment intent on cultivating PYD (Ettekal et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2017). These align well with the six overlapping and interconnected design principles of the PRIMED framework for character education, as well as the foundation of servant leadership.

There is a need for grounded, evidence-based training programs for moral character development that sport coaches can rely on and lean on that are backed up by data. As the review of literature has depicted, the great majority of current coach-training programs lack grounded, evidenced-based practices (Ettekal et al., 2017, 2018). There is a need for the data-driven research around “What Works in Character Education” (Berkowitz, 2012, 2021; Berkowitz, et al., 2005, 2007; Berkowitz et al., 2017), to be applied to the youth sport landscape, and specifically the training of coaches for moral character development of their players. Coaching for character in the field of youth sport is lagging behind teaching for character in the classroom.

The goal of this research dissertation was to apply the grounded, evidenced-based PRIMED framework for character education (Berkowitz, 2021) to sport coach training
program to bridge the research-to-practitioner gap to give sport coaches a roadmap for coaching for character development. The PRIMED framework presents what educators/coaches can do to (1) prioritize character development; (2) foster relationships of trust; (3) cultivate intrinsic motivators; (4) model character; (5) empower players; (6) commit to long-term development of character (Berkowitz, 2021).

**PRIMED for Character Education (Evidence-Based Framework) as an Intervention for Sport Coaches**

As this review of the literature attests, the field of sport coaching for character is in need to establish grounded, evidence-based interventions that emphasize the cultivation of all four domains of character (moral, performance, civic, and intellectual), but prioritizes the moral domain above all. The overlapping emphases between the PRIMED framework for character education (Berkowitz, 2021) and the meta-study by Holt et al. (2017) could provide a roadmap for sport coaches rooted in empirical data on what works in character education in schools, and thus, what could be effectively applied to the amateur youth (including high school) sport landscape.

In presenting an integration of the five conclusions from Holt et al. (2017) with the six PRIMED design principles (Berkowitz, 2021), there is clear alignment in at least three of the conclusions. Conclusion 1 (Holt et al., 2017) asserts that many factors from children’s lives affect their character development. PRIMED (Berkowitz, 2021) points to the significance of the prioritization “P” of character education in the lives of youth. It is integral that this prioritization of character is witnessed (or seen) in at least some of the countless environments or cultures in which children experience (e.g., school buildings, home life, dugouts and locker rooms).
Conclusion 2 (Holt et al., 2017) posits that cultivating a “PYD climate (based on relationships between athletes and peers, parents, and other adults) can produce PYD outcomes” (p. 38). This is tantamount to the “R” (relationships) and “M” (modeling) in PRIMED (Berkowitz, 2021) in highlighting the importance of strong and healthy relationships of trust, connection, and role modeling of what high character looks like.

Conclusions 3 and 4 from Holt et al., (2017) may be more of a stretch to justify their clear connection to the principles of the Berkowitz (2021) PRIMED framework. Thus, they will not be analyzed.

Lastly, Conclusion 5 (Holt et al., 2017) suggests that by increasing athlete outcomes deliberately geared around PYD through sport, the athletes or students will be able to transfer such character development to other areas of life and be thriving contributing members of society. The major premise of the PRIMED framework is to do precisely that through an empowering and long-term development standpoint in an effort to “nurture the flourishing of human goodness” in our youth through vehicles that they can connect with, such as sport. When school and sport educators can masterfully connect the theoretical learning and skill development to future aspirations of students, it inspires youth to want to seek out more learning for intrinsic purposes above grades or awards alone and empowers youth to set high goals and break through previous limitations (Berger, 2003; Berkowitz, 2021; Ehrmann & Jordan, 2011; Glaze, 2018; Holt et al., 2021) resulting in long-term development.

Building off these recent empirically based conclusions on character education or PYD by Holt et al. (2017) and Berkowitz (2021), this dissertation set out to take on the task of providing sport coaches with a grounded, evidence-based coach training program
that seeks to enhance coach commitment to and self-efficacy in character education and Servant Leadership with their players and teams. Five of the six design principles of the PRIMED framework for character education (Berkowitz, 2021) are reinforced through the meta-analysis of best practices in PYD. Specifically, prioritization of character development, building of strong relationships, modeling the way, empowering others, and a commitment to long-term development were results of the cross-hatching from the research by Holt et al. (2017) and Berkowitz (2021). However, it is the clarity of focus and the mnemonic aid of the six design principles of the PRIMED framework that appealed to the principal researcher of this study.

The ideal outcome of youth sport is character development in youth. With this understanding, youth sport can be conceptualized as a form of character education. Holt's meta-analysis concludes that effective PYD through youth sport involves acknowledging that sport can be utilized as a platform to cultivate positive relationships with coaches and other adult mentors. There is a need to establish clear goals and outcomes and deliberately develop life skills. Character education must be done intentionally, strategically, and with fidelity. The PRIMED framework is grounded in research and aligns well with Holt's conclusions about sport and PYD. Therefore, PRIMED is a natural framework for using sports as a platform for character education.

To be effective character educators, coaches must intentionally engage in character-focused programming as an intervention (in the case of this study, the PRIMED framework) with fidelity. Such deliberate professional development training is essential to increase commitment to and self-efficacy in character education.
If we think of coaches through a leadership lens, as the leaders of a team of athletes, one effective leadership style that maps on with character education is Servant Leadership (Bier, 2021). In my experience as a long-time coach and former professional athlete, the data and research on Servant Leadership (Durden, 2016; Ellis, 2016; Greenleaf, 1991; Spears, 2004) aligns with what I have seen to be the more effective and impactful sport coaches: a prioritization of the long-term development of character in each and every athlete; the building of strong bonds and relationships of trust between coach and athlete; a commitment to cultivating a sport culture and climate that empowers and intrinsically motivates all to be their best; and a commitment on the part of coaches to be strong and supportive role models for those that they coach and lead.

With the spotlight on utilizing effective evidence-based character education practices for sports coaches committed to this important work of character education in the athletic arena, it is useful at this point to target the desire to increase three key characteristics of coaches in this study: Commitment to, and Self-Efficacy for Character Education and Servant Leadership.

**Key Dependent Variables/Ideas: Commitment to, and Self-Efficacy for Character Education, Servant Leadership**

**Commitment**

Commitment can have countless definitions and contributing factors pertaining to character education such as persistence, motivation, perseverance, etc. For this study, I have operationalized the concept of commitment into three integral terms, which have degrees of overlap: Persistence, Follow Through on Intentions, and Grit.
**Persistence (Commitment).** To persist is “to go on resolutely or stubbornly in spite of opposition, importunity, or warning” (Persist in Webster Dictionary, 2022). This working definition for persistence in how it relates to coaches’ commitment to moral character education over performance character is fitting in that coaching for moral character is rarely stated in a coach’s job description. As noted, the prevalent transactional (extrinsically driven) approach reigns supreme in youth, amateur, and especially professional sport (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2010; Sagas & Wigley, 2014; Shields & Bredemeier, 2011; Shields et al, 2015a). In order to remain committed to moral character development, coaches must be persistent and intrinsically motivated through the long-term development of their players and teams.

**Follow Through on Intentions (Commitment).** Follow Through on Intentions is the focus of a recent study from Harvard University’s Center for Public Leadership. Rogers and Milkman (2016) emphasize that “Forming an intention is easy; following through is hard” (p. 973). In an effort to increase commitment to one’s intention, they stress the importance of keeping one’s intention(s) front and center. Rogers and Milkman posit an approach to enhanced follow through via “reminders through association.” This is highly relevant to my study because the PRIMED framework can act as a mnemonic device to do precisely what Rogers and Milkman describe in stating that “the reminder-through-association approach can dramatically increase people’s success at following through on their intentions” (p. xx).

**Grit (Commitment).** Grit is described as a combination of both perseverance and passion (Duckworth, 2016, p. 8). Perseverance is ferocious determination (p. 8), while she describes passion as “a compass—that thing that takes you some time to build, tinker
with, and finally get right, and that guides you on your long and winding road to where, ultimately, you want to be” (p. 60). Psychologist and leading expert on “grit,” Angela Duckworth, makes an argument for the everyday value of the term through the question: “How many of us start something new, full of excitement and good intentions, and then give up—permanently—when we encounter the first real obstacle, the first long plateau in progress?” (2016, p. 50). In high school sport, it takes grit for coaches to stay committed to and focused on character development, especially with the societal focus on performance character over moral character. Shields and colleagues (2018) found grit to be of great value in relation to sport, and they found that grit scores (and self-control) were higher in athletes who scored higher on “true competition”, which places the utmost value on one’s commitment to operating with high moral character. The subsequent methodology section depicts how qualitative semi-structured interviews will be conducted with coach participants focused on coach commitment to character education.

**Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy has been a focus of academic research for more than forty years and the leading expert and contributor to the field is Dr. Albert Bandura. While there are slight variations in defining the term, for the sake of this study, self-efficacy is defined as: “Beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). It is imperative that sport coaches can rely on a proven, evidenced-based framework from which to cultivate character education on a daily basis with their teams. Being equipped with a character education game plan is an integral first step, but sport coaches and classroom educators should continually seek professional development in character education to gain increased confidence and
competence in intentionally educating for character (Berkowitz, 2021 & 2022; Berkowitz et al., 2012 & 2017; Bier, 2021).

The research on self-efficacy in sport coaching (Boardley, 2018; Feltz et al., 1999; Myers et al., 2008; Myers et al., 2017; Park, 1992) is notedly rooted in the work in schoolteacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994). In referencing Coladarci (1992), Feltz and colleagues from the initial Coaching Efficacy Scale [CES I] (1999) state, “Highly self-confident teachers are more committed to their profession” (p. 765), which clearly presents a positive correlation between efficacious (self-confident) teachers and commitment to their teaching. Myers et al., 2008 (which builds off the work of Feltz et al., 1999) parallel the teaching and coaching profession in the advancement of the Coaching Efficacy Scale II-High School Teams (CES II-HST), which is a highly utilized coaching efficacy scale in sport as it has been shown to be both valid and reliable.

Staying consistent with the literature and research on sport coach training programming, both the CES I & II place less emphasis on moral character in comparison to performance character. However, the previous coach efficacy scale (Park, 1992) had completely excluded reference to a character-building component in their “Coach Confidence Scale.” The inclusion of character-building elements for effective coaching demonstrated progress as sport was clearly recognized as a mechanism for character education of youth. However, in analyzing the CES-II, only one of the five dimensions focused on character building, and only three of the items in the 18-item scale pertained to the focus of character or character development (Myers et al., 2008, Myers et al., 2017).
**Servant Leadership (Presented above)**

This study set out to increase the three key dependent variables of focus for this study on effective character education: commitment, self-efficacy, and Servant Leadership through the utilization of the evidence-based PRIMED framework for character education as the independent variable.

**Purpose & Significance of the Study**

It is critical for sport coaches focused on character education with their teams to demonstrate long-term, ongoing commitment to the facilitation of character development in themselves and their students; increase confidence (self-efficacy) in their ability to instill character; as well as increase their self-identification as Servant Leaders. The purpose of this study was to increase coach commitment to and self-efficacy for character education, and self-identification as Servant Leaders in an effort to “nurture the flourishing of human goodness” (Berkowitz, 2021) of our youth, and in this case, specifically, high school student-athletes.

With millions of youth involved in sport in North America, and across the world, the potential positive impact for good that sport coaches can play in the development of character is significant. It is integral that coaches are provided effective, evidence-based, training programs from which to influence their coaching behaviors and practices in an effort to cultivate goodness in our future generations.

**Research Questions**

In this dissertation, I explored the effects of a short six-week intervention where sport coaches were introduced to the PRIMED for Coaching framework and asked to
apply it to their current in-season coaching. In this mixed-methods pilot study, I examined the following research questions:

**Qualitative**

1. How do study participants understand and apply the PRIMED for Coaching framework by the end of the intervention period?

2. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their commitment to coaching for character?

3. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their self-efficacy as coaches of character?

4. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework will influence their coaching practice?

5. How do study participants believe the 6-week intervention supported their ability to implement the PRIMED for Coaching framework?

These qualitative questions were answered primarily via semi-structured interviews with study participants. The purpose of questions one, four, and five were to understand, from the coach’s perspective, how much they resonated with the PRIMED Coaching model and whether they believe the content will influence their practices as a coach going forward. There always exists the possibility that an intervention may fail to have an impact for a variety of reasons. It could be that the information or the model, the PRIMED for Coaching framework in this instance, fails to connect with or influence the intended audience because of the content itself. It is also possible for an intervention to fail because of the delivery of the content. The fifth question was to get at this latter possibility. The second and third questions were to gain feedback from the coaches on
whether the PRIMED for Coaching framework had any effect on their commitment to
and self-efficacy for coaching for character. This intervention was designed to be
minimally invasive. It was short, six weeks, and purposefully did not require an excessive
time commitment on the part of coaches. If the intervention was too minimal, it may fail
to adequately deliver the content. Conversely, if the intervention was too time-
consuming, it may deter coaches from participation. The third question solicited
participants’ feedback on this issue.

Quantitative

In addition to the qualitative responses from participants, I also captured pre-
post- data via surveys. The purpose here was to further assess whether the intervention
led to an increase on these scales.

1. Will there be an increase among coach-participants in self-reported self-efficacy
   for character development of high school athletes following participation in an in-
   season six-week PRIMED Coaching intervention?

2. Will there be an increase in self-identification as Servant Leaders among coach-
   participants following participation in an in-season six-week PRIMED Coaching
   intervention?

With these two research questions, I attempted to determine whether these changes were
quantifiably observable using pre- post-survey measures.

PRIMED is not a curriculum or a program. It is a framework for understanding
how to influence character. The goal of this intervention was for participants to
understand and internalize the framework. In doing so, the intervention should have
increased coaches’ commitment to and self-efficacy for character education and self-identification as Servant Leaders.

**Paper Organization**

This dissertation followed the following format: Chapter 1 began by presenting an overview of the landscape of youth sport coaching, followed by a sequential roadmap of the relevant literature presented in seven major buckets of focus demonstrating a need for the current study. Chapter 2 was where I further detailed the methods used to answer the five qualitative and two quantitative research questions. Chapter 3 provided the data that was gathered from the 11 coaches throughout the six-week intervention, and Chapter 4 presented the discussion of the data results, along with the limitations noted and future studies that could come from this current study.
Chapter 2: Mixed Methodology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

This research study used a mixed-method approach to analyze the effect of a six-week PRIMED Coaching intervention with in-season high school coaches. The mixed methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data presents a clearer understanding of the impact of the intervention (Creswell, 2005; Ivankova et al., 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

The use of mixed methodologies for research data collection can be a highly effective approach, where “quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for a more robust analysis” (Ivankova et al., 2006, p. 3; Wilson, 2014). There are many aspects to consider when conducting mixed methods research. Creswell (2003 & 2005) discusses how mixed methods are not easy and can be time-consuming and difficult to implement (especially from a qualitative standpoint for both the researcher and participants). However, Creswell (1998) and Ivankova et al., (2006) share how mixed methods are worthwhile, as they help to drill deeper and add clarity and richness.

In this chapter, the recruitment and selection criteria for study participants are explained. The description of the study methods used to answer each of the research questions is then presented.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

For this pilot study, 11 high school sport coaches as participants in a six-week intervention were recruited. The goal was to secure high school coach-participants from across the United States of both male and female genders who coach both male and female teams during the 2023 spring sports season. This allowed for a small, but heterogenous sample of coaches and cross-hatching of diverse perspectives. There were
no more than two coaches from the same school to minimize the likelihood of overlapping responses due to school or athletics department culture influence.

As a long-time youth and amateur coach, I have a broad network of high school coach contacts that I utilized to solicit study participants. To minimize the influence of personal connections on the study, no coaches with whom I was currently coaching with or against were included in the study.

I began the recruitment process by contacting individuals in my sport coaching network to target potential schools or coaches who seemed to be inclined to see themselves as character educators through their coaching. From my contacts, I solicited the names of additional individuals who were inclined to participate in the study. This sampling technique may be described as “non-random, snowball sampling” (Fowler Jr., 2009; Abowitz & Toole, 2010).

As I began to establish potential participants, I sent each of them an email invitation (See Appendix A) to each candidate. This introductory email briefly included my doctoral study of interest and coaching background, as well as the length of time and nature of the research study. Coaches who expressed interest in participating in the study were then emailed the research study consent form with an IRB-approved waiver of documentation (see Appendix B). Upon receiving notification that coaches had reviewed the consent form and wished to continue to participate in this study, they were sent two short pre-study surveys (the details of the surveys are in the next section) that include demographic and coaching information via email. Once the desired number of candidates (10-20) accepted the invitation to participate, they were selected as participants for the six-week intervention, assuming they meet the following criteria:
• Must be a high school coach
• Must be in-season during the intervention period
• May not have more than two coaches from the same school

During the selection process of potential participants, I used a purposive, non-random, snowball strategy to ensure the study sample included: males and females, coaches from various sports, geographic representation, and age/experience representation. The goal was to have a diverse group of coaches.

Selection Bias

Since study participants were self-selected to participate, the study sample was non-random. That is, they may have differed in unobservable characteristics from the average coach. Specifically, they were more likely to be interested in coaching for character education. This may have biased the study findings, but it is not readily clear in what direction. It could have been the case that it was harder for this sort of intervention to have a noticeable impact when the coaches were already predisposed to consider character development an important part of coaching. If that were the case, find could have shown more success in influencing the coaching practices of individuals who were less inclined to participate. Conversely, it may be the case that study participants were more eager to engage with the content and the materials provided. This could have led to the study having an outsized impact compared to what might be found with the average coaching population. Those questions may be explored further in future analyses.

The Intervention

Once participant interest and acknowledgment of consent were confirmed, I set up a time to conduct a 30-minute Zoom just prior to the beginning of the six-week research
study to provide an overview of the PRIMED framework as an intervention for sport coaches interested in character education and Servant Leadership as the first procedural step of the research study (as described in the next section under “Procedures”). The participants were informed that they would be receiving the two resource books (guides), as well as my PRIMED for Coaching for Character Google Drive electronic Playbook, that they could use at their own discretion to delve deeper into the six design principles of PRIMED. I used an eight-slide PowerPoint, as well as referenced and provided them access to the Google Drive, during the Zoom overview with each participant to provide them with an understanding of the PRIMED framework.

Throughout the study, coach-participants received text prompts from me on Monday and Wednesday of each week prior to their sport practice time. These texts provided short reminders about the various design principles of the PRIMED for Coaching for Character framework and ideas for applying these principles. At the intervention midway point, coach-participants were given an opportunity (optional) to join one of two sessions that Saturday to participate in a cohort discussion panel virtually, where coaches in the intervention could share ideas with me and each other regarding how they are using PRIMED. There was also a one-question open-ended survey question that was emailed to coach-participants that Saturday at the conclusion of Week Three to reflect on their understanding and application of PRIMED for Coaching. At the end of Week Six, 18-26-minute recorded Zoom semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each coach-participant. Lastly, all coaches completed two post-surveys, which were identical to the pre-study surveys.
Upon completion of the study, participants received a $50 gift card strictly for the time that they took to complete the necessary consent forms, the intervention overview Zoom meeting, the pre & post-scales, the mid-intervention survey, and the end-of-intervention 18-26-minute semi-structured interviews amounting to an approximation of two to three hours.

**Qualitative Methods**

As noted, at the conclusion of the six-week intervention, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each study participant. These interviews were conducted one-on-one and took place via Zoom. The interviews were transcribed using the built-in transcription device with Zoom audio/video. Directly after each interview, the transcripts were checked and cleaned for accuracy of the computer-generated transcription to account for computer error and unnecessary filler words. The target time for each interview was 20 minutes.

During the semi-structured interviews, I sought to answer the five qualitative Research Questions.

1. **How do study participants understand and apply the PRIMED for Coaching framework by the end of the intervention period?**
2. **How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their commitment to coaching for character?**
3. **How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their self-efficacy as coaches of character?**
4. **How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework will influence their coaching practice?**
5. How do study participants believe the six-week intervention supported their ability to implement the PRIMED for Coaching framework?

Figure 2 Paciorek-Coach of Character Semi-Structured Interview Questions (P-CCSSIQ)

1. You’ve spent the last six weeks learning about the PRIMED for Coaching Framework I. If someone asked you to explain it to them, what would you tell them? (connects with RQ1)
2. Tell me about the usefulness of the PRIMED for Coaching framework for you over the past 6 weeks. (connects with RQ1 & RQ2 & RQ4)
   Possible follow-up questions:
   a. Which aspects of the 6 design principles of the PRIMED framework, if any, did you find useful in your coaching of sport? Why?
   b. Which aspects of the 6 design principles of the PRIMED framework, if any, did you find were not useful in your coaching of sport? Why?
3. How likely are you to use the PRIMED framework with your coaching in the future? Why? (connects with RQ2 & RQ4)
4. Do you feel that your experience learning about the PRIMED framework had any effect on your daily commitment to implementing character development in your coaching? If so, how? (connects with RQ2 & RQ4)
5. Do you feel that your experience learning about the PRIMED framework had any effect on your confidence in your ability to implement character development in your coaching? If so, how? (connects with RQ3 & RQ4)
6. Do you feel that the players on your team grew in character due to your learning about and applying the PRIMED model to your coaching? (connects with RQ3 & RQ4)
7. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the PRIMED model? (connects with RQ1)

Along with the semi-structured interviews (P-CCSSIQ) with each coach-participants at the conclusion of the six-week study (above in Figure 2), all coaches were additionally asked to complete a one-question qualitative survey at the end of Week Three labeled the mid-intervention open-ended question on PRIMED commitment (MIOEQPC). This question simply asked them to provide a one-paragraph response to how they had been applying the PRIMED framework to their coaching up to that point.
Quantitative Methods

I used pre-post-intervention surveys to generate quantitative data to answer the following questions:

1. Will there be an increase among coach-participants in self-reported self-efficacy for character development of high school athletes following participation in an in-season six-week PRIMED Coaching intervention?

2. Will there be an increase in self-identification as Servant Leaders among coach-participants following participation in an in-season six-week PRIMED Coaching intervention?

**Question 1: Self-Efficacy**

The research on self-efficacy in sport coaching (Boardley, 2018; Feltz et al., 1999; Myers et al., 2008, Myers et al., 2017) is rooted in the work in schoolteacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Building off the work of Park’s (1992) “Coaching Confidence Scale,” which did not include a single character dimension for coaching efficacy, Feltz and colleagues (1999) saw the need to add a fourth dimension in the creation of their Coaching Efficacy Scale (CES). Park’s three-dimension labels were kept largely intact with only slight terminology relabeling: “teaching technique, motivation, and game strategy” (Feltz, 1999, p. 767). The added dimension was called “character building efficacy” (p. 767). As noted in the literature review, character development has taken a back seat to performance-based coaching and winning prioritization for decades. With this new 24-item CES, Feltz, and colleagues addressed the omission of character in Park’s (1992) scale.
Feltz and colleagues (1999) emphasized the importance of CES as an effective instrument for the field of sport coaching efficacy while attesting to the lack of validity for the additional fourth factor of character building: “Our research involved the development of a valid and reliable instrument, the CES, to measure the multidimensional nature of coaching efficacy and to investigate its sources and outcomes (p. 775). However, the results of Feltz et al. (1999) found the sub-scale of character building to show the weakest construct validity compared to the other three dimensions.

The same core research group, Feltz et al., (1999), proposed a refined version of the CES as CES II-HST or “Coaching Efficacy Scale II—High School Teams” (Myers et al., 2008). The main components of the updated scale brought about improved revisions to the original CES I measure Feltz et al., (1999). The CES II-HST improved clarity in the questionnaire stem, which better aligned with self-efficacy guidelines (Bandura, 2006). The new CES II-HST stem: “in relation to the team that you are currently coaching, how confident are you in your ability to…” (Myers, et al., 2008) more clearly defines the context for the coach, and construct validity.

The advancement of the CES II-HST provided a more defined specific target population of the measure for coaches of high school teams (HST). With the focused coach-participant population of this current study being high school coaches, the revised CES II-HST is appropriate. Lastly, the newly revised scale reduced the original 10-category coaching rating scale to a more manageable four-category scale. Myers and colleagues (2005) found that a 10-category scale could increase inaccuracies in responses due to the difficulty of differentiating between such a broad range. “Post hoc analysis identified an improved four-category rating scale structure: low, moderate, high, and
complete confidence” (Myers et al., 2008, p. 1063). The CES II-HST scale continues to be a commonly used measure to assess coach efficacy in the field of sport.

Despite the fact that the CES I & II only provided a portion (or sub-scale) of the instrument focused on character building, these sport coach efficacy scales have a great deal of validity and relevance to the focus of this current study. To address quantitative research question number one, I administered a sub-section of character-building dimension segment of CES II (labeled “CBSS of the CES II-HST”) prior to the start of the intervention and then again at the conclusion of the six-week intervention. The post-assessment survey was conducted after the semi-structured interviews. This was to ensure that the coaches’ reflections on the post-surveys did not sway the responses to the semi-structured interviews, which were the prioritized methodology of data collection. The CES II-HST defines character building as: “confidence a coach has in his or her ability to positively influence the character development of his or her athletes through sport” (Myers et al., 2008, p. 1070). Of the 18 items on the CES II-HST scale, three questions are specifically focused on character-building:

**Stem cited above:** “*in relation to the team that you are currently coaching, how confident are you in your ability to***”

1. “effectively instill an attitude of respect for others in your athletes”
2. “positively influence the character development of your athletes”
3. “effectively promote good sportsmanship in your athletes” (Myers et al., 2008, p. 1070).

Though there are only three questions in the CES II-HST scale geared around character-building, the truncated and concise sub-segmented dimension of character-
building works well to combat one of the concerns of coach-participant burnout (especially considering the array of mixed methods being used to triangulate the coach-participant data). The three questions of the CES II-HST (2008) model geared toward the character-building dimension have been designed to be segmented out and measured together, independently of the other four components (game strategy, motivation, teaching technique, and physical conditioning).

In investigating other sport coach efficacy-focused measures, one of the leading institutions in the field of character education, the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, provided a recent meta-analysis of the current research on coaching efficacy (Boardley, 2018). Though Boardley suggests the creation of a revised coaching efficacy model looking further into the future, he acknowledges the vast utility of Myers and colleagues (2008) CES II model. In discussing the CES II, research has been highly supportive of the relevance and validity of its usage (Boardley, 2018). The validity and utility of the abbreviated CES II scale (Myers et al., 2008) as a pre-intervention baseline for coaching character-building were given to coach-participants, along with a revised Servant Leadership scale (discussed below) that has also been found to be valid and concise (Liden et al., 2015). As is discussed in the “procedures” section of this chapter, the “CBSS of the CES II-HST” was also completed post-PRIMED intervention to measure changes in coaches’ perceived character-building coaching efficacy with their teams.

**Question 2: Servant Leadership**

There have been several valid Servant Leadership scales over the past few decades (Liden et al., 2008; Page & Wong, 2000; Wong, 2004). There is a scale focused
on Servant Leadership in coaching (Hammermeister et al., 2008), but it is lengthy and repetitive in nature and believed to be too onerous for this mixed methods study.

Liden and colleagues’ (2015) revised Servant Leadership scale (SL-7) demonstrates high validity, reliability, and internal consistency with the original SL-28 (which is cited in scholarly literature over 2,500 times) while pairing down the number of items in the revised instrument from 28 to seven (Liden et al., 2008, 2015). Given the level of support regarding the instrument’s validity and the length of the instrument, I selected the SL-7 for use in this study.

There was just one problem in administering the SL-7, it was designed for followers to rate their leader. It was not constructed for self-rating. The original seven statements are as follows:

Original Language of SL-7:

1. My leader can tell if something work-related is going wrong.
2. My leader makes my career development a priority.
3. I would seek help from my leader if I had a personal problem.
4. My leader emphasizes the importance of giving back to the community.
5. My leader puts my best interests ahead of his/her own.
6. My leader gives me the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that I feel is best.
7. My leader would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.

To adjust these questions for self-reflection, the language was modified as follows:

Adjusted Coach-focused SL-7:

1. As coach, I can tell if something sport-related is going wrong with my players.
2. As coach, I make my players’ career development a priority.
3. My players would seek help from me if they had a personal problem.
4. As coach, I emphasize the importance of giving back to the community.
5. As coach, I put the best interests of my players ahead of my own.
6. As coach, I give my players the freedom to handle difficult situations in the way that they feel is best.
7. As coach, I would NOT compromise ethical principles in order to achieve success.

With the SL-7 Scale (Liden et al., 2015), the original SL-28 Scale by Liden et al., (2008) was deliberately made more concise to avoid participant fatigue and boredom in completing the scale. The more concise SL-7 Scale maintained the same seven dimensions for Servant Leadership while reducing the total number of items to seven total while still maintaining the psychometric integrity and validity of the original 28-items scale.

Adjusting the language of the questions creates a problem in terms of validity. The revised statements and self-rating have not been validated in the same manner as the original SL-7. Nevertheless, I believe the revised statements provide a useful measure for self-reflection. Moreover, by administering the survey pre- and post-intervention, I was able to determine whether individual coaches had changed their self-perception on these measures. As with the self-efficacy measure used for question 1, the post-assessment was conducted before participants took part in the semi-structured interviews.
Procedure Summary

This research study design was intentionally devised to assure that the instruments and procedures used were thorough, concise, and directly correlated with the main research questions. Coach-participants’ time (who are volunteering their time and knowledge to this study) was also a noted concern in wanting to have all participants complete the full six-week study. Upon receiving IRB approval, and after all participants had acknowledged their consent to participate, the following procedural steps guided the interaction with all coach-participants during this study:

Step 1: Pre-Character Building Sub-Scale of Coach-Efficacy Scale II (CBSS of CES-II) and Pre-Servant Leadership Scale (SL-7)

Prior to all coach-participants being provided with an overview of PRIMED via Zoom, they were first emailed and asked to complete the pre-(CBSS of CES-II) and the pre-(SL-7) scales to establish their baseline as character builders and Servant Leaders in sport.

Step 2: PRIMED Intervention Overview

All coach-participants then received an individual one-on-one 25-30-minute virtual Zoom meeting to provide an overview of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, as well as reference for the PRIMED for Character in Sport Playbook electronic resource guide. The coach-participants were told that they could contact me with any questions that they may have about PRIMED and its application to their sport coaching at any point during the study.

Step 3: (*Optional) Coach-Participant Community of Practice (Discussion Group)
On the Saturday morning at 8am EST and again at 5pm EST at the end of Week Three of the intervention, coach-participants were provided the optional opportunity to meet for 30-45 minutes during one of these times on Zoom to share with me and other coaches in the study how they were utilizing the PRIMED framework in their coaching.

**Step 4: Mid-Intervention Open-Ended Question on PRIMED Commitment (MIOEQPC)**

The mid-intervention open-ended question on PRIMED commitment (MIOEQPC) was emailed out at 5pm on Saturday at the end of Week Three, requesting coaches to complete the one question pertaining to their usage of the PRIMED framework up to that point to be completed prior to the start of Week Four.

**Step 5: Paciorek-Coach of Character Semi-Structured Interview Questions (P-CCSSIQ)**

I conducted 18-26-minute (seven question) semi-structured interviews with each coach-participant, individually, at the conclusion of the six-week intervention. The P-CCSSIQ was conducted using the Zoom recording software.

**Step 6: Post-Character Building Sub-Scale of Coach-Efficacy Scale II (CBSS of CES-II) and Post-Servant Leadership Scale (SL-7)**

Directly after each coach-participant completed the semi-structured interview step, they were emailed the Post CBSS of CES-II and SL-7 scales which were identical to the pre-tests that they completed prior the start of the PRIMED intervention for comparison after the completion of the six-week study.

**Coach-Participant Weekly Prompts.** On Monday and Wednesdays throughout the six-week intervention (prior to normal high school practice times), I sent each coach text prompts on the PRIMED intervention to remind them to seek to apply the framework to their daily coaching. These prompts provided a visual reminder of the PRIMED
acronym as a mnemonic device, and a condensed summary of the design principle of focus that week: (one week for each of the design principles, though the coaches should certainly seek to apply all six every week).

**MIOEQPC Question Reminders.** Coach-participants were emailed the mid-intervention open-ended one question survey on Saturday at the end of Week Three and asked to complete it prior to the start of the next week.

**Data Analysis**

As stated at the start of this chapter on methodology, the use of mixed methodologies for research data collection can be a highly effective approach, where “quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for a more robust analysis” (Ivankova et al., 2006, p. 3; Wilson, 2014). There are many aspects to consider when conducting mixed-methods research. Creswell (1998) and Ivankova et al., (2006) share how mixed methods are worthwhile, as they help to drill deeper and add clarity and richness. While this study will rely much more heavily on qualitative research, the quantitative pre-&-post scales add richness to the data and findings.

**Quantitative**

When analyzing quantitative data, sample size is incredibly important. Smaller sample sizes make it difficult to draw valid statistical conclusions. For this reason, I did not conduct a statistical test of significance. Rather, I examined the pre-post responses for individual growth in perceived coach self-efficacy and Servant Leadership. Presenting the comparative pre-post-scale results for the dependent variable of coaching efficacy for character building (*CBSS of CES-II*) and servant leadership (SL-7) was a straightforward and precise way to test the my hypotheses that the PRIMED intervention would increase
the dependent variables on coach self-efficacy in the CBSS of CES-II and Servant Leadership in the SL-7. The difference in pre-post survey data provides observable surface level instances of increase that are explored further in the qualitative data analysis.

**Qualitative**

The process of thematic analysis of the coach-participant (P-CCSSIQ) interview transcripts was used as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is one of the most thorough and highly accepted methods for qualitative thematic analysis in the literature for presenting and describing qualitative data (Bryne, 2022). The six steps include (1) familiarization of the data transcript, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) presenting the findings. The six-step process is provided below in Figure 3 (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87), as well as “a 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis” (p. 96), which is provided below in Figure 4.

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**Figure 3 -6-Step Process of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes:</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes:</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes:</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes:</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Producing the report:</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview responses from coach-participants produced coded themes that relate back to the main research questions focused on: Coaches’ perceived “Commitment to PRIMED;” Coaches’ perceived “Efficacy for Character Building;” and Coaches’ self-identification as “Servant Leaders.”

The process of thematic analysis was used with the responses to the mid-intervention open-ended question on PRIMED commitment (MIOEQPC) as it related to how coach-participants were using PRIMED up to that point. However, the mid-intervention responses did not garner much added information that was not expanded upon in more detail during the semi-structured interviews at the end of Week Six.

All of the data (Quantitative and Qualitative) were collectively analyzed to answer the seven research questions in an effort to explore whether the PRIMED for Coaching for Character framework could increase sport coach perceived commitment to and self-efficacy for character development, as well as self-identification as Servant Leaders.
Ethical Considerations

_Risks and Benefits; Informed Consent; Confidentiality_

Based on the University of Missouri-St. Louis Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, all participants were respectfully treated. Upon receiving IRB approval, all coach-participants were asked to acknowledge having read and reviewed the consent form emailed to them prior to participating in this research study. No children took part in this study (all coach-participants were adults). The consent form with a waiver of documentation is provided in Appendix B.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and if for any reason any participants decided that they no longer wanted to participate in this study, they were free to do so and none of their participant responses would have been used in the study.

There were minimal risks that could have occurred from participation in this research study. They included loss of confidentiality risk. Despite the content matter being non-sensitive, I did everything I could to protect the subjects’ privacy. To help lower this possible risk, coach-participants’ information was kept as secure as possible to prevent their identity from being disclosed. In order to protect their information, I have not used or revealed their name and/or video recording in any publication or presentation from this study. Coaches who participated are listed as Coach 1, Coach 2, etc. in the final publication.

As part of the research study, participants’ image and voice were recorded in the Zoom recordings. The recordings will not be used in any presentation or publication about this research study. The recordings will not be kept for future research studies or
educational purposes. Upon transcribing and taking notes from the recording, the recordings have been destroyed to protect the participants’ identities.

It is the hope and intent of this study that coach-participants gained value, inspiration, and intrinsic fulfillment as benefits from participating in this study focused on coaching for character, however, that could not be guaranteed from the outset. While there were no guaranteed direct benefits to subjects of participation in the study, information learned from this study may help other coaches in the future by providing data on the benefits of using the PRIMED for Coaching for Character framework.

Additionally, all coach-participants received a complimentary copy of two books as resource guides: 1. *PRIMED For Character Education: Six Design Principles for School Improvement* by Dr. Marvin Berkowitz and, 2. *Character Loves Company: Defining the Teachable Moments in Sports* by Pete Paciorek (PI). These books were not required readings or prerequisites to take part in the study, but rather resource guides for coaches to refer to during the six-week study and beyond. Coach-participants also received access to my Coaching for Character Playbook Google Drive as an optional reference guide throughout the study. Lastly, all coaches who completed the six-week study were mailed a $50 gift card for their time completing all surveys, forms, and the overview meeting and interview. All 11 coach-participants completed the full six-week study, but they were told that should they decide not to complete the study, they would have received a pro-rated gift card amount for their participation in the study.
Chapter 3: Results

This study explored the effects of a brief six-week intervention where sport coaches were introduced to the PRIMED for Coaching framework. PRIMED is not a curriculum or a program. It is a framework for understanding how to influence character. The goal of this six-week intervention was for coach-participants to understand and internalize the framework and apply it to their coaching during their current sport season. Through this study, it is hypothesized that coach-participants in the intervention will have increased commitment to, and self-efficacy for, character education as well as increased self-identification as a Servant Leader. In this mixed-methods pilot study, I examined the following seven research questions (two quantitative and five qualitative):

Quantitative Research Questions

1. Will there be an increase among coach-participants in self-reported self-efficacy for character development of high school athletes following participation in an in-season six-week PRIMED Coaching intervention?

2. Will there be an increase in self-identification as Servant Leaders among coach-participants following participation in an in-season six-week PRIMED Coaching intervention?

Qualitative Research Questions

1. How do study participants understand and apply the PRIMED for Coaching framework by the end of the intervention period?

2. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their commitment to coaching for character?
3. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their self-efficacy as coaches of character?

4. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework will influence their coaching practice?

5. How do study participants believe the six-week intervention supported their ability to implement the PRIMED for Coaching framework?

**Descriptive Statistics of Participant-Sample**

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics of the demographics of the 11 high school coach-participants in this six-week mixed-methods study. The goal was to have demographic diversity in representation in the gender of the coach and the athletes they coach, sport, years of experience, level of coaching (varsity, junior varsity, freshman). Due to the limited nature of this study and the small sample size, achieving this level of diversity was difficult. Despite an effort to recruit an equal number of female and male coach-participants, there were four female coaches and seven male coaches who participated in this research, which is representative of the demographic of female: male high school coaches in the United States, which is 1:3 (Zippia.com and the National Federation of High Schools website). Most of the coach-participants ended up being primarily coaches at the varsity level. Because of the criteria for all coaches to be in-season during the time of the intervention to apply the PRIMED for Coaching for Character framework directly to their daily coaching (rather than in theory or aspiration), the number of different sports were limited to spring season sport offerings across the country. Despite this, there were still eight different sports represented. The strong majority of the coach-participants have been coaching for 11 or more years, making it a
well-seasoned and established group of coaches. Further analysis on this can be found in the final discussion chapter.

As noted in the confidentiality section of this dissertation in Chapter Two, all coaches’ names, schools, and geographic region were removed (though gender remained) and individual coaches’ data (both qualitative and quantitative) were coded by a specific number one to 11 based on when their final interview took place (e.g., Coach 1, Coach 2, …. Coach 11). It was important for research purposes to be able to match up individual coach-participant pre-post survey data to note changes from week one to week six, as well as to match up with the qualitative interviews and mid-intervention open-ended one question survey.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Coach-Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Coaching</th>
<th>3-5 Years</th>
<th>6-10 Years</th>
<th>11-15 Years</th>
<th>16+ Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Varsity</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Varsity</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Athletes Coached</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of Sports Coached</th>
<th>Tennis</th>
<th>Basketball</th>
<th>Squash</th>
<th>Volleyball</th>
<th>Field Hockey</th>
<th>Baseball</th>
<th>Track &amp; Field</th>
<th>Softball</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Quantitative Data Results**

When analyzing quantitative data, sample size is incredibly important. Smaller sample sizes make it impossible to draw valid statistical conclusions. Nevertheless, the difference in pre-post survey data provides interesting results that may be explored
further in the qualitative data analysis. Tables 1-3 and Figures 4 and 5 present the pre-post data for the 11 coach-participants’ responses who completed the six-week study in full, including demographic information. All 11 of the coach-participants who agreed to participate in the study completed the study in its entirety.

Pre-post data via surveys were gathered focused on self-perceived coaching efficacy in character building and self-perceived Servant Leader coaches. The purpose here was to further assess whether the PRIMED for Coaching Character intervention led to an increase in these two areas based on the two quantitative Research Questions (above).

**Character Building sub-Scale of Coaching Efficacy Scale-II-CBSS of CES-II**

This section presents the comparative pre- and post-scales for the three survey questions (CBSS of CES-II). Given the size of the sample being 11 coach-participants, I did not conduct a statistical test of significance; rather, I examined the pre-post responses to the three-question survey for coach-participant self-efficacy as character builders. The original CES-II HST (2008) continues to be a commonly used measure to assess coach efficacy in the field of sport. Of the 18-item scale, the three questions of the CES II-HST model geared toward the character-building dimension have been designed to be segmented out and measured together, independently of the other four components (game strategy, motivation, teaching technique, and physical conditioning). To address quantitative research question number one, I administered this sub-section of the character-building dimension segment of CES II (labeled “CBSS of the CES II-HST”) prior to the start of the intervention and then again at the conclusion of the six-week intervention. The CES II-HST defines character building as: “confidence a coach has in
his or her ability to positively influence the character development of his or her athletes through sport” (Myers et al., 2008, p. 1070). Figure 5 (below) lists the stem and three questions for the sub-scale.

**Figure 5 Stem & 3 Questions from CBSS of CES-II**

**Stem:** “*in relation to the team that you are currently coaching, how confident are you in your ability to:*”

1. “effectively instill an attitude of respect for others in your athletes”

2. “positively influence the character development of your athletes”

3. “effectively promote good sportsmanship in your athletes”

**Comparison of Pre-Post Data from CBSS of CES-II**

Tables 2 and 3 (below) present the pre- and post-scores for the overall scale scores, as well as the individual scores for the three coaching efficacies for character building questions (*CBSS of CES-II*). In comparing the full-scale results from the pre-post survey, seven of the 11 coach-participants increased in their perceived efficacy/confidence in this subset on character building on the validated coaching efficacy scale in only six short weeks, while two coaches reported a decrease, and two coaches remained the same. As a whole, the data report an average increase from 3.179 (79.5 percentile) on a 4-point scale to 3.423 (85.6 percentile). With only 11 participants in the sample size and being that the study was only six short weeks, it is difficult to say why the majority of participants increased on the scale as a whole, while a few decreased or reported no change. One notable emphasis is that the overwhelming majority of responses to the pre-post surveys were “high confidence” or “complete confidence,” with
only three responses of the 33 being “moderate confidence.” As the demographic data demonstrated, this is a seasoned and committed group of high school coaches committed to character building.

Table 2 Pre-Post CBSS of CES-II Results (full scale response to 3 questions together)
Table 3 Pre-Post CBSS of CES-II Results (responses to three questions individually)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem: How confident are you in your ability to...</th>
<th>Low Confidence</th>
<th>Moderate Confidence</th>
<th>High Confidence</th>
<th>Complete Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1...effectively instill an attitude of respect for others in your athletes.</td>
<td>Pre 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2...positively influence the character development of your athletes.</td>
<td>Pre 0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3...effectively promote good sportsmanship in your athletes.</td>
<td>Pre 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In further assessing the data, individual coach-participant responses to each question were analyzed. After the six-week intervention, coach-participants, on average, increased their level of confidence on one or more of the three measures, despite this being a highly confident group of coaches from the outset. Table 3 (above) notes that in total across the three questions, there were 14 instances where participants rated their level of confidence higher on the post survey. Meanwhile, there were six instances where participants rated their level of confidence lower. It should be noted that no coach increased or decreased by more than one level of confidence in response to the three questions, and there was only one coach with no change at all in response to this survey. There was one coach (Coach #6) who decreased by one level on all three questions from “complete confidence” in the pre-survey to “high confidence” in the post-survey. Two coaches (Coach 4 and Coach 9) increased in all three questions from “high confidence” to “complete confidence” at the end of the six-week study. There were no clear trends noted...
in any of the three questions that led to patterns of movement (increase or decrease) in participant confidence levels. Additionally, gender, experience coaching, or specific sport did not show any patterns in participant response. This quantitative data from the CBSS-CES-II scale is interesting and it is difficult to determine what caused some participants to increase and a few to decrease on certain questions. One of the overarching themes that emerged from the rich qualitative data (to be discussed later in the chapter) was that coach-participants found that the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework enabled them to self-reflect more on their current coaching practices. Upon such self-reflection, it could have been the case that coaches who rated themselves at the highest levels on the pre-survey could have realized through the use of the PRIMED framework that their current coaching practices had room for improvement.

**Servant Leadership (SL-7)**

This study utilized Liden and colleagues (2015) revised Servant Leadership Scale (SL-7) adjusted. This more concise SL-7 Scale maintained the same seven dimensions for Servant Leadership as the SL-28 Scale (Liden et al., 2008) while reducing the number of items to seven total to avoid participant fatigue and boredom while still maintaining the psychometric integrity and validity of the original 28-item scale. The SL-28 and SL-7 scales were both created for followers to complete regarding their leaders. Because the SL-7 was not constructed for self-rating, the language in these questions was adjusted to apply directly to sports coaches for this study.

Presented below (Figure 6) is the seven-question scale for the SL-7 (adjusted) used for the pre-post tests. As noted above with the CBSS of the CES-II Scale, given the size of the sample, I did not conduct a statistical test of significance.
Regarding the SL-7 adjusted scale, participants responded with their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Pre and Tables 4 and 5 (below) present the pre- and post-scores for the overall scale scores, as well as the individual scores for the seven questions of the SL-7 (adjusted). In comparing the full-scale results (Table 4 below) from the pre-post survey (SL-7), eight of the 11 coach-participants increased in their identification as Servant Leaders in only six short weeks, while one coach reported a decrease, and two coaches remained the same. As a whole, the data report an average increase from 4.34 (86 percentile) on a 5-point scale to 4.57 (91.4 percentile). With only 11 participants in the sample size and being that the study was only six short weeks, it is difficult to say why the majority of participants increased on the scale as a whole, while one decreased and two reported no change. Similar to the CBSS of CES-II scale results, a notable emphasis is that the overwhelming majority of coach-participant responses to the pre-post surveys were in the two highest levels on the scale “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree.” On the pre-scale, 67 of the 77 responses were in these two highest levels, while the post-scale number increased to 74 responses falling in this range, with the three remaining responses being “neutral,” which was the mid-level. As the demographic data demonstrated, this is
a seasoned and committed group of high school coaches committed to serving the best interests of their athletes and teams.

Table 4 SL-7 adjusted Pre-Post Results-(full-scale response to 7 questions together)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 2</td>
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<td>Coach 3</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 4</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 5</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 6</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 7</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 8</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 9</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach 10</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Series 11</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the CBSS of CES-II, through further assessment of the data, individual coach-participant responses to each question were analyzed. Table 5 data (below) indicate that there were instances of movement in individual participants’ responses to all the SL-7 adjusted questions except the last one. The fact that all coaches responded at the highest level to that final question on both the pre- and post-surveys is not surprising given the noted commitment from all coaches to being character educators. While the positive increases to participants’ levels of confidence to Questions 1-6 were modest in
nature, for a group of seasoned coaches who were highly committed to character
development coming into the study, the overall growth could be noteworthy.

Aside from Question 7 in the SL-7 scale, there were no clear trends from the data
in regard to certain questions garnering more change in participants’ responses. Two of
the 11 coaches (Coach 5 and Coach 11) showed no change in response to the seven-
question scale in either direction from the pre- to the post-results. Eight of the other nine
coaches showed instances of increase to their perceived Servant Leadership, with the
highest total number of instances of growth for one participant being six levels of
increase in total across all seven questions in the scale (Coach 3), while Coach 4 had four
instances of combined levels of increase, and Coach 1 has three instances of combined
levels of increase. Only Coach 9 recorded combined instances of decreased overall from
the pre to the post scale, though it was only by one level on Question 3 (all her other
responses remained the same). Overall, there were 21 participant instances of total levels
of increase on the post SL-7 scale (primarily one level at a time) with the largest growth
on any single question being two levels. Coaches 2, 3, and 4 increased two levels on
questions 6, 3, and 2 respectively. There were six participant instances of total levels of
decrease noted from four of the 11 participants, so the total participant instances of
increase from the pre- to the post-surveys over the six weeks was +15. Another
noteworthy takeaway from the SL-7 pre-post data in analyzing the questions individually
was that on the pre-survey, there were ten instances where coaches recorded a score on an
individual question below the highest two levels (“strongly agree” and “somewhat
agree”), while the post-survey data reported only three instances below these two highest
levels, and none were below the third level listed as “neutral.”
Summary

There were noted instances of increases in the post-surveys for most of the coach-participants’ perceived coaching efficacy as character builders and Servant Leaders from these two surveys (CBSS of CES-II and SL-7 adjusted). In administering both surveys, pre- and post-intervention of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, it can be
determined that, on average, the coach-participants have a perceived increase in self-efficacy as character educators and in their identification as Servant Leaders. The number of coach-participants (11) was a small sample size and for this reason statistical significance tests were not run. However, the comparison data between the pre- and post-survey results suggest that the coach-participants seem to have been positively impacted by the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework over the short six-week intervention period. Overall, this is a highly confident group of coaches, who rated themselves high from the outset in the pre-survey of both the CBSS of CES-II and SL-7 adjusted, which would make it challenging to see significant noted growth. While this quantitative data was not tested for statistical significance, the data was skewed in the same direction as the rich qualitative data that is presented below in the next section from the one-on-one interviews with all 11 coach-participants.

**Qualitative Data Results**

As noted in the methodology section, the qualitative mode of data collection was the prioritized method. All 11 coach-participants completed the semi-structured interviews at the end of the six-week study, which provided time for them to reflect on the intervention and provide rich detailed feedback in response to seven interview questions. These 11 interviews ranged in duration from 18-26 minutes in length. As noted in Chapter 2 (Methods), the interviews were conducted via Zoom, which provided an automated transcript at the end of each interview. The 11 coach-participants’ transcripts were thoroughly analyzed through Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis process.
Qualitative Research Questions

1. How do study participants understand and apply the PRIMED for Coaching framework by the end of the intervention period?

2. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their commitment to coaching for character?

3. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their self-efficacy as coaches of character?

4. How do study participants believe the PRIMED for Coaching framework will influence their coaching practice?

5. How do study participants believe the six-week intervention supported their ability to implement the PRIMED for Coaching framework?

There were seven semi-structured interview questions (Figure 2: P-CCSSIQ) that attempted to address these five qualitative research questions. The purpose of interview questions one, four, and five was to understand, from the coach-participants’ perspectives, how much they resonated with the PRIMED for Coaching model and whether they believed the content would influence their practices as a coach going forward. There always exists the possibility that an intervention may fail to have an impact for a variety of reasons. It could be that the information or the model, the PRIMED for Coaching framework in this instance, fails to connect with or influence the intended audience because of the content itself. It is also possible for an intervention to fail because of the delivery of the content. The fifth question was to get at this latter possibility. The second and third questions were to gain feedback from the coaches on whether the PRIMED for Coaching framework affected their commitment to and sense of
self-efficacy for coaching for character. This intervention was designed to be minimally invasive. That is, it was short, just six weeks, and purposefully did not require an excessive time commitment on the part of coaches, aside from applying the PRIMED framework to their in-season coaching during the time of the study. There was cognizant awareness that if the intervention was too minimal, it might fail to adequately deliver the content. Conversely, if the intervention was too time-consuming, it might deter coaches from participation. There was also an open-ended, one-question mid-study (end of week three) survey asking the coach-participants to share how they had been using the PRIMED framework up to that point.

The subsequent section of this Results Chapter provides the six-step process of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that was followed to process the qualitative data.

**Thematic Analysis**

**Coding Using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)**

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step process of thematic analysis (Figure 3) was used to process the qualitative coach-participant data from the semi-structured interview transcripts and the mid-intervention open-ended, one question survey. Braun and Clarke’s process of thematic analysis is seen as one of the most thorough and highly accepted methods for qualitative thematic analysis in the literature for presenting and describing qualitative data (Bryne, 2022). The six-step process was deliberately followed to include (1) familiarization of the data transcript, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) presenting the findings.
In adhering to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step process for thematic analysis, I [researcher-author] also utilized Braun and Clarke’s 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis (Figure 4).

The first step of the process mapped on with the first checkpoint: All interviews were conducted using Zoom with a high-quality speaker to capture and produce the transcriptions of coach-participant responses to the seven semi-structured interview questions. The transcriptions were reviewed fully side by side with the audio/video recordings a minimum of two times to assure that the participants’ responses were accurately recorded. During this time, coach-participants’ data were given a participant code number for the study data (e.g., Coach 1, Coach 2, … Coach 11) as noted above. All unnecessary filler words were omitted, and any reference to the coach-participants name, school, or geographic location were removed. In an effort to maintain each coach’s voice, references to team gender and player gender remained as stated by the coach. Before attempting to code the interview and mid-survey data, I spent countless hours “familiarizing myself with the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87 & 96) over a two-week period.

During the “Coding” process (Step 2 of Thematic Analysis & Checkpoints 2-6 of the 15-point checklist), all data items were given equal attention during a two-week span while thoroughly processing the data searching for initial codes. Braun and Clarke describe the Thematic Analysis coding as a “messy” process when working through qualitative data. During this initial coding process, color-coded lines were drawn back and forth attempting to group the data responses into similar buckets or initial codes. Through this first round of coding, 32 initial codes emerged. Figures 7-9 (below) provide
two of the initial color-coded transcripts, as well as a spreadsheet breakdown of codes from the 11 coach-participants’ transcripts.

At this point, and again later as themes were emerging out of the codes, I engaged in peer-debriefing from two doctoral students who had previously been trained in using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis. These peer doctoral student reviewers were asked to conduct their own thorough coding of two of the 11 coach-participant transcripts. The choices of coach transcripts were selected at random and the same two transcripts were analyzed by both reviewers. Their initial codes and themes were closely aligned with each other and there was clear alignment with my codes and themes, which provided confidence and trustworthiness to the codes and themes produced. There were a few cases where the reviewers’ codes or themes provided a more clearly articulated code or theme that I used for overall clarity.
Figure 7 Coach 1 Coding Process (color-coding)

"I think it’s been helpful to keep my attention on certain things and, you know, sort of developing young players. And you know the young man that got the opportunity to work with, just yesterday again, I think he’s come a long way, and he’s shown in a tight game against a tough team and instead of letting emotions take over, it’s just the same way as you can see in the different, and for myself and for my coaches. How do we now the teams to work with the older players to be able to handle the tough situations? In general, it’s been using the framework to center the design principles which ones, if any, do you find really useful to help coaching? And then secondary, follow up question with that is, which ones don’t you find that weren’t useful, or perhaps you had a harder time with it?"

"I don’t know there were any design principles that weren’t helpful. I think back at them again, and"

"What’s the help from?"
Figure 8 Coach 6 Coding Process (color-coding)
Applying the next three phases of the six-step process for Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis (2006), steps three to five entailed “searching for themes,” “reviewing themes,” and “defining and naming themes” (p. 87). In step three, the 32 codes of the rich qualitative coach-participant responses were electronically organized using Google Jam Boards, with each coach-participant ID having its own jam board (all 11 coaches) filled with electronic yellow sticky notes. Figures 10 and 11 (below) provide examples of two of the Jam Boards upon completion of step three. Using these initial codes to go back to the qualitative data, Braun and Clarke’s process was followed in thoroughly in “collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme” (2006, p. 87) to refine, name, and define initial themes, while eliminating overlapping themes (in
the coded themes below, LTD is short for long-term development; CD for character building; R’s for relationships; and DPs for design principles).

Figure 10 Codes to Initial Themes for Coach 9

Figure 11 Codes to Initial Themes for Coach 10

Adhering to the fourth step in the six-step process (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the sticky notes of the coded data were electronically moved around and organized around
notable themes in “generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis” (p. 87). The number of themes from each of the 11 coach-participants’ Jam Boards ranged from seven to 14 themes. Those major themes were color-coded with blue sticky notes. Figures 12 and 13 below provide examples of Jam Boards during this part of the step 4 process of Thematic Analysis. This fourth step of the Thematic Analysis process brought more clarity in visibility, usability, and organization to the coded data.

*Figure 12 Major Themes for Coach 2*
The 17 different themes produced in total from all 11 coach-participants were then reviewed and checked back to the original transcript data and checked against each other for accuracy, distinctiveness or overlap, consistency, and coherency per checklist points five and six. Per the fourth and fifth steps of Braun and Clarke’s process, the 17 themes were culled down to nine overarching themes. Overlapping themes of emphasis were combined, while themes that were not mentioned by the majority of participants were removed or included as potential sub-themes, which led to the refinement and clarification of names for each of the final nine overarching themes. These nine final themes were the most frequently noted and reflected on by the majority of coaches. Figure 14 (below) shows the 17 initial themes highlighted in green, while Figure 15 (below) provides the final nine themes.
### Figure 14 Codes (32) to initial Themes (17 in green) with Overlapping Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Themes (17)</th>
<th>COACH 1</th>
<th>COACH 2</th>
<th>COACH 3</th>
<th>COACH 4</th>
<th>COACH 5</th>
<th>COACH 6</th>
<th>COACH 7</th>
<th>COACH 8</th>
<th>COACH 9</th>
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### Figure 15 Final 9 Overarching Themes (combining overlaps)

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The final step (six) of Braun and Clarke’s Thematic Analysis process (2006) and their checklist points seven-15 were adhered to and consulted in producing the written report of the data. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, the qualitative data from the
coach-participant interviews “...tell a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic” (p. 96).

**Overarching Themes**

1. Commitment to PRIMED for Character Development
2. Confidence as a Coach of Character through PRIMED
3. PRIMED as a Guide for Character Development
4. Usefulness of Design Principles of PRIMED
5. Character Development (long-term) through PRIMED
6. PRIMED Helps Reflect and Improve
7. Other Coaches Need PRIMED
8. PRIMED Allows Authentic Values to Flourish
9. Good Struggle with Design Principles “I” and “E” of PRIMED

The nine overarching themes extracted from the whole data set from the 11 semi-structured interviews and the seven interview questions (presented above) asked of each of the coach-participants. While the foci of Themes 1, 2, and 4 were specifically inquired about through the interview questions regarding whether the intervention increased their commitment to and confidence in the PRIMED for Coaching framework, as well as the usefulness of PRIMED, the other six themes emerged more organically. Irrespective of whether the overarching themes were specifically asked about, or they emerged more organically, the presence of these themes was clearly manifested in the data. There were also sub-themes that arose from the qualitative interview data, which will be presented along with the nine overarching themes in the remainder of this Results Chapter.
Theme 1: Commitment to PRIMED for Character Development

The fourth semi-structured interview question (P-CCSSIQ) specifically asked the 11 coach-participants: “Do you feel that your experience learning about the PRIMED framework had any effect on your daily commitment to implementing character development in your coaching? The following coach-participant narratives from the interviews related to this question and the theme around commitment to PRIMED. All 11 coaches expressed their commitment to continuing to use the PRIMED framework with their coaching.

Coach #1 stated, [Speaking about the PRIMED framework] “I think that it has found its way into what I do, and how I operate. So, I’d say, moving forward, PRIMED is going to be something that I will be implementing…”

As the trend will show with the other coach-participants, Coach #2 concurred, “Oh, absolutely! We just continue on. What I'm going to do is probably print out the PRIMED six points, and just have it on my desk or somewhere I can continue to use it.”

Coach #3 stated:

Absolutely, yes! I am using it [PRIMED] in the future. It is something that if you're not using it, then you're falling behind and I always want to be that innovative person who's keeping up and who's stealing all the best ideas. So, I really like it.

Coach #4 stated, “I think it [PRIMED] is something I will definitely use going forward. I think it is going to be a big part of my plan now…of course I will continue to use PRIMED.”
Coach #5 provided what I viewed as one of the most compelling testimonies justifying his continued use of the PRIMED for Coaching framework with his sport coaching moving forward, as he compared PRIMED to his coaching Bible:

Oh, absolutely [in response to being asked directly if the coach would use the PRIMED framework moving forward after the conclusion of this six-week study].

Oh, no question about, you know. Having this kind of a framework, I think is equally as important as having just pure technical baseball knowledge in the sport. I mean this is, without sounding too bizarre, I could see where this could really become my Bible [chuckle of laughter], you know, my guideline and my book to go to when I need some reinforcement in how to be a better coach. I've been quite taken by the whole experience [of using PRIMED].

Coach #6 spoke to his long-term commitment to using the PRIMED framework with his coaching in the future. He stated, “100%, 100%...It [PRIMED] is something that I will certainly, 100%, be using going forward…I think this is the forefront.”

Similarly, Coach #7 stated, “100%. No question about it…How could you not be committed? I have seen positive results. It [PRIMED] has impacted me in a very positive way. It's shaped me in a manner that I didn't think it would shape me.”

As noted, the idea of sticking with the PRIMED model was a common theme for the coaches in the study as a way of staying committed to character education because it encompasses and helps coaches show up best in “everything” that they do.

Coach #10 was able to articulate how the PRIMED for Coaching framework was something that she feels will be much more long lasting as a coaching for character intervention than any of the numerous other professional development programs that she
had taken part during her lengthy coaching career. In response to this same interview question, “How likely are you to use the PRIMED framework in the future with your coaching?” She responded:

I think [I am] way more likely than the other character education and continuing education things that I have gone through [in previous years]. [Referring to previous programs] It is all really good, powerful stuff in the moment, but then it [previous programs] are very difficult to try to go back and apply it. Where this [PRIMED] I feel like is just so easy to apply…

This veteran coach (Coach 10) committed to character development, who often coaches all three seasons of the high school years, used the word “powerful” to describe how inspiring and well-intentioned the countless other interventions workshops around coaching for character have been in the moment. She has continuously found these previous programs to be difficult to go back to after the initial training session to apply to her coaching. However, she stated that she felt differently about the PRIMED framework due to its simplicity and application to her daily practice planning after this six-week study. In discussing increased commitment of the coach-participants, this aligns well with the feedback from review of the literature discussing the work of organizations, such as Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) and their one-day, two-hour expert coach training seminars. Ettekal et al. 2017 and Ferris et al. 2015 refer to this as the “fade-out effect” (presented in Chapter 1).

Along with this overarching Theme #1 on Commitment to the PRIMED for Coaching framework, there were two sub-themes identified in how coach-participants’ justified their commitment to continue using PRIMED.
**Sub-Theme #1.1: Coach-Participants Shared PRIMED with Their Coaches.**

In justifying his commitment to PRIMED, Coach #1 stated:

I mean, I handed the book over to one of the coaches on the staff, you know, and I'm asking him to read it and take it on, and you know the PRIMED book will also be passed around, and we will be finding ways to implement this as long as I’m up able to coach.

Within the six weeks of this short intervention, Coach #1, who is the baseball program’s head coach, had already read and shared the PRIMED book with one of his assistant coaches to read. This, and the fact that he said it will be passed around to others in the program demonstrates his commitment long-term.

Prior to the end of the six-week study, Coach #4 had already shared the PRIMED with many of the coaches in the program that he is a part of, even his superior. He stated:

And the thing is, I am also sharing it with the assistant coaches. I also shared it with our head coach of the whole program…We have a lot of alumni who come back to coach so right now some of our assistant coaches are only a couple of years removed from high school…think it's a great way to share PRIMED, and hopefully they can do the same thing as well.

Like Coach #1, Coach #4 is deeply committed to the PRIMED framework demonstrated through his sharing it with his coaching colleagues from his school.

Overarching Theme #7 expands upon this idea of sharing the PRIMED framework with other coaches, though it is more focused on the need for opposing coaches in their leagues to have PRIMED training, while this sub-theme expressed how coach-participants were already sharing PRIMED with their colleagues.
Sub-Theme #1.2-Weekly Text Prompts on PRIMED Helpful. There were coach-participants who noted in the interviews that the weekly text prompt reminders added to their commitment to using and implementing PRIMED with their coaching. Though this sub-theme has relevance to the larger overarching Theme #3-PRIMED as a Great Guide, it was directly invoked in explaining their ongoing interest and commitment.

In referring light-heartedly to the weekly PRIMED text prompt reminders that I sent every Monday and Wednesday prior to their practice time throughout the six-week intervention, Coach #2 stated, “I know that you are not going to text me for the rest of my coaching career on a Monday and a Wednesday [laughter]. So, I'm going to have a reminder of what to focus on.”

Coach #10 also noted how impactful the most commonly sent text prompt reminder provided her with an overview template that helped her stay committed to using the PRIMED for Coaching framework on a daily basis (shown in Figure 16 below). She remarked:

Especially if you put that PRIMED one pager that you sent [researcher text reminders] and I set my phone there with that up while I am doing my practice plans. It is so easy to just find a couple of ways to weave it [the PRIMED principles] into practice and to make it more purposeful in your day-to-day stuff. Coach #10 printed the overview template slide that presented all six design principles and conscientiously attempted to build these into her daily practice plan.
There were a few short videos on the PRIMED framework that were shared with the coach-participants through these weekly text prompts that support this sub-theme 1.2. Coach #6 and other coaches noted the impact that the short two-minute video on intrinsic motivation presented by Dr. Marvin Berkowitz and COSCHOOL provided on the Center for Character & Citizenship’s website (retrieved on March 12, 2023 at: https://characterandcitizenship.org/primed-co-school-videos). Coach #6 stated:

When you showed me that video about intrinsic motivation [in a weekly text reminder] that video really spoke to me… I kind of stepped back from that now and I've said, “Hey, I need to do a better job understanding exactly what a long-term success is going to be,” and I don't think giving him a toy, a trinket, or a dollar is going to do that. So, I've really tried to link it a little more towards

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**PRIMED for Coaching for Character**

**PRIMED for Character Education:**

- **Prioritization (meta)**
  - Purpose
- Relationships
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Modeling (role)
- Empowerment
- Development

--Principle 1
--Principle 2
--Principle 3
--Principle 4
--Principle 5
--Principle 6

*Over 40 years of Research and Empirical Data around What Works in Character Education (WWCE) by Dr. Marvin Berkowitz and Dr. Mindy Bier

**PRIMED is not a curriculum or program. It is a framework for understanding how to influence character in youth.

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**Figure 16 PRIMED Overview Text Reminder**
intrinsic motivation, and so that one was like. Wow! That's kind of a game changer for me. I really need to make sure that I'm being mindful of that.

While the text message brief video on intrinsic motivation proved to be a gamechanger for Coach #6, it also spoke to other coaches in a manner that increased their commitment to the PRIMED for Coaching framework. Coach #10 and Coach #11 both shared how the video of intrinsic motivation helped with their commitment to PRIMED. Coach #10 stated:

That video you sent about [text prompt video on Intrinsic Motivation], I think it was publicly praising the whole team, privately praising an individual and maybe looping the parents in. I felt like, “okay, that's something that I can do.” I can do this, and I can write this into my practice plan. And having [coach colleague] having gone through this with me, I have an accountability partner within my own department is really powerful.

Coach #11 referenced the same video on intrinsic motivation but with a separate focus in stating:

[With] intrinsic motivation, I really connected with the video that you had shared [in weekly text prompt] with that [design] principle of how the school principal in St. Louis wrote notes home to the parents, and how that maybe was the first time that they had ever received something good about their child. I don't think I'll ever forget that story.

The connection that these coaches made with the text message video on intrinsic motivation increased their commitment to using the PRIMED for Coaching framework.
This sub-theme 1.2 that emerged from the coach-participant interviews demonstrates that the weekly text prompts enhanced their commitment to PRIMED.

There were other sub-themes that connected to the overarching Theme #1 on Commitment to PRIMED. The two most prevalent were around coaches’ commitment to long-term development and how the PRIMED framework aligned authentically and naturally to what these coaches were already doing in their commitment to using sport as a vehicle to promote character education in their teams. These two potential sub-themes emerged into overarching Themes #5 and #8.

From the coach-participant responses, the PRIMED for Coaching framework seemed to have had a positive impact on the commitment of the coaches who took part in this six-week study. While the inspired tone of voice from the coaches during the interviews cannot be adequately accounted for during the written transcription process, the PRIMED for Coaching framework made a lasting impression on all of the coaches and they were committed to utilizing it in the future with their sport coaching. The coach-participants noted that the PRIMED framework also impacted their confidence positively, as will be discussed in the next theme.

**Theme 2: Confidence as Coach of Character through PRIMED**

While confidence is not a direct synonym for self-efficacy, it was the term that most sport coaches could identify with. Self-efficacy is defined as “Beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). In this case, the focus is on coach-participants’ confidence in their ability to act as character educators with their players and teams. The fifth semi-structured interview question (P-CCSSIQ) specifically asked the 11 coach-
participants: “Do you feel that your experience learning about the PRIMED framework had any effect on your confidence in your ability to implement character development in your coaching?” The following coach-participant narratives from the interviews related to this question and theme around confidence in PRIMED. Ten of the 11-coaches (Coach #1 suggested that more time was still needed to reflect on it), expressed that the PRIMED framework had a positive effect on their confidence as character developers through their sport coaching.

While Coach #1 was not able to confirm at that time whether the six-week study had any effect on his confidence to see himself as a character educator through his sport coaching, he did recognize that he had a chance to reflect on it. He stated, “Maybe a little bit, but I don’t know that I saw a confidence boost in it. Maybe upon further reflection…It was just more of a way of tying it all together.”

The remaining ten coach-participants clearly expressed that the PRIMED for Coaching framework positively affected their confidence as character builders. Coach #2 stated, “[PRIMED] gave me like a stamp of approval…there is a [character] foundation that is a must, and I think PRIMED is reiterating that this still must be done.”

Coach #3 also found PRIMED to provide a similar stamp of approval in stating: Yes, I don't want to implement anything unless it has been battle tested, and there has been data to support it…Absolutely. Yes. I feel like if you are doing all of it and you're following the framework of PRIMED then you're doing the things you need to be doing and that's going to give you confidence as a coach. If you know that you are acting with purpose, and you are creating relationships with all of the stakeholders, and you're empowering those around you…if you're doing all those
things, how are you not confident? It [PRIMED] has definitely helped me with my confidence as a coach.

**Sub-Theme 2.1 Proven Framework Boosts Confidence.** In discussing this theme of increased confidence through PRIMED, many coach-participants noted that the proven research behind the framework helped prove its validity and effectiveness. Confidence in the research was a notable sub-theme that emerged. Coach #4 reflected on this point:

I think the framework has built my confidence as far as that goes. Having the framework and the book and using it [PRIMED] has built my confidence. I’m using it as it’s a proven study. It’s allowed me to really take it to the next level… I believe so because of the research and the background behind PRIMED. I believe it. When you have research backing it, then you know it's easy to apply it. It is something that has been proven before. And, so, I think, with the research and proof that it's real.

Coach #6 expressed how PRIMED affected his confidence, “Yes, because I feel like when I am PRIMED and I feel like I have got this process behind me, I've got purpose to what I'm doing. Likewise, Coach #7 stated, “Yes, PRIMED is giving me more [confidence]…it gives me that confidence to stand on those pillars and trust myself and trust this. Trust the [design] principles…”.

Similar to Coach #4, Coach #8 spoke to how the wealth of research and expertise in the field of character education that laid the foundation for PRIMED increased his confidence in many of the coaching for character practices that he had been using prior, as well as new ways and approaches rooted in the empirical data. He stated:
Yes. It [PRIMED] did give me a lot more confidence…when you have somebody who has studied it for 40 years [Dr. Berkowitz] and was writing about it, …It just gives you more confidence that maybe I’m on the right track.

As a youth coach of 25 years, primarily at the high school varsity level, I can attest that coaches can often get sidetracked by the pressures to win, so the PRIMED for Coaching framework’s focus on character can build confidence in keeping the “big thing”—character development front and center. Coach #10 articulated this in her response:

I think having the science-backed research about character education, and it almost props you up to say this is the right thing to do. It [being a coach of character] is hard…So, I think if it does anything [with confidence], it boosts you up in those hard moments where this is going to be tough. The parents might be mad, and it could be ugly for a day or two, but it is the right thing to do.

Doing the “right thing” as a coach can be the hardest part of the job because it often means having difficult conversations and holding the standard high for one’s players. More than two decades of research by Berkowitz and his colleagues on “What Works in Character Education” that went into the PRIMED framework played integral in Coach #10 and other coaches’ increased confidence in these tough, character-based decisions.

Coach #11 stated, “…the fact that it [PRIMED] is backed by research, that allows you to step with more confidence and I know that it will give results and ultimately be the best for the athletes.” She summed up this theme well with her use of the phrase “step with more confidence” in regard to utilizing the PRIMED framework to more confidently
commit to coaching their sport with an eye and focus on developing character in their players and teams long-term. To know that PRIMED is rooted firmly in empirical data allows for such confidence or self-efficacy in coaches to see themselves as coaches of character. The PRIMED framework seemed to have increased the coaches’ commitment and self-efficacy (Themes 1 & 2) as character educators through their sport. The third and fourth themes delves deeper into the usefulness of PRIMED as a whole, as well as its six design principles.

**Theme 3: PRIMED as a Guide for Character Development**

In Theme #3, coach-participants expressed how they found PRIMED to be a framework to guide or center their philosophy with increased purpose as coaches of character. One coach was so taken by the PRIMED for Coaching framework that they stated how it had become his Bible for coaching. Once again, with this overarching theme, all 11 coach-participants noted how the PRIMED for Coaching framework had a centering effect that has helped guide and focus them as coaches of character.

Coach #1’s response below reflects this resonating theme from all of the coach-participants regarding this centering effect:

I think it [PRIMED] has been helpful to focus my attention on certain things…developing young students… I think it just gives me a hook to hang that hat on. Instead of just speaking out into the ether about being a good person, I'm trying to empower them [my players] to step into that role. My big thing in my program is, “Step up, lean in and lay out,” and so it's giving kids a way to center that focus.
Coach #2 stated, “I think PRIMED is a great tool…I'm obviously a huge advocate of it, because it touches very well on the philosophies that I've been coaching with for years.” He continues:

Start right there: Start with PRIMED. Start with this little simple understanding, and there is a wealth of information out there that they can branch off into. That is how I look at it. It could be more of an opening up of Pandora's box, as there is so much more in there.

Coach #3 was like the other coach-participants in discussing how the PRIMED for Coaching framework has become a guide or centering focus, as they spoke to the ease and simplicity of the acronym P.R.I.M.E.D.:

I feel like PRIMED is a really good acronym that I found really easy to remember… I just like that it is clear. It is easy to understand. It is easy for coaches to look at the PRIMED framework, to think about the framework and apply it. It is simplistic, but it's also very practical and useful and it gets to the core roots of coaching…There are so many things that are transparent with it [PRIMED] that I feel like it's very, very useful, and very beneficial.

Coach #3 focused on the foundational grounding for coaches who may not be winning on the scoreboard as often as they would like that the PRIMED framework can provide in helping them see that what they are engaged in as a coach of high school athletes (in this case) is more about building character and life skills. She stated:

…This [PRIMED] framework is great. It's a really good foundation for all coaches… It can be easy for them to hang their head and lose purpose because they're not winning when really, they could fall back on this [PRIMED]
framework and say, "I'm doing way more important things than teaching them how to play the sport even over winning. I'm helping prepare future leaders and lifelong learners to be engaged citizens." This could help give coaches that perspective outside of the wins and losses.

This is the type of re-centering that all coaches need.

Coach #4 shared how PRIMED is guiding him in preparing for practice and games with purpose. In essence, it is allowing him to show up with a better focus on long-term development of the members of his team.

In the world of sports, especially in the United States, one could argue that sport has become a religion for some. If that is the case, Coach #5 suggests that PRIMED can be a sort of Bible for coaching for character:

Having this kind of a framework, I think, is equally as important as having just pure technical baseball knowledge in the sport. I mean this, without sounding too bizarre, I could see where this could really become my Bible [chuckle of laughter], you know my guideline and my book to go to when I need some reinforcement in how to be a better coach. I've been quite taken by the whole experience [of using PRIMED]…Now, I go down a personal checklist and PRIMED has helped me do that because things are so well laid out about how to organize yourself.

As a seasoned coach-educator, Coach #5 was not alone in articulating how the PRIMED for Coaching framework has refocused him in a freeing way that feels better than being so focused on the scoreboard as the judge of success.

Coach #6 also shared a similar sentiment in stating:
The PRIMED process really took me and centered everything together and brought it all in one place… Now I have this acronym that I can really easily go back to when things get going…To be able to go back and say, “Okay, I gotta get back to Ground Zero. I gotta get back to basics.”

Coach #6’s response below aligns well with what Coach #5 and the other coach-participants noted regarding the freedom that a foundation in PRIMED provides. This freeing effect away from the “winning is everything” trap that coaches of competitive high school sport often get caught up in, which can shift their focus off the process of developing habits in young people to be successful adults:

I feel like when I am “PRIMED” and I feel like I have this process behind me, I've got purpose to what I'm doing. It is easy for a coach to get wrapped up in the wins and losses during the springtime season. I really think that doing the PRIMED study during the spring season, which is in the height of battle here, was a big blessing. I'm telling you for the first time in I don't know how many years, I didn't look at the rankings [state and national rankings for baseball] this week. Because, for the first time, I really don’t care.

It came down to the fact that I really feel like I'm just worried about the purpose behind our work [coaching]. I'm worried about the relationships [amongst the team]. I’m worried about intrinsically motivating these kids and modeling the behavior we're looking for and being able to empower these kids to be the best they can, and then showing up and developing these guys. I feel like over the course of the year, if we do that, the scoreboard is going to take care of itself. And we will be fine…I’m not going to let the wins and the losses and the rankings
from the [High School State Association] steal my joy because now you're comparing yourselves to others. It [PRIMED] has really allowed me to stay grounded, and it's allowed for a lot of freedom mentally.

Such profound statements about how the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework is helping ground long-time sport coaches in a manner that brings about increased freedom and contentment aligns with the research that supports the framework around the “I” in PRIMED for intrinsic motivation. When coaches are solely coaching for the “wins” and trophies, they are seeking extrinsic motivators, as described in Chapter 15 “The Perils of Extrinsic Motivators” in the PRIMED guidebook (Berkowitz, 2021, pp. 113-117). However, coaching for the long-term development of their players (long after they leave their sport programs) is intrinsically motivated. Berkowitz (2021) gives this definition, “Intrinsic Motivation: Valuing something for its own sake and not for its consequences (e.g. rewards, punishment, recognition)” (p. 123). We will take a deeper dive into intrinsic motivation in the final theme.

Coach #6 shared how PRIMED has positively shifted his mindset in this way, which has been a blessing for his well-being, for which he expressed great gratitude for being introduced to this grounding framework:

This study has been a real blessing for me to be able to do this during the spring season, because it's helped me stay grounded and stay on track with what's most important, which is these children and helping grow these guys and helping them grow themselves and changing their mindsets as well… How can I impact people for the next generation to change the world? And I think PRIMED really has the
ability to do that if you're able to implement it on a daily basis, which I certainly intend on.

Coach #6 hit the nail on the head, that positively impacting the next generation through the vehicle of sport and equipping them with life skills that stay with them long after their sports careers end is what the most impactful coaches do.

Coach #7 also found PRIMED to be a helpful tool to focus or re-focus on coaching for character:

Being able to use PRIMED as a tool has helped me become better, and helped my team get better. Eventually I'll start tailoring PRIMED and the [6] principles to [coach’s name omitted] my PRIMED. There's a lot of stuff that you can take from it, and there’s a huge thing I’m taking from it…It has impacted me in a very positive way. It's shaped me in a manner that I didn't think it would shape me.

Like the others, Coach #9 saw PRIMED for Coaching Character as a way to re-center her focus back to character development. For her as a long-time character educator, PRIMED was a powerful tool in her toolbelt:

It is five minutes to dwell and re-center in this case. How can I better apply this [PRIMED]? You know, what's the thing tomorrow that can be a teachable moment and trying to be proactive, and that was my takeaway… It [PRIMED] provides more tools for the toolbelt…We have to keep evolving and keep growing. And this [PRIMED] is definitely another way to do that… I think this is imperative for anyone in that school setting to have these kinds of tools [the PRIMED framework] at their disposal.
Coach #10 printed out one of my early text message prompts to all coaches that summarized the six PRIMED design principles, and she would set that next to her as she was planning out her practice each day. That way PRIMED could more purposefully help guide her each day and ensure that character development was always front and center in her mind.

Coach #11 used terms such as eye opening and at the heart of character education in referring to how the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework was guiding her focus and purpose for coaching. Similarly, to the other coach-participants, she sees it as a powerful tool to guide that aligns with what she finds to be important:

It [PRIMED] is laid out very clearly, and I think it is more tangible…I feel like this [the PRIMED framework] is futuristic in a sense. This has to be the future to figure out how to motivate athletes. So, that was really inspiring, and it gives me a sense of hope. I think I need and want to learn more. It [PRIMED] leaves me with that hunger to learn even more.

While all of the coach-participants expressed how they saw PRIMED as a helpful guide (and potentially the future of coaching for character per Coach #11’s hope) to keep them committed to their purpose as coaches of character, they also found the six design principles to be highly useful in and off themselves.

**Theme 4: Usefulness of the Design Principles of PRIMED**

Another major theme that was specifically asked during the post-intervention interviews pertained to its usefulness and applicability. The second semi-structured interview question (P-CCSSIQ) specifically asked the 11 coach-participants: “Tell me about the usefulness of the PRIMED for Coaching framework for you over the past six
weeks.” The following coach-participant narratives from the interviews related to this question and theme around the Usefulness of the Design Principals of PRIMED.

In order to be able to apply something, one has to first be able to understand it. The same can be said for being influenced by something. All of the 11 coach-participants articulated how they found the design principles of PRIMED to be useful and/or applicable in their own different ways. Coach #1 summed up the coaches’ thoughts on the utility of the PRIMED for Coaching framework and these six design principles, “I think it [PRIMED] gives me a hook to hang that hat on, instead of just speaking out into the ether about being a good person.”

While Coach #1 expressly stated that all six design principles to be highly applicable to his coaching for character, there were key design principles from the PRIMED framework that each of the coach-participants found especially useful and applicable to their coaching for character, which are noted in the three sub-themes below.

**Sub-theme 4.1 Design Principle Prioritization Useful.** In alignment with all of the other ten coach-participants, Coach #3 found that the first design principle, prioritizing character, was a key takeaway from using the PRIMED framework with her coaching. She stated:

Prioritization is important and that first key piece. I feel like if you [as a coach] don’t prioritize character and you don’t prioritize relationships or intrinsic motivation or empowerment and prioritize those things, as well as development, then it would not be useful. So, I felt like after I talked to you [initial overview prior to week 1] my biggest thing was having to reflect on what I’ve been prioritizing, and then move from there.
Yeah, I really have leaned into the development piece… We can get so caught up as coaches in the x's and O’s, though I’m not a football coach. But we can get so caught up in stats and mechanics, and all these things that we forget about the development and seeing these individuals as individuals. And what's most important, and the things that we need to really focus on.

Because this sub-theme on design principle #1 “Prioritization of Character Long-Term” was so frequently discussed, it emerged as overarching Theme #5.

**Sub-theme 4.2 Design Principle “Relationships” Useful.** The PRIMED framework speaks to the necessity for character educators to build relationships of trust with all stakeholders. Berkowitz (2021) emphasizes the importance of “intentionally and strategically nurturing healthy Relationships within and across all stakeholder groups” (p. 30). For sport coaches, this consists of athletes (including those on opposing teams), coaches, administrators, parents, officials, fans, family, etc. Ten of the 11 coach-participants specifically spoke to the value of PRIMED’s emphasis on this second design principle: Relationships. On this note, Coach #1 stated:

> Relationships are big. Everything starts with relationships to me. You know, building relationships with my student-athletes with my coaches…We bring up a guy to the varsity, and immediately I want him to know "you belong here, and I need for you to find a guy that you can follow." And I talk to the guys about building a relationship with the younger guys coming up.

Coach #2 was, perhaps, the most seasoned coach of the group, and one who has been committed to what would be defined as old-school character education through sports for decades. For this reason, I sensed in our initial Zoom overview session that
Coach #2 was a little skeptical of the potential usefulness that the PRIMED for Coaching framework could have on them. However, Coach #2 provided salient feedback on the usefulness of PRIMED and specifically building lasting relationships of trust. He stated:

But what PRIMED helped me to understand is that winning is not the ultimate goal…That's why I mentioned the previous player. Because I don't think, if I was that intimidating and flew off the handle, that he would be able to come to me. Especially with him being an emotional kid. I mean, he's a kid who this year is a senior, and he had a bad outing [baseball term for performance] and he was almost to tears, you know that emotional type of kid. So, if I was able to do that in six weeks by opening up that gate, and not being so “don’t come to me” [unapproachable]. Nobody wants to come to you if you're going to stab them more. So, it's more of a softening of the relationship, so that they come to you for help and lifting, as they don't need any more criticism...So, if anything, I could see that is why I say that it was a big surprise to me that he actually reached out on the phone call. Maybe it was because of PRIMED.

This was a vulnerable acknowledgement from a highly seasoned coach that he could recognize how the PRIMED design principles, and specifically building relationships of trust, were contributing factors in the positive growth that was unfolding right before their eyes. The “opening up of that gate” and his “thinking more intentionally after games” were demonstrable proofs of the utility of the PRIMED for Coaching framework.

Continuing in on this theme of relationship building through PRIMED, Coach #2 stated:
It [PRIMED] definitely gives you an opportunity to be aware of some key issue or perhaps to take it into a better relationship with my players, a better relationship with the parents and the overall development of the boys, not only as athletes, which I don't think a lot of coaches make that their number one priority…more on the one-on-one relationship principle in that you have to carve out time to do that, along with all the practice planning and everything else that you do, you really have to carve that out? And that was really the one (Design Principle) that stuck out to me.

Coach #2 was clearly struck by the relationship building conversation that one of the senior players on the team initiated with him. This player had never been able to express himself to his coach in this manner prior and he [coach #2] felt that perhaps his work with PRIMED over the past six weeks had positively attributed to this by “opening the door” and being more committed to building stronger relationships of trust with his players. For a self-described hard-nosed, old-school coach, Coach #2 was notably impressed by the scenario that is depicted below with one of his players:

I had a player for example…He said, “Hey, coach, can you talk?” And I said, “Sure.” So, he called me. For him, in that moment, to be able to call me on an individual basis and clarify [something he had been doing incorrectly in practice]. And the fact that he reached out to me and said, “You know my answer kind of came out wrong,” and he wanted to clarify; I just reiterated that I'm with him! "You were doing a good job.” So, for me, that was a big deal. As the head coach and the decision maker, there can be an intimidation factor for players. They'll say stuff [communicate more openly] to the assistant coaches and everything else. But
they are sometimes scared to come one-on-one and talk to the head coach. But I thought it was a big growth process, and I'm not sure if it is because of how I have changed my approach [through PRIMED]. I'm trying to open up that opportunity where, "Hey, let's talk about it” to build that relationship so they can come to me one on one. For this individual, in particular, that was a huge hurdle for certain through a one-on-one phone conversation, and not just texting because for these boys that's kind of big especially when they are just 16, 17 and 18 [years old] It's a big step…I think the biggest one [design principle] is the relationship one to me.

In discussing the usefulness of design principle two, Coach #7 appreciated how PRIMED has enabled him to focus more intently on building relationships of trust with players on his team. This has allowed for a more open and transparent communication process where his players feel that they can trust coming to him for support. He stated, “I’m seeing a little bit more of a trust from the kids…Now that I've gotten into PRIMED, there is no question that I need to be less top down and build stronger relationships.” Coach #7 continued to share how PRIMED has enabled him to realize the need to cultivate stronger relationships:

Going back to relationships, never should a player ever be scared to come talk to the coach. I mean, that's old school. I've seen it the last four years and I’ve beat my head into the ground… I'm a guy that wants to build those relationships. But with the other things I was just floating until I started reading the PRIMED book, and I started thinking about everything I needed to do differently.

Coach #11 reflected on how PRIMED helped her be better at intentionally building relationships of trust with her players:
With the relationships part, there is a line from the PRIMED book [Berkowitz, 2021] that says, “Relationships save lives.” That also resonated with me on just how important it is for athletes to have that sense of belongingness and being part of something that is bigger than themselves. It really helped me to be more intentional and going through all those steps [of the six design principles] was very valuable.

…With the relationships piece, I certainly have room to grow in being intentional and showing up every day for them and looking them in the eyes and acknowledging them as people and being intentional about it.

**Sub-theme 4.3 Design Principle Empowerment Useful.** Design Principle #5 of the PRIMED framework focuses on Empowerment. Berkowitz (2021) describes the importance of “creating a culture and governance structure that Empowers all stakeholders, by inviting their voices, listening to those voices, and seriously considering what they have to say, so that each one has the possibility of making a significant difference” (p. 30). In the sport landscape, this is an area that many sport coaches struggle with, as they are often used to maintaining authoritarian, dictator-like control, rather than empowering athletes as leaders. However, a majority of coaches mentioned that they found the inclusion of the design principle empowerment to be useful in their commitment to coaching for character.

Coach #3 became more focused on finding ways to effectively empower her team. She stated:

As far as the empowerment piece goes, I know you talked about allowing players to have input and allowing players to even help teach other players. So, in
practice, I've leaned on our veteran players to help support our instruction more. I've asked that our juniors and seniors, and even some of our sophomores that are of our varsity players, “Can you help that player?... Can you talk about why this core value is important to our program” and explain how it applies to them. So, we've added in those discussions before practice and during practice and after practice. And we've been hearing a lot more from our players. So, I think that it has been a change, and it's been good.

Continuing with the theme of usefulness of the empowerment design principle, Coach #3 continued:

Some of the best ideas that our players can get are ones from their teammates, not just us coaches. I could tell a kid over and over again mechanically how to do something, and I have. I've seen it the last few weeks where I've said in a hitting station [drill work], “Well, tell your partner [teammate] what you do, what you think about to hit that outside pitch, or what you think about to not drop your back hand, or your backside, or whatever.” And then I've seen our players helping each other through that, and it's like some of the things they've said to their partner resonates quicker than what I've said [coach chuckles]. So, my focus on empowerment has actually helped me because, well, they got it from a teammate, and I don't have to keep saying that same thing over and over again. It has helped. It's actually helped all around and been beneficial... I really like the PRIMED framework. I think it's very applicable. It's very beneficial.

Like Coach #3, for Coach #4, the “E” for empowerment was also a big point of emphasis that he saw marked improvement in through his learning about PRIMED:
On Saturdays, what I’m implementing is a system where a pair [of student-athletes] will lead a 15-minute drill allowing them to be the one to demonstrate and to instruct...I definitely did not do it before. But we talked about the framework and the empowerment piece of it and trying to get them to get it and get outside themselves and be more inclusive in finding ways to lead.

In talking about upcoming youth sports clinics that Coach #4’s team will be facilitating in the summer, he expressed his excitement for how this connects to empowerment:

Part of that empowerment piece is that our players are the ones really running the drills and demonstrating for the sixth and seventh graders that are coming up from middle school that eventually will make it to high school. A big part of it is introducing the game. The other part of it is just getting them interested in getting in the program and playing for the JV, but these guys are doing the demonstrating. They're doing everything: I mean, we're overseeing as coaches, and we're integrating as well. But they're doing most of the work with the sixth and seventh grade kids.

Coach #7 is also utilizing the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework to be find more meaningful ways to empower his team:

I’ve started doing it [empowerment] with my captain. Before it was, I just told him to do things, instead of now, “Hey, what do you think of this and what did you think of that?” I am more about trying to empower him. And then getting the other guys as well empowered. Now, this is a collective group. It’s trying to get everyone feeling responsible to the team. You know we all need to be holding
each other accountable and being able to have that conversation empowering them all to be leaders and see that, “Look, there's not only one leader. There are nine leaders, plus another five on the bench.”

… I’m being more collaborative with my players. They are understanding a little bit more that coach is allowing us to talk to him about things. This is allowing them to play with greater confidence, you know so, and that’s something we’ve kind of struggled with previously not having this. Just by empowering them and being more on building trust in relationships with them.

As noted by many other coaches, Coach #7 is finding that his focus on empowering his players is leading to stronger relationships of trust and noticeable increases in confidence in his players.

**Sub-theme 4.4: Useful for Players to Grown in Character.** In response to whether this coach felt that his players had grown in character due to him learning about PRIMED, Coach #1 stated:

Yes, I can say that with certainty. You know the empowerment of the young men that I get the opportunity to work with, and the development side that I get to work with them on. With prioritization we have had conversations about how to prioritize yourself, how to prioritize the team, how to prioritize a school. We have the end of our quarter coming up and grades are due, and we’ve had that side of the conversation. Yes, I can say that without fail, that this [PRIMED] framework has helped the young men that I get to work with.

It is impressive to hear from Coach #1 that he felt that his players had grown in character due to his understanding and application of the PRIMED for Coaching
framework and the six design principles, and specifically the empowerment piece. While not every coach felt that they could attest to noticeable growth in character in just six short weeks, many coaches responded in a similar manner within this theme.

**Sub-theme 4.5 All Design Principles Working Together.** Coach #8 and Coach #9 spoke about the collective impact of the six design principles that make up the effectiveness of the framework, Coach #8 stated:

> It is a thought model for coaching. Everything that I know about PRIMED, I try to apply to what I do which is coaching. In my mind, it is a thought model for making coaching more efficient…When I started focusing on the individual components [design principles] of the model, it was extremely helpful.

Coach #9 reflected, “I would say the process overall here [with PRIMED] and looking at those six letters [design principles] provides an easy way to remember it and that was helpful.”

**Sub-theme 4.6 Design Principles Help Reflection.** When asked if she found PRIMED for Coaching to be a helpful in preparation for practice or reflection afterwards, Coach #3 stated:

> Yes, for sure. Pre-practice to figure out what am I going to do today to build relationships and how am I going to work that into the instruction that has to take place? And then, how am I going to model? How are my assistants going to model? How are the players going to model? And then afterwards: How am I going to empower our kids while doing all of those things? So, I would ask myself a lot of questions beforehand so that I could purposely integrate all that.
This post-practice or competition reflection is an overarching theme that will be unpacked more fully in Theme #6.

**Sub-theme 4.7 Design Principles More Difficult to Apply.** Many of the design principles that make up the mnemonic device PRIMED were easy for coaches to apply over the course of the six-week study, though there were two that were commonly noted to be more challenging for coaches to fully understand and apply to their coaching: Intrinsic Motivation and Empowerment. These will be discussed in the final Theme #9 labeled “Good Struggle with Some DPs.”

**Sub-theme 4.8 Design Principle Development Long-term Useful.** The final design principle Development (long-term) was another sub-theme that was reflected upon by the overwhelming majority of the coach-participants, and thus it will be the focus of the upcoming overarching Theme #5. This next theme focuses on the coaches’ prioritized commitment to character development long-term, which encompasses the two bookends to the PRIMED framework: Prioritization and Development long-term of character.

**Theme 5: Character Development (long-term) through PRIMED**

While Prioritization of character is the first design principle, Development (long-term) is the sixth design principle “D” of the PRIMED framework. There was a clear and resounding emphasis undergirding the prioritized effort of the coaches who participated in this study. Character Development (long-term) is one of the nine overarching themes that came out of the coding and thematic analysis process. As noted in the Review of the Literature in Chapter 1, Berkowitz (2021) states, “Character is an aspect of the nature of the person, character development consists of the psychological processes that bring about the growth of character, and character education is the intentional nurturing of
those developmental processes through the practice of families, schools, and other contexts” (p. 17), and those “other contexts” would include sport. In this study with in-season high school sport coaches, the prioritization of character development was noted throughout the post-study coach-participant interviews. While the three of the first four overarching Themes emerged from specific interview questions (P-CCSIQ) asked of each of the 11 coach-participants, the remaining seven overarching themes came about more organically.

The following coach-participant narratives formed the Overarching Theme Character Development Long-Term through PRIMED.

Coach #1 felt strongly that, “At the end of the day, or before the day begins, how can I do a better job of developing young people.” This coach is clearly seeing PRIMED as a framework to better cultivate him as a cultivator of character in the student-athletes that he works with.

The positive impact that PRIMED for Coaching Character is having on the players on Coach #1’s team this season, in only six short weeks, has been notable. He spoke to how he felt his players had grown in character due to his learning about the PRIMED for Coaching framework. He stated, “Yes, I can say that, without fail, that this [PRIMED] framework has helped the young men that I get to work with.” In the short six weeks of this pilot study that was remarkable to hear.

Coach #2 saw PRIMED as a way to build “young men of character:” He stated, “It [PRIMED] definitely gives you an opportunity to make them more of great young men of character and understanding the values they can bring to society, not just as an athlete. Along with building character long-term in his players, Coach #2 recognized and
appreciated how PRIMED was helping to build his character as well. As will be discussed further in overarching Theme #6, Coach #2, as well as the majority of coach-participants, found that PRIMED helped him improve and reflect upon his own character, along with this current theme on building of long-term character.

Coach #3 reflected on how PRIMED relates to the principles of Servant Leadership in stating:

It is all about Servant Leadership and how we can best develop lifelong learners, and send these kids, send our student-athletes, out into the world better equipped with the right character development tools, and the things they need to be successful.

…We can get so caught up in stats and mechanics, and all these things that we forget about the development and seeing these individuals as individuals. And what is most important, and the things that we need to really focus on.

While the above response is more focused on the character development long-term of her players, Coach #3’s response below is more focused on her own personal character development, which in the end is modeling high character for her team:

Am I being that coach of character that I want to be? My goal, throughout the years, has been to remain even-keeled emotionally, because it's easy to get caught up in the emotions of the game, even as a coach. So, PRIMED has really helped me during practice and during games to remember, “Okay, what's my purpose here?”

Coach #4 also expressed the importance of long-term character development in his players in stating, “I know PRIMED was originally focused on the education
side in schools but, in our case, we are applying it to our student-athletes on the sports side to ensure that these kids are really growing up to be bigger and better people in life.”

It is powerful to hear high-level, competitive high school coaches talk about helping their players to grow up to be bigger and better in life. Coach #4 is not speaking at all about his players’ athletic abilities or production, but rather their character growth. He remarked, “I think for long-term development…it [PRIMED] has helped me kind of think about the big picture of long-term growth for these young student-athletes.”

Coach #4 shared how a great deal of the character growth that he had seen in his players over the six-week study had been manifested through the team building empowerment activities, such as having the high school players lead drills in practice, as well as lead youth sport camps for the next generation of students that come to their school (as discussed in Themes #3 and #4).

When talking about the coach-participants’ efforts to prioritize character development long-term with his team, this statement from Coach #5 merits repeating:

I would say that it all boils down to character. It boils down to building a better culture within the school, the team, and the framework of whatever you're working with…I would say what it gets back to is that we want to build good character and good people, and then expand from there.

As other coach-participants in the study have noted, the character development has not only been for the players on their teams, Coach #5 felt the same way:

I have always felt that character is important. You look at the end of the game and you see the scoreboard. It is not in your favor, but that is not indicative of winning; it's what you do out there on the field and working your best and being
your best self. To me, that is much more important. But I think that PRIMED has given me a structure and a framework to have that as a more upfront thing.

Despite being a coach with a high affinity towards seeing sport as a vehicle to promote character development, as was the case with the other coaches targeted for this study, Coach #5 saw PRIMED as a way to provide a better structure to operate from.

Coach #6 described how the focus on the long-term development of character is a big one for him and his approach to coaching. However, below Coach #6 spoke to how PRIMED has not only affected him, but specifically the character of the players on the team, and even some of their parents:

To conclude our interview, Coach #6 left me with this regarding the importance of the PRIMED framework for building character long-term:

Being able to go through a crash course [over the past six weeks with PRIMED] has been a real blessing to me. So, I want to thank you because this is something that will change my life. I am [going to] teach my players these types of things and it will really help them to not chase the wins and get locked up in this culture of only being outcome based. It is all about being PRIMED for character. To me, it is not just being a coach. It is being a dad. And to me that is the most important thing. How can I impact people for the next generation to change the world?

Coaches are finding that the character-building focus from PRIMED extends past their sport coaching and into all areas of their lives, and the lives of others within their reach.

Coach #7 spoke candidly about how it is allowing him to grow in his own character, as well as his commitment to becoming a better model of character for his
team. He stated, “It [PRIMED] is about character building and how important that is. I mean that.” He reiterated this in response to being asked if he felt an increased commitment to seeing himself as a character educator in stating:

I have always thought more in that manner that they [players] are going to be husbands and workers someday. But I have never really practiced it in this manner and thought about what type of character that I want to show. How do I build a good leader out of me? So, for me, PRIMED helps me answer some of those questions. I am still asking a lot more questions about things. But now I am asking the right questions after reading and going through this study.

The growth in character and emphasis in modeling the way for players has had a positive effect on his assistant coaches as well. This is quite common, as head coaches typically set the tone for team culture. Coach #7 stated, “our coaches are a lot calmer trying to show better character.”

Coach #9 articulated how PRIMED has helped her commit more deeply to character education. She stated:

We are looking to invest in kids for the sake of their overall development, specifically character development in this case. Well, winning is sometimes the way success is measured, especially in the high school sports world. The real win here, obviously, is going for life change and more of a longer lasting impact than simply a score at the end of the game, telling us whether we win or lost…You still feel that external pressure that comes with winning. Unfortunately, that is one of those more powerful, measurable things that often gets put into a box as the most important… Sure, a state championship would be great. But let's just call that
gravy on top. The real win for us is seeing these girls grow and develop as humans and as teammates and gain some life skills.

… To have this [PRIMED framework] at our disposal is very affirming. It is encouraging and yet another reminder of why we do what we do. I think we [Coach #9 and her coaching colleague who is also involved in the study] are much more intentional about it [character education] now because we have been through this [six-week study] together.

Coach #9 responded similarly to other coaches (including Coach #10 to follow) in this study in expressing how character development can take time to manifest its fruits, as such character development can be tough to see in the moment. She stated:

You know with so much of what we do, we may not see the fruit of it in the moment. It may come 10-15 years down the line. I do not know many kids who would come to you in the moment and say, “Wow, that really impacted me today.”…To me, that is the most encouraging aspect to coaching seeing them go on to be these wonderful humans that are doing great things for society, and maybe that is kind of the cherry on top for me is when maybe you do get that kind of affirmation that maybe you played a very small role in helping them [from a character development standpoint].

For Coach #10, character development long-term had long been a priority for her, but the PRIMED framework has made her more purposeful in this direction, as she stated:

It [character education] has always been a part of who I am as a coach to really teach the whole child, and I view these kiddos as my own kids. I want to have an
impact on them eventually down the road someday, but I cannot always see it now. So, I think the character piece has always been there, though, I would say in the last ten years, it has really grown. So, I have been identified as a coach who is focused on character. But I think the PRIMED framework has made me be more purposeful in my day-to-day preparation.

Though she cannot see the results of her commitment to cultivating character in her players yet, Coach #10 is committed to it, and the PRIMED framework has been integral for her in doing so.

Coach #11 was expressly grateful to take part in this six-week pilot study around the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework and how it heightened her purpose towards coaching for character long-term.

We all want our teams to do great, and the athletes that we coach. But if you cannot get to the heart of the athlete and the character, no matter how many games you win or races the athletes win, I do not feel like you can call it a true success. So, I feel like PRIMED for character education really helps get to the heart of the athlete and uncover areas that need to grow and improve and just be able to connect with the athletes on a way better level.

Coach #11 summed up how she and the other coach-participants are prioritizing long-term development of character in her players by getting “to the heart of the athlete and character” and how PRIMED has helped her to do that better.

The impact that the 11 coach-participants in this study have had in the development of character in their players and themselves was highly apparent to them as they reflected on the PRIMED framework over the course of the six-week pilot study.
The next theme expands on this idea that coaches are key role players in character building in the sport landscape and articulates more specifically how the coach-participants were able to reflect and improve on this.

**Theme 6: PRIMED Helps Reflect and Improve**

To grow and improve in any aspect of one’s life, it is necessary to step back and reflect. All 11 coach-participants spoke without prompting about how the PRIMED for Coaching Character helped them reflect on their current practices and emphases to improve and grow as coaches committed to character.

Coach #1 remarked how the use of PRIMED was a way to reflect on his current practices in an effort to improve. He shared:

> It has helped in the sense that I'm actively reflecting on things that I'm doing rather than just doing them and wondering why or wondering how or wondering if it's working…When I get home and before I open the door to go into my house to be a dad and a husband, you know, I get a chance to really reflect on how well I did on these things [regarding his coaching] and what could I do better?

Sport coaches have so much to manage on a daily basis with their teams: Playing time, scouting reports, practice plans, injuries, academic reports, etc., and it can at times seem overwhelming. The PRIMED framework allowed Coach #1 to reflect more regularly on the design principles for character building rather than the minutiae of coaching:

> You get in your routines…We are in season right now. We are six games in, and it would be real easy for me to bury my head and just plow forward, "Hey, I've got this opponent coming up, or I've got this, you know; I've got this practice plan
because we botched these plays" [adding emphasis to all the other details in coaching], whatever it may be and whatever sport and whatever season. But, having some sort of six-item principles to be able to look back on. It is a way to reflect and find a way to have that conversation starter with your coaching staff or with your players. Can we be doing this better, or maybe even celebrating like, we really did this thing well in yesterday's game, or yesterday's practice, or yesterday's volunteer event, and then finding ways to build on that.

In reflecting on the six design principles, Coach #2 felt that due to his long-time commitment to being a coach of character (over 30 years), he had been doing character education with high fidelity prior. However, he admitted that PRIMED uncovered for him that he was close in his efforts but was learning through reflection on PRIMED:

I was close. But, you know, there were still some things that I could do better, but in all [design] principles, actually in all of them. You know what's interesting is that at the end of each game, I’m walking up [to huddle with the players]…and it's [PRIMED] that is running through my mind…How am I going to address the positives of the game and the negatives of the game? You know, all the little things. So PRIMED is there.

In discussing the importance of building relationships of trust and care with all players on the team, irrespective of whether they are the stars of the least talented player on the team, Coach #2 has found PRIMED to help reflect on whether he is showing the same love and care to all players:

But how about the guy who rarely plays and is behind the scenes, the guy who is at the deep end of the depth chart on the pitching, or he is never going to get any
real playing time? How do you treat him? Does the coach even know that he is there and that he exists?

When it comes to character development and the thriving of human goodness, Dr. Berkowitz (2021) in discussing character education in the K-12 school setting, emphasizes that each and every student needs a character champion, or someone who sees them, knows them, and expresses care for them. This same idea applies to sports teams. However, oftentimes, coaches will focus more on the development of their star players while reserve players do not receive the same attention and affection (as noted above by Coach #2). For a veteran coach of more than 30 years to note how PRIMED has helped him reflect on maintaining relationships of trust with all players is significant.

In reflecting on all of her players, especially her seniors getting ready to graduate and start the next chapter of their lives, Coach #3 was able to use PRIMED as a way to consider how to assure that her players knew that she cared for them long-term, and not simply as athletes in her program:

PRIMED made me reflect on our seniors a lot. So, after meeting with you [overview at start of six-week study], I chose to sit down with each of our two seniors and just started talking about life after here. I was able to look through junior college opportunities for our catcher, who is a senior, and then my other pitcher who is a senior and committed [signed with a college] already. But I talked to her about ideas, “Do you have a resume? Do you have the things you need? And everything else?” So, I really wanted to make sure that they felt like this [season] was not just a transactional experience this year, but that I could help them and support them outside of the field, too. So, I worked with them on that.
… Yeah, it [PRIMED] has helped me. It has helped me really reflect on my own practices. You know, am I being that coach of character that I want to be?

Similarly for Coach #4, PRIMED opened the door for honest self-reflection in returning daily to the six design principles.

Coach #5 shared how he was learning to self-reflect on his own actions, attitude, and behaviors, prior to reflecting on his players:

… We are having a difficult time with the team getting enough kids to come out, and in past years, we did not have it quite as bad as we do now. But I would look more externally, you know. I have realized that I have to internalize it and say, “Well, wait a minute, let’s start with me.” I do not really have any control over how somebody else thinks or what they want to do. So, look at me. Is there something that I am doing or not doing that might be creating a reason why these kids may not want to come [to practice]. Now, I go down a personal checklist and PRIMED, again, has helped me do that because things are so well laid out.

Coach #5’s approach to self-reflection, first, aligns well with the research behind the PRIMED framework, which is rooted in Aristotelian and Confucian principles. Berkowitz (2021) states, “Character education is how we be with others and then what we do as a consequence, in order to nurture the flourishing of their human goodness. Ideally, our inner character informs our outward living, and our outward living both represents and reciprocally transforms our inner being” (p. 4, 5).

Coach #6 was able to use PRIMED to reflect back on some of the coaches that he had growing up, or the high-level coaches that he watched on TV, who were highly
successful from a win: loss and championship standpoint, but clearly not the highest examples of coaching for character. While he has long outgrown such a short-sighted, win-at-all costs approach to coaching, the foundation of PRIMED grounded his approach to coaching for character long-term. He stated:

I can easily go back to and say, “okay, when things get going and it's 100 games you feel like in the 120 days in our profession in baseball.” To be able to go back and say, “Okay, I have got to get back to ground zero. I have got to get back to basics. Something is missing here.” I can quickly go back and have a framework that says, hey, here is where you're at.

Many of the coach-participants shared this similar sentiment that PRIMED allowed them to quickly reflect and improve their commitment to being coaches of character.

Coach #7 has been grappling quite a bit with the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework as a way to improve his own character in an effort to better model what he hopes to cultivate in the players on his team. He has been asking himself a lot of questions and reflecting on his approach to coaching over the past six weeks:

I have really begun to look at myself and what I am projecting. I want these guys [his players] to be a certain way, but is what I am projecting to them [modeling] getting them to go that way? But, at the same time, if I am trying to build character, positive character, good character, then I have got to be better.

These are terrific questions that Coach #7 is asking himself through reflection on the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, coupled with his humility and desire to
grow as a coach of character. As he states, through deep inner reflection, he is now starting to ask the right questions:

How do I build a good leader out of me? So, for me, PRIMED helps me answer some of those questions. I am still asking a lot more questions about things. But now I am asking the right questions after reading and going through this study.

Since learning about the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, Coach #8 also found himself spending much more time reflecting on how he shows up or models character on a daily basis. If he can improve his own “way of being” then his players can follow his lead. He appreciates the modeling component of the PRIMED framework and desires to show up at his best each day. He stated, “That means I spend an awful lot of time taking a look at how I coach…and trying to be a better representative of what I consider to be the PRIMED model.” As Coach #8 states, the ability to use PRIMED as a tool for self-reflection can better enable coaches to be models of character for their teams.

Coach #10 shared a simple story that was fresh in her mind from the previous week regarding how she had been using the PRIMED framework to reflect and be more mindful and aware of the alignment of her words and actions. A hard fast rule for her players is no cell phones out during practice or games. However, she reflected on a time when she took her phone out to time the players in a drill. Because she was more mindful of modeling what she was asking of her players, she felt the need to clarify that she was not checking text messages, but rather using her phone’s stopwatch to time the players’ speed intervals. This is a simple example of how PRIMED can allow coaches to be more self-reflective and intentional in their modeling: “It was because of the PRIMED framework in my head.”
To re-state part of a comment that Coach #11 made presented above under theme #5 on Character Development long-term, she uses PRIMED to better reflect on how to improve one’s character:

I feel like PRIMED for character education really helps get to the heart of the athlete and uncover areas that need to grow and improve and just be able to connect with the athletes on a way better level. It really challenges you to model what you want to see in the athletes as well.

This reflection on how one is modeling character is a vital element of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, and the coach-participants in this study reflected on how they have been or want to share the framework with their coaching colleagues, as discussed in the next theme.

**Theme 7: Other Coaches Need PRIMED**

Without any prodding in the interview questions for the coach-participants to consider how PRIMED would impact other coaches across the country at the high school level, or any level of youth sport for that matter, eight of the 11 coach-participants shared how their coaching counterparts could benefit from learning about the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework.

Coach #1 reflected, “I think that a lot of coaches in my area, and I presume the rest of the country and around the world, could use this [PRIMED] as a foundation for how to be better at what they are currently doing.” While Coach #1 offered the perspective that other coaches could and should utilize the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework to be more effective coaches, Coach #2 was much more animated...
and pointed to the drastic need for opposing coaches in his area to be introduced and influenced by the PRIMED framework.

Coach #2 posited, “there are a lot of great coaches out there, but we all know there are a lot of coaches that can use a little refresher course for understanding how to make those connections, and how to build them [players] for the future.” In talking about PRIMED, Coach #2 had quite a bit more to share on its potential utility for coaches:

I hope that other people can understand and use it [PRIMED]…As you look across the field, with whoever you are competing against with the pre-game chatter with the other coach, you can just tell that they have a lot of growing to do. I mean, they are dropping f bombs [profanities] and stuff like that in the game with their communication style…it is just unfortunate. I mean, maybe they don't know any better and I think if someone was to say, “Hey, there is a different way to approach out there.” If it is their life ambition to be a coach and to be a mentor, then there are definitely some tools for growth simplified. Just start right there: start with PRIMED. Start with this little simple understanding…If they look at it [PRIMED], they can see “I am not really hitting on any of these six principles.” Then, there is a fork in the road. Do you want to be better? One is as a human being and as a coach. Then, just try these [referring to the PRIMED principles].

This idea from Coach #2 on how other coaches need to start with a PRIMED foundation and then advance from there, was the similar sentiment of many other coach-participants. Coach #3 presented how many coaches are not provided such a purpose driven clear framework to adhere to:

I think a lot of coaches do not get that and they’re just thrown out there.
PRIMED can be very beneficial for first-year coaches or coaches that have not had a lot of experience to follow the framework, so they have a guide and clear guidelines. They have a framework, so they are not out there without purpose and they know what they are supposed to be doing. I see a lot of value in it [PRIMED] for coaches that have been doing it [coaching] for a while, but especially for beginner coaches.

Coach #3 suggests the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework for all new coaches coming into the profession, so that they are not “just thrown out there.” But she also feels it would be valuable for seasoned coaches from some of the highest profile and high-pressure sports in high school, such as football, especially down in the southern states, where football reigns and winning championships can seem to trump all else. Though she does not coach football, she wishes that some of her coaching colleagues who do could gain a better perspective through the PRIMED for Coaching framework training. She wished they could realize, "I'm doing way more important things than teaching them how to play the sport even over winning. I'm helping prepare future leaders and lifelong learners to be engaged citizens.” This could help give coaches that perspective outside of the wins and losses.

Coach #6 spoke about how he felt the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework can create a needed mindset shift for coaches that he could see going viral and impacting a great number of coaches in a positive manner:

I think it [PRIMED] can really create a great viral mindset change for coaches. I think it is going to be really good for kids to have this kind of mindset; this PRIMED mindset, because both the coaches and the kids; everyone's going to
have more fun. The pressure is going to be off. Everyone is motivated in an authentic environment. I just think it is going to be something that is going to play really big. I do think, honestly, that it should be a course required in school. That’s my feeling on it.

… Honestly, every youth sports travel team needs to have this [PRIMED], because as you know, everyone is just chasing that college scholarship. Everyone is chasing the outcome and this [PRIMED] helps people to get back to ground zero and be more process minded.

Many of the design principles in PRIMED provide a new way of thinking for coaches, and Coach #9 shared how her head coach at her school needs to embrace the PRIMED framework in order to stretch and grow, particularly in how to find ways to better empower her players:

I would say the gal [other coach] that I work with is wonderful but that [empowerment] is not necessarily her nature, and so I was able to use you [researcher of study] as my out [justification] for that. Come on, let’s just give it a whirl.

On that last note, I often see that a scholarly published document from a higher authority offers the legitimacy needed to inspire and promote positive change. Later in the interview, she articulated how many of the travel ball (pay to play club team) coaches could benefit from learning about the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework. She remarked, “I am glad that you are doing this, and I hope that before long we have a lot more coaches that are on board with this [PRIMED].”

It is clear from the unsolicited feedback in Theme #7 (Other Coaches Need
PRIMED) from the coach-participants in this study that a large portion of the coaches that they coach against, all the way down to the youth levels of travel ball and club sports, could benefit from the foundation and design principles of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework.

**Theme 8: PRIMED Allows Authentic Values to Flourish**

Like Theme #7, all 11 of coach-participants added to the emergence of Theme #8 despite the fact that the interview questions did not specifically speak to this theme directly. As a coach of youth for more than 25 years (many of those as a high school coach), I can attest to the fact that coaches have very busy schedules, and for many of them, coaching is not their primary profession. Of the 11 coach-participants in this study, all but one of the coaches had distinctly separate full-time jobs (e.g., teacher, administrator, or other fields outside of school). This is important to emphasize because with the busy, on the go schedules of coaches, it is safe to say that adding something burdensome to the already full plates would be a tough ask. The recurring theme from the coding process was that the coach-participants did not see the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework as an add-on for them as high school sport coaches in-season, but rather that the framework aligned well with and allowed coach-participants’ authentic values to flourish.

Coach #1’s comments concurred with the sentiment of the majority of the other coach-participants’ unsolicited feedback. The PRIMED for Coaching Character framework did not feel like a burdensome add-on, but rather aligned well his approach to coaching, and as the preceding themes noted, it provided a clear guide to authentically focus on these values in stating, “I would tell them [other coaches] that it [PRIMED] is
not adding on another thing to have to do.” Coach #1 found PRIMED to be simple to incorporate into his approach to coaching for character yet provided a much more manageable way to bring all of his ideas to one place (as noted by all 11 coach-participants in Theme #3-PRIMED as a Great Guide). He stated, “I think it gives me a hook to hang that hat on, you know, instead of just speaking into the ether about being a good person.”

For Coach #2, the PRIMED framework was very similar to what he had long been focused on but that the PRIMED for Coaching Character Framework helped him to realize that, “…you know, there were still some things that I could do better, but in all design principles, actually in all of them!” As the most seasoned coach-participant in the study, Coach #2 has been committed to coaching for character for decades, and while the PRIMED framework was not something that varied a great deal from his practices, he was able to utilize the clarity around PRIMED in an impactful way to him:

It [PRIMED] fits my philosophy, and where I have been in my path has always been through similar things that PRIMED is doing. It is going to be, it has been a part of me before. It is going to be a part of me after… I have been coaching for 35 years and… I feel like it [PRIMED] was a natural fit for me as it is not like I have to twist and change my philosophy or rethink everything.

For Coach #3, the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework was clear and easy to apply to what she was already doing in her focus on character building. In her reflection, she remarked how coaches who were not inclined to see themselves as character educators or did not desire to grow as coaches of character would not find the
framework to be useful because their priorities were not aligned. However, she found PRIMED to heighten her focus on character development.

In discussing the six design principles of PRIMED, Coach #4 spoke to how PRIMED aligned well with many of his priorities for character development, yet he was deeply thankful to have been introduced to this PRIMED framework that has been able to help guide him and keep him aligned to his purpose:

Coach #5 spoke about how PRIMED fit well with him and made him more aware of the importance of the second design principle, which is building strong relationships of trust, despite feeling that was something he was committed to prior:

I would say that going back through it [the PRIMED framework], the thing that really struck me the most was building the individual relationships, and I thought, “That is it!” That is something that I realized that I have always tried to do, but I did not really have as good a framework to have it logically and rationally pointed out as it does.

Regarding many of these salient design principles, Coach #5 stated that prior to the study, believed in the principles of PRIMED, but he did not have such a well laid out guide to carry out his plan.

Though a highly committed coach of character prior to be introduced to the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, Coach #6, too, appreciated how taking part in the six-week study allowed him was not an added burden, but rather a way to increase his commitment and be more mindful of building long-term character in each member of his teams through his own unique authentic style:
It is a unique system, but it is really flexible. It is flexible. You can use your own style. It is not like I have to be a different person, you know. I am a little bit more adamant and I am a little bit more emotional. But I can model good behavior in my own unique, energetic way. I can empower people through my own unique way. While it is a clear system, it is very flexible. So that is why I keep bringing up the point that we can always go back to these design principles as these are great principles that you can use but use them in your own unique coaching style…We can be more authentic.

Coach #9 shared how she had been committed to character education for quite some time, but she appreciated the simplicity of PRIMED:

I am just so grateful that there are all these programs [PRIMED and others that she has learned from] that exist now. Some of us are really lucky to be in a workplace where this is not only allowed, but it's encouraged and expected. These are all great things, but at times it is kind of like, “Gosh! Can we just put it all together into a thing?”

While the PRIMED framework and its six design principles are rooted in decades of research on “What Works in Character Education,” prior to this study, these had not been tested in the sport coaching landscape. As Coach #9 noted, PRIMED could be a way to “put it all together” in a manner that is authentic to each coach.

Coach #10 has been immersed in a school and athletics department culture that aligns very well with the principles of PRIMED, so she noted that it was easy and natural for her to embrace the six design principles as a way to advance and enhance the
flourishing of her team culture. In talking about her commitment to character education with her teams over the past few decades of coaching, she stated:

I think the character piece has always been there, though, I would say in the last ten years, it has really grown. So, I have been identified as a coach who is focused on character. But I think the PRIMED framework has made me be more purposeful in my day-to-day preparation.

This eighth theme that arose out of the interview data demonstratively illustrates that the coach-participants did not view the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework as an add-on to an already overflowing plate. Rather, PRIMED was viewed as a flexible guide that aligned well with their values for coaching for character in an authentic way.

The PRIMED for Coaching Character framework was well received for its clarity, utility, and application overall by all of the 11 coach-participants in this six-week study. However, the final theme that was extracted from the qualitative data was that many of the coach-participants found that a few of the PRIMED design principles created a good struggle that is taking a bit more time to fully understand how to apply.

**Theme 9: Good Struggle with Design Principles “I” & “E” of PRIMED**

This final theme, Theme #9, presents responses from coach-participants focused on their grappling (good struggle) with key concepts to character building that seem to be less commonly practiced by the sport coaches in this study (or outside of their normal comfort zone). It is referred to as a “good” struggle or grappling here because, oftentimes, in order to grow, we need to stretch ourselves to think and act outside of our normal habits or ways of operating. Design Principle #3—Intrinsic motivation & Design Principle #5—Empowerment of the PRIMED framework were the source of this “good
struggle.” All 11 coach-participants noted one or both of these design principles in this way, as there was a common theme from the reflections on intrinsic motivation and/or empowerment as a source of struggle and/or newness of application to their approach to coaching for character.

While Coach #1 felt that all six design principles aligned with, and were applicable to, his coaching approach, he was the only coach who did not grapple to incorporate these design principles throughout the six-week study.

After sharing how the PRIMED framework and design principles aligned well with his long-time approach to viewing sport and the role of coaching as a vehicle to support the long-time character development of his players, Coach #2 reflected on how he continued to “wrestle with” the third design principle—intrinsic motivation:

But the intrinsic one you were talking about, that was still one that I am trying to wrestle with to understand how it is similar or different to what I was doing… we all have a knee-jerk reaction on how we have been taught or what motivated us. With most of us being the old school, you come from a very tough “get it done” approach. You know that type of stuff, and intrinsic [motivation] is more of a relationship where you individually try to find out what their motivation is, what is their comfort zone? What do you do to individually bring them out? It is a pull them aside, or as they are walking by it is a good job. That is my understanding of it, or maybe a text at the end of the day of practice?

As stated above, Coach #2 has been focused on building character through his coaching for decades. When he spoke about all the other aspects of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, he spoke with certainty and confidence. However, the
third design principle, intrinsic motivation, is clearly something that he is still grappling with. However, he shared his commitment to better understanding how to motivate and be motivated more intrinsically.

A desire to better understand and apply both empowerment and intrinsic motivation to her daily practice of coaching for character was noted by Coach #3. From her response below, she is much more intentional about recognizing and seizing opportunities to empower the players on her team, and her confidence with this design principle is growing through more frequent usage and familiarity. However, with intrinsic motivation, she is much less confident in her comprehension of and fidelity for cultivating intrinsic motivation with her players. This tension on intrinsic motivation makes sense as it is difficult to know and see what is intrinsic to others.

As far as the empowerment piece goes, I know you talked about allowing players to have input and allowing players to even help teach other players. So, in practice I have leaned on our veteran players to help support our instruction more…And we have been hearing a lot more from our players. So, I think that it has been a change, and it has been good…I hope that those discussions have empowered them, and I feel like from the positive feedback from the players and parents, too, which has confirmed that we're moving in the right direction, and it is helping our kids.

While Coach #3’s approach to empowerment demonstrates her understanding of empowerment with her players, it was clear that the verdict was still out as to the long-term effectiveness of this coaching for character practice. However, she specifically
stated how difficult it has been for her to gain a grasp on intrinsic motivation in only the six short weeks of this study:

I would say, out of the [design] principles, the intrinsic motivation piece is the hardest for me to really apply, or understand how to apply… I feel like that intrinsic motivation is always evolving in our athletes throughout their careers… We did ask for those "Why" statements, and that helps give us a glimpse into why they are here… So we understand why people are here [playing the sport] to a certain degree. But I feel like their motivations can always change… I feel like intrinsic motivation is the hardest one for me to wrap my head around, and a lot of times that can be out of our control, or just not having a great understanding of it yet either.

From the above statement, Coach #3 made it clear that she did not fully understand this design principle #3 around intrinsic motivation. This seemed to be the case for many other coach-participants, because motivating intrinsically seems to be counter to how most coaches were motivated themselves or had been trained to motivate their players. However, in the concluding paragraph of her interview, Coach #3 demonstrated that her grappling with the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivators, had already caused her to eliminate certain extrinsically focused coaching practices:

I really liked when you [the researcher during the pre-study overview of PRIMED] were talking about praising the team and not the individual. I do not know if that is something that most coaches do. I know I have done the opposite in the past quite a bit. But I have stopped doing that and started praising the team
and then talking individually with players. Now, nobody has told me that it has changed things, but I feel like it is just a good coaching practice.

In discussing how some of the design principles were more natural to incorporate into his daily coaching practices, such as the “R” for relationships and the “M” for modeling, Coach #4 found the “E” for empowerment and the “I” for intrinsic motivation to be tougher to incorporate:

I think the tougher ones for me were trying to do the empowerment piece. As you know with ninth and tenth graders, sometimes they just want to be there and just play. But we are trying to get them to empower themselves, and even with simple things like setting up for practice, setting up the gym. With the empowerment piece, I stole one from you [as described in the pre-study overview on PRIMED] on how we are doing team bonding for empowerment. A part of that is going to be a civic duty piece in volunteering for about three hours; I think that is another great thing.

And then in terms of intrinsic motivation, it is always tough at the high school level, because everybody just wants to be about “I” and “me.” In volleyball, it is all about the pretty stuff [referring to sport statistics]. But we talk about team all the time and that is intrinsic motivation in getting them [to care] about team. It is about the love of the game. I'm trying to relay that to the kids, especially the ones who are a little better [talent-wise]. And I think they are very supportive, because during the preseason we had tournaments where we were allowed to get some of the bench guys in the game and the stars have really
behind them [reserve players] caring for them and making sure that they felt part of the team. I think that is a good thing.

Coach #4 admitted that he is still working to gain a full understanding of how to incorporate empowerment and help shift away from extrinsic motivation towards intrinsic motivators. He mentioned a key takeaway from the PRIMED book (Berkowitz, 2021), “I read that part from the PRIMED book about how, if you were a teacher, or if you were teaching at home, would you put up all these signs and sticky notes and things of that nature up?” While Coach #4 may not have been fully comfortable with the empowerment and intrinsic motivation design principles, he was clearly working at it. Throughout the remainder of the interview, he shared many of the ways that he is taking these more challenging design principles of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework and introducing and instilling them into their team culture. Coach #4 shared that he and his coaches are cultivating empowerment and intrinsic motivators with their players through having them take on a leadership role in youth sport camps, including providing opportunities for their players to facilitate youth camps with younger athletes. These opportunities to coach and mentor are excellent empowerment strategies. Clearly, Coach #4 and his coaches and team are making progress with these more challenging design principles, but they are making progress to it, and he is committed to this good struggle to be better as a coach of character.

Coach #5 did not specifically use the words “intrinsic motivation,” but he references his notes from the PRIMED book (Berkowitz, 2021) focused on strategies for educators to move away from extrinsic motivators toward intrinsic motivation. He
outlined how he felt some of these strategies could be effective to use with his team to build the type of culture of character that he aspires:

…one of the things that came up is outlined in the [PRIMED] book “Praise effort, not ability” (p. 123). That is a big part of what I have tried to do in getting the kids going…Now, today we are going to have a big team meeting after practice, and I want to go over those. I said to the boys, “I think it is a really good idea if all of us look inside ourselves and set an individual goal of how we can be better.” And I left the word “better” open [for player interpretation]. I hope that it is not just about being a baseball player. But what I can do to be a better teammate, a better person? My hope is that would hopefully translate into helping us to be a better team.

Coach #5 was not sure how his team meeting and efforts to better cultivate intrinsic motivation with his team would go, but he looked forward to emphasizing with them how to internalize lasting reasons for playing sports with his players.

Coach #6 shared how he is really grappling with how to apply the “I” in PRIMED to his coaching, as well as his family life as a parent. He shared how, similar to many other coach-participants in the study, the intrinsic motivation design principle tends to take longer to grasp on to because it presents a different approach to motivation that is not commonly practiced in the sport landscape, where trophies and the pursuit of college scholarships reign. It was not until Week 4 of the study that it “really spoke to him:”

When you showed me that video about intrinsic motivation [in the Week 4 text reminder] that video really spoke to me. Because it talked about how that one school had all the toys and the trinkets that the kids were getting. They were
getting toys if they were doing good things. That design principle [Intrinsic motivation] for me was something where I felt like even with my own children sometimes, I would get into the habit with my young son of, “I'll give you a dollar if” because I know he is motivated by money. But I have kind of stepped back from that now and I have said, “Hey, I need to do a better job understanding exactly what long-term success is going to be,” and I don't think giving him a toy, a trinket, or a dollar is going to do that. So, I have really tried to link it a little more towards intrinsic motivation, and so that one was like, “Wow!” That is kind of a game-changer for me. I really need to make sure that I am being mindful of that. I think as parents, we do this behavior with kids and then they will get this reward. The intrinsic motivation part of PRIMED has really helped me flip my mindset and get me back to ground zero. Otherwise, it is not sustainable. It is not something that is going to work long-term.

Coach #6 mentioned twice in the above interview excerpt how he needs to do a better job of applying this third design principle of intrinsic motivation to his coaching, as well as to his parenting. He saw a direct link or connection between intrinsic motivation and lasting, long-term character development. His use of the word “game-changer” is a big deal in the sports world to “flip” one’s mindset around how they approach motivation of their players. It is a sign of the powerful effect that grappling with innovative ideas rooted in empirical data and best practices can have for coaches.

What Coach #7 learned most from the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework was how to begin to make that shift from relying on extrinsic motivators towards intrinsic motivation with his players. He seemed excited and committed to
shifting away from that “old school” approach based on the transactional model learned by his predecessors. As he mentioned, he knows this type of shift in motivation takes time in stating how he is looking forward to how cultivating intrinsic motivation throughout his team will have a positive effect over time (e.g., “with next year’s team”).

Coach #7 is also working to find ways to create a more empowering team culture through his commitment to PRIMED for Coaching Character, as he is also wrestling with how to better empower all members of his team, starting with the team captain:

… I have started doing it [empowerment] with my captain. Before it was, I just told him to do things, instead of now, “Hey, what do you think of this and what did you think of that?” You know, it is more of that relationship where I’m trying to empower him instead of where it was just top-down communication. That has stopped as I am more about trying to empower him. And then getting the other guys empowered as well. Now, this is a collective group. I’m trying to get everyone feeling responsible to the team. We all need to be holding each other accountable and being able to have that conversation empowering them all to be leaders and see that, “Look, there is not only one leader. There are nine leaders, plus another five on the bench.”

Shifting away from what Coach #7, as well as some of the previously noted coach-participants, refer to as an “old school” top-down approach to leadership takes time and conscientious effort. He is willing to stick with it to shift away from this mindset in order to cultivate intrinsic motivation and better empower his players and teams. The remaining four coach-participants did not seem to be challenged with such an old school, top-down approach, yet they, too, expressed how design principles #3 and #5
(Intrinsic Motivation & Empowerment) of PRIMED were ones that they were grappling with as well.

Coach #8 also noted that he was also grappling with these same two design principles. He stated:

I spent a lot of time looking at those, and those two in particular [intrinsic motivation and empowerment]. My conclusions were that those were difficult because of the environment of coaching, not because they are difficult to understand. For example, if you look at intrinsic motivation, my sense is that all motivation is intrinsic, and I think Berkowitz makes that point in the book [PRIMED, 2021]. He says making the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation is kind of a fictitious delineation, but we do it just to explain things a little bit better. In my mind intrinsic motivation is motivation. I mean it's like wind to a sailor, you know, any wind is better than no wind. If you have extrinsic motivation: “I really want the trophy” that is better than having no motivation. And so, what I try to work on is how can you start wherever the athlete is, whatever motivation he has, and just try and elevate it and inspire it just a little bit more each day to be more intrinsic.

It is clear in his explanation and interpretation of both design principles intrinsic motivation and empowerment that Coach #8 is still trying to understand and wrap his head around how to apply these principles to his coaching, but he is willing to grapple with them. In discussing empowerment, he stated:

… To do that [empower] coaches need to actively listen. They need to observe, they need to listen to what they [the players] are saying they need. All of that type
of empowerment in having the athlete have a voice and everything is, in my mind, baked into the system of coaching. It is what coaches do more so than a teacher in a school or a businessperson. Empowerment is clearly baked into it as I read it. And it is clearly baked into coaching. …I have never been a “my way or the highway sort of coach,” but I can understand how with that type of approach, empowerment would be a difficult and challenging aspect to incorporate into their coaching style.

Coach #9 concurred that she was doing much of what PRIMED focuses on through many of the design principles through her coaching. However, through this six-week study, she was finding these same two design principles to be the most challenging because no two people are motivated the same way. With the uniqueness of each member of the team, she spoke to the importance of getting to know individually “what makes them tick.” She noted similar struggles with incorporating in more ways to empower her athletes:

Empowering them is always interesting. I love to give kids that platform, and I try to be more intentional. The other day in practice just saying, “This isn't looking very smooth. What if we tried this? What if we tried this instead of that?” And really getting their feedback rather than just [the head coach] and I kind of lean on each other to make that decision ourselves. Even giving them the freedom on the field to call it, call what [plays] they want to run and be okay with it [the result]. Come on, let's just give it a whirl. Let's see how this [empowerment of the players] goes…How can we maybe empower them better? That is something that would serve a lot of benefits for them and freeing them up and live with the
consequences. The first time [empowering the players in this way] was kind of a train wreck. But they saw it, and then we were able to make some adjustments and they got back on course.

Despite Coach #9’s increased emphasis and efforts to further empower her athletes on the field resulting in a “train wreck,” she continues to see value in this design principle and is finding ways to better equip and empower her players, and they are beginning to get it.

Coach #10 seemed to be applying empowerment to her coaching and mentoring of her assistant coach more this year than in previous years, though she still expressed a bit of hesitancy as to whether that type of empowerment was in alignment with PRIMED since it was more focused on the coach and not on the players. The PRIMED framework talks about seeking to empower all stakeholders rather than just the most obvious ones, and this coach was doing so and seeing noted growth and autonomy from her assistant coach:

I have found myself applying it [Empowerment] more to my assistant coach this season. Having gone through and read the PRIMED framework, I do not know if it was intended to be applied to assistant coaches, but I noticed last year that she was kind of more on the sidelines waiting for me to lead. I made a purposeful effort to sit with her this year and say, “You know, you have so much knowledge. I would love to hear from you more.” Then, I found myself writing that into the practice plan connecting with [omitted assistant coach’s name] before the practices, saying, “Can you take this piece [lead this part of practice] or let me know what you think we need to work on?” So, with the empowerment piece, I think I have been more purposeful with that with [assistant coach] more so than
other years. Also, I hear from my players a lot. I feel like they have a voice, but I do not write empowerment stuff into the practice plan for my players. This is a salient example of her understanding and application of empowerment with her assistant coach, which is having a positive impact. It seemed that Coach #10 wished to be able to apply this same sense of empowerment to her players, which she certainly can do intentionally.

I am struggling with the intrinsic motivation stuff a little bit. But that video you sent about [text prompt], I think it was publicly praising the whole team, privately praising an individual and maybe looping the parents in. I felt like, “Okay, that is something that I can do.” I can do this, and I can write this into my practice plan.

… One thing that I wonder, as I go back to this intrinsic motivation thing, is trying to connect with them to help intrinsic motivation. So, maybe a note home to the parents, or a handwritten letter, or pulling them aside. I did the Golden Stick award and these individual awards after each game, and it got to the point where I knew I needed to give it to everybody. But then I got to somebody who knew that they did not earn it. But I feel like I have to give it to them, and then it waters it down for everyone else, and it just didn't feel good. So, this intrinsic motivation piece feels better to me, but it is just a matter of me figuring out how to actually implement it.

Coach #10 mentioned multiple strategies from PRIMED that she is using for shifting away from extrinsic motivators in place of intrinsic ones. She is already incorporating these into her daily practices and making the shift to cultivating long-term healthy motivation with her teams. She is reflecting on and contemplating some of her
long-time motivators, such as the “Golden Stick” Award, while finding ways to praise individuals privately to build those deeper more meaningful relationships of trust. Her questioning of her former approaches and her struggle to apply these new strategies are noteworthy and it may take time to feel at peace with them.

While Coach #11 expressed that she was still working to adhere to PRIMED design principle #3 Intrinsic Motivation, she was greatly impacted by two examples provided through PRIMED on how to shift away from extrinsic motivators for more lasting and impactful intrinsic motivators that were presented through this six-week study. These were new approaches that she looked forward to incorporating into her coaching:

I am definitely a work in progress…The intrinsic motivation resonated the most with me, and just learning how to praise more individually rather than praising one person in front of the team. Now, you know, it could still happen from time to time, but just learning that was so impactful for me. So, praise the team as a whole as much as possible; but, then, when you have feedback or praise individually it gives the most impact. That was eye opening to learn and it seems so valuable. I do not think I will ever forget about intrinsic motivation and how to reach the athletes that way.

…[With] intrinsic motivation, I really connected with the video that you had shared [in weekly text prompt] with that [design] principle of how the school principal in St. Louis wrote notes home to the parents, and how that maybe was the first time that they had ever received something good about their child. I do not think I will ever forget that story. And so, when you help them build the
intrinsic motivation and giving those powerful words [one-on-one] versus just giving them a bag or a trophy because that will stay with them for the rest of their lives versus something material.

Whether attempting to shift away from a more “old school” approach to coaching, or simply seeking to find ways to better motivate and inspire, many responses from the 11 coach-participants found the PRIMED design principles #3 and #5 (Intrinsic Motivation & Empowerment) to be the two that did not come as naturally as the other four design principles, as they are mindset shifts that many coaches are not accustomed to having and they will continue to take time to become more habitual. This final theme presented the responses from coach-participants regarding the good struggle that many of them reflected on pertaining specifically to intrinsic motivation and empowerment. They were not stating that they did not find these two design principles useful, but rather, they found that attempting to apply them to their daily coaching practices was a much greater shift than the other four design principles. All of the coach-participants found themselves grappling to fully comprehend and wrap their heads around how to better “empower” and shift away from extrinsic motivation and move towards “intrinsic motivation” with their teams.

These nine overarching themes comprised the bulk of the qualitative data (that supported the suggested findings in the Discussion Chapter), which aligns with the quantitative data from the two pre- and post-surveys. There was one other minor source of data collected during the six-week study: The mid-study one open-ended question survey about how coach-participants were using the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework after three weeks of the study. This was more of an accountability check-in,
but these short responses do provide additional support for the qualitative interview responses.

_Mid-Study One-Question Open-Ended Survey Responses_

The 11 coach-participants were still getting acclimated to the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework at the mid-way point (end of Week 3) of this six-week study. They all had received the 20–30-minute one-on-one Zoom overview of the PRIMED framework with me, they had been receiving short text prompts on Mondays and Wednesdays prior to their practice times, and they all received the copy of the PRIMED for Character Education book (Berkowitz, 2021). This one-question open-ended survey served the purpose of allowing the coaches an opportunity to articulate how they were using the PRIMED framework in their coaching. I hoped this could directly or indirectly shed light on their understanding of the framework, which would help answer Qualitative Research Question #1. Though inadvertent, I also found that this mid-study check-in provided an accountability system to ensure that the coaches were attempting to apply the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework to their own daily coaching.

Along with responding to this mid-study one question survey, coaches were given the opportunity to join an optional 30-minute Zoom session on Saturday of Week 3 to share with me and other coaches in the study how they were using PRIMED up to that point. With two time slots provided as options for convenience, none of the 11 coach-participants chose to attend these optional Zoom sessions. Several of the coaches reached out to state that they had games or athletics events that weekend and could not attend these optional sessions.
Specific qualitative interview questions at the end of Week 6 (provided in the above section) also sought to provide a clear understanding of the coaches’ comprehension and application of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework. The feedback from the coaches from the mid-study one-question survey aligns with what was shared during these final semi-structured interviews at the end of the study. The majority of the coach-participant responses at this point in the study revolved around the idea of Theme #6: “PRIMED Helps Reflect.” There were a few mid-study reflections on how coaches were using the PRIMED framework and certain design principles that are worth sharing on this note:

Coach #1 wrote, “I have been actively reflecting on my practice as a coach. [Key researcher] sends me text reminders, which helps me focus on different facets of the framework, and I have been able to use those reminders to home in on certain areas of my coaching.”

Coach #3 wrote, “In the first three weeks of the study, I have worked intentionally to use the framework in my everyday coaching. Prioritization has been key here and I have made sure to devote time before each practice and game to decide how I am going to apply the frameworks.”

Coach #9 wrote, “In addition to spending time reflecting on the six principles of the PRIMED framework daily before practice, I have intentionally tried to focus on a single aspect each day.”

Coach #11 wrote, “I have been focusing on building relationships with my athletes. Relationship building is a priority for me, and the PRIMED framework for Coaching Character shows evidence of how critical it is for teams.”
Summary

Nine overarching themes emerged from the qualitative data from the 11 coach-participant interviews. These nine overarching themes were present in a minimum of eight (Theme #8) of the coach-participant responses, and a maximum of all 11 in three of the themes (Themes 4, 5, & 9). One could argue that there is evidence from the qualitative data found within these nine themes to claim that the PRIMED for Coaching framework had a positive impact on the three areas of focus in this study: Coach perceived Commitment to, and Self-Efficacy for Character Education, and self-identification as Servant Leaders, as well as other areas of growth expressed through the nine overarching themes that emerged from the data. While the 11 coach-participants’ responses to the interview questions were each unique to their own experience and personal reflection on the PRIMED for Coaching framework, the clear and resounding affirmation for the effectiveness of the PRIMED framework had a positive and lasting impact on their coaching for character practices in only six short weeks.

Together, the qualitative data (the primary methodological approach) and the quantitative data (despite the small sample size from a quantitative standpoint) in this pilot study present a case for the implementation of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework with high school sport coaches. While the quantitative comparison data from the pre and post data only indicated a slight overall increase, the rich qualitative results from which the nine overarching themes emerged provided evidence to suggest that coach-participants increased in their commitment to, and self-efficacy for, character education, as well as self-identification as Servant Leader coaches through learning about and seeking to apply the PRIMED framework in their coaching.
The 11 coaches in this study were highly seasoned coaches, who have long been committed to character education through sports with their teams. With the noted evidence to suggest overall increase in all three key ideas of focus: commitment to character education, self-efficacy as coaches of character, and self-identification as Servant Leader coaches, the next chapter (Discussion Chapter) will attempt to bring more meaning to this rich data.
Chapter 4: Discussion

At the heart of this mixed methods pilot study, I wanted to know whether the PRIMED for Character Education framework (Berkowitz, 2021) would resonate with other sport coaches in a similar way that it did with me as a youth coach of 25 years. The review of the literature presents a clear need to establish grounded theory around what constitutes effective character education training programs for sport coaches. This need for an empirically based framework to support coaches committed to the character development of their players and teams, as well as combat the “fade-out” effect of most existing professional development training programs, are the two major gaps presented in the extant literature. This mixed methods (six-week) pilot study with high school sport coaches was the first of its kind to utilize the grounded, evidence-based theory of the PRIMED for Character Education framework while applying it to sport coaching. Qualitative research was the primary method of data collection in this study, and the quantitative research data also contributed important findings in seeking to explore whether the PRIMED for Coaching framework intervention had an effect on the perceived commitment to and self-efficacy for character education, and the self-identification of high school sports coaches as Servant Leaders.

Due to the small sample size (11) and the brevity of the intervention (six weeks), I cannot offer strong empirical support that PRIMED will be generalizable for all sport coaches seeking to increase their commitment to and confidence as character educators, as well as self-identification as Servant Leader coaches. However, the data demonstrate compelling evidence to suggest that the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework resonated with these 11 coach-participants, and they think it has been impactful to their
coaching and could help other coaches. In looking at the evidence from the data, there is a great deal that can be garnered from the findings, and more can be done and built on from this initial study.

**Overview of Study**

Through the use of the PRIMED for Coaching Character intervention (independent variable), there were three key conceptual ideas (dependent variables) of focus in this research study: 1. Coach commitment to character development; 2. Coach self-efficacy (confidence) as a character builder; and 3. Coach self-identification as a Servant Leader. These three key ideas led to the formulation of seven research questions. Answers to these research questions were gained through a mixed methods approach to data collection. Data collection through two quantitative pre-post scales (Figures 5 and 6) and seven qualitative semi-structured interview questions (Figure 2) with each of the 11 coach-participants produced consistent results. The results of this pilot study are supported by complementary data findings between the quantitative scales and the qualitative interview data that produced the nine overarching themes (Figure 15). The mixed methods results provide empirical evidence to suggest that coach-participants increased in response to the three key ideas of focus below:

1. Did the PRIMED framework increase coach-participants’ perceived commitment to being coaches of character?
2. Did the PRIMED framework increase coach-participants' perceived confidence as coaches of character?
3. Did the PRIMED framework increase coach-participants’ self-identification as Servant Leaders?

Primary Findings: Three Key Ideas

Key Idea #1: The PRIMED Framework Increased Coach-Participants’ Perceived Commitment to Being Coaches of Character

There were four indicators from the research data on this first key idea that the PRIMED framework increased coach-participants’ perceived commitment to being coaches of character: The coach-participants’ explicit statements that they are committed to PRIMED; The coach-participants’ enthusiasm about using PRIMED; The coach-participants’ encouragement of others to use PRIMED; The relevance of PRIMED and how it resonates with who they are.

The Coach-Participants’ Explicit Statements that They Are Committed to PRIMED. Reflecting on the evidence-based PRIMED framework in character education after the short six-week intervention, all 11 coaches explicitly expressed how the PRIMED framework increased their commitment to the long-term development (Theme 5, Figure 15) of their players, while ten of the 11 coaches explicitly stated their continued commitment to use PRIMED with their coaching moving forward (Theme 1). All the coach-participants in this study latched on to the PRIMED framework as a way to improve as coaches of character. Coach #4 expressed this importance of long-term character development in his players in stating, “I know PRIMED was originally focused on the education side in schools, but in our case, we are applying it to our student-athletes on the sports side to ensure that these kids are really growing up to be bigger and better people in life.” This coach was not speaking at all about his players’ athletic abilities or
production, but rather their character growth. He remarked, “I think for long-term
development… it [PRIMED] has helped me think about the big picture of long-term
growth for these young student-athletes.”

In response to being asked if he will continue to use the PRIMED framework in
the future with his coaching now that this study is over, Coach #7 responded similarly to
the other coach-participants:

100%. No question about it. I'm starting to see the positive results from it, and not
just with my team, but with myself as well…How could you not be committed?
I’ve seen positive results. It [PRIMED] has impacted me in a very positive way.
It's shaped me in a manner that I didn't think it would shape me.

This coach’s testimony not only explicitly speaks to his (and nine other coaches)
commitment to PRIMED and coaching for character, but also supports the second
indicator of the coach-participants’ commitment to being coaches of character.

**The Coach-Participants’ Enthusiasm about Using PRIMED.** The coach’s
response above about the positive impact of the PRIMED framework over the course of
the six-week study was expressive of all 11 coach-participants. They spoke about how the
PRIMED for Coaching Character intervention positively “shaped” them in finding ways
to do a “better job of developing young people,” and this shaping and developing
“reinvigorated” and “re-focused” (Themes 4 and 6) them in the most integral work of
sport coaches, which is to build stronger character. More than half of the coach-
participants expressed their gratitude for being included in this study to learn about the
PRIMED framework, as they were excited about the positive impact now and in the
future. Coach #6 summed the overall enthusiasm and gratitude for PRIMED stating, “I
want to thank you because this is something that will change my life. It's all about being PRIMED for character.”

The Coach-Participants’ Encouragement of Others to Use PRIMED. As one becomes increasingly committed to a new framework or strategy, especially in the service profession, they often will want to share it with others. This was the case with the coach-participants in this study, as their commitment to the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework increased, so did the expressed desire (of eight of the coaches) to share it with other coach colleagues (Theme 7). Coach #6 stated, “I think it [PRIMED] can really create a great viral mindset change for coaches.” The understanding and easy application of the PRIMED framework increased the coach-participants’ commitment to their own coaching and has inspired them to want to see the framework shared with coach colleagues near and far.

The Relevance of PRIMED and How It Resonates with Who They Are. The coach-participants in this study demonstrated increased commitment as coaches of character through the relevance of PRIMED to who they are. The PRIMED framework resonated with the coaches in this study as it affirmed and validated the import of their calling as coach-educators of character. Quite often, coaches (specifically, high school coaches in this case) are not compensated commensurate with the impact of this calling, and the coaching profession (like the teaching profession) can be challenging and time-consuming. The coach-participants in this study expressed how PRIMED resonated with who they are and increased their commitment to their “why.” All of the coaches noted how PRIMED helped them re-focus their commitment to being coaches of character (Themes 3 and 6). Coach #9 has been a high school coach committed to character
education for more than 20 years and upon reflecting on not being able to know that she is having a positive lasting impact in the current moment, she reflected on the relevance of PRIMED to her work:

I think it [PRIMED] is really affirming that you're on the right track, and I'm grateful because it is more than winning. To have this [PRIMED framework] at our disposal is very affirming. It is encouraging and yet another reminder of why we do what we do.

If the coach-participants did not view the PRIMED framework as relevant to who they are, they would have let it fall by the wayside. On this topic of commitment, it is noteworthy that all 11 coach-participants completed the six-week study in its entirety, which was not the case for similar previous studies (Ferris et al., 2015; Holtzclaw et al., 2019), which will be elaborated on in the subsequent section on “secondary findings.”

The empirical evidence above suggests that the PRIMED framework increased coach-participants’ perceived commitment to being coaches of character through the four indices: The coach-participants’ explicit statements that they are committed to PRIMED; The coach-participants’ enthusiasm about using PRIMED; The coach-participants’ encouragement of others to use PRIMED; The relevance of PRIMED and how it resonates with who they are.

**Key Idea #2: The PRIMED Framework Increased Coach-Participants’ Perceived Self-Efficacy (confidence) as Coaches of Character**

Like the first key idea, there were four indicators from the research data on this second key idea that the PRIMED framework increased the coach-participants’ perceived self-efficacy as coaches of character: The coach-participants’ explicit statements and
survey responses that they are more confident due to PRIMED; The relevance of PRIMED and how it resonates with their current approach; The coach-participants’ ability to implement PRIMED; The noted results from PRIMED.

Self-efficacy is defined as: “Beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). In this case, the focus is on coach-participants’ confidence in their ability to act as character educators with their players and teams.

**The Coach-Participants’ Explicit Statements that They are More Confident Due to PRIMED.** Upon reflecting on the PRIMED framework at the conclusion of the six-week intervention, nine of the 11 coach-participants (qualitative interviews) and seven of the 11 (quantitative surveys) explicitly affirmed that the PRIMED framework had increased their confidence as coaches of character (Theme 2, Figure 15). As the demographic data demonstrated, this is a seasoned and committed group of high school coaches committed to serving the best interests of their athletes and teams. The process of personal growth is often not a singular event, but rather takes time to take root, and the nuances of such growth can be difficult to note quantitatively through a 4-point rating scale. This is where the rich qualitative data from the interviews at the end of the six-week intervention enhanced the findings.

The depth of research by Berkowitz and his colleagues (2005, 2007) on “What Works in Character Education” that went into the PRIMED framework was integral in their increased confidence and consistency as character educators. In summarizing the rich qualitative responses of the coaches, Coach #11 articulated the great value that PRIMED has had in propelling her up with confidence in her work as a coach of character.
She stated, “The fact that it [PRIMED] is backed by research that allows you to step with more confidence and I know that it will give results and ultimately be the best for the athletes.” The research-backed data that went into the foundation of the PRIMED framework rooted in decades of research clearly resonated with and gave the coach-participants increased confidence.

**The Relevance of PRIMED and How it Resonates with Their Current Approach.** In reflecting back on their understanding and application of the PRIMED framework, it was clearly expressed that the coach-participants found that it validated the work that they had been doing as coaches of character. In the quote above from Coach#11, having the trust that your efforts are firmly rooted in best practices around character education brings great relevance to one’s actions.

While relevance to coach-participant’s commitment as coaches of character was focused on the relevance to who they are, in this case of self-efficacy the relevance is with what they are doing as coaches of character. If a professional development intervention is too complex to process or too far of a stretch from their current approach, most participants would likely put it aside as irrelevant. Coaching for character training interventions should resonate well, while being easy to understand, recalled, and applied to increase the confidence of coaches. All eleven of the coach-participants expressed that they found the PRIMED framework to align naturally and authentically with their approach and prioritized intentions as coaches of character, as it was not as if they had to twist or change their approach a whole lot (Theme 8). The recurring theme was that PRIMED was not an onerous add-on to what they were already doing, but rather the streamlined framework enhances their confidence in their ability to remain on target with
their goals. The relevance of PRIMED through the alignment of the streamlined framework segues into the third indicator of increased coach self-efficacy.

**The Coach-Participants’ Ability to Implement PRIMED.** All 11 of the coach-participants found PRIMED to be useful (Theme 4), while ten of the 11 coaches specifically found it to be a helpful guide (Theme 3), and one coach even referred to it as his “coaching Bible.” The coaches in this short six-week study expressed how the clarity and order of the six design principles provided a blueprint for coaching for character success that allowed them to implement these design principles and PRIMED as a whole to their coaching for character.

Coach #5 provided the most salient description of how PRIMED was guiding his approach to coaching for character:

> Having this kind of a framework, I think, is equally as important as having just pure technical baseball knowledge in the sport…I could see where this could really become my Bible [chuckle of laughter], you know my guideline and my book to go to when I need some reinforcement in how to be a better coach. I’ve been quite taken by the whole experience [of using PRIMED]…Now, I go down a personal checklist and PRIMED has helped me do that because things are so well laid out about how to organize yourself.

The coaches agreed that the implementation of the PRIMED framework as a guide could be a “gamechanger” for all coaches. In the sport landscape, having the PRIMED framework as a guide, described as a gamechanger, will undoubtedly increase coach confidence as character educators.
The Noted Results from PRIMED. Whether it be in sport, business, or education, seeing the fruits of one’s labor brings about increased confidence. In the case of this short, six-week intervention utilizing the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, it is noteworthy that the coaches (nine of 11) testified to perceived growth in their confidence as coaches of character. Many of the coaches reflected on how they were already seeing positive results in less than six weeks, especially around relationships of trust (Themes 4 and 5).

Coach #2 (a coach of 30 years) spent a significant amount of time reflecting on the relationship growth between him and senior player who had been in his baseball program for four years. Prior to learning about and applying PRIMED, he and this player did not have much of a relationship of impact, but, like the responses of other coaches in this study, he suggested that the implementation of the PRIMED framework with his coaching enabled him to “open up doors” in their relationship that had previously been closed. This was a powerful and vulnerable acknowledgement from a highly seasoned coach, who recognized how the PRIMED design principles, and specifically building relationships of trust, were contributing factors in the positive growth that was unfolding right before his eyes. As coaches or educators, when we are able to see the impacts of our labor towards the cultivation of the thriving of goodness in the youth, it inevitably breeds confidence.

The empirical evidence above suggests that the PRIMED framework increased coach-participants’ perceived self-efficacy as coaches of character through the four interconnected indicators: The coach-participants’ explicit statements that they are committed to PRIMED; The coach-participants’ enthusiasm about using PRIMED; The
coach-participants’ encouragement of others to use PRIMED; The relevance of PRIMED and how it resonates with who they are.

**Key Idea #3: The PRIMED framework increased coach-participants’ self-identification as Servant Leader coaches**

With the third key idea, there were two indicators from the results that the PRIMED framework increased the coach-participants’ self-identification as Servant Leader coaches: The coach-participants’ explicit survey responses that they grew as Servant Leaders; The coach-participants’ adherence to the precepts of Servant Leadership around PRIMED design principles: Intrinsic Motivation, Empowerment, and Development (long-term).

Sport coaches are leaders of a team of athletes, and Servant Leadership is an effective leadership style that maps on with character education (Bier, 2021). The data and research on Servant Leadership (Durden, 2016; Ellis, 2016; Greenleaf, 1991; Spears, 2004) align with effective and impactful character education and, specifically, the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework and its six design principles that were used as the intervention for this study.

**The Coach-Participants’ Explicit Survey Responses that They Grew as Servant Leaders.** Upon reflecting on their perception of themselves as Servant Leader coaches at the beginning and the conclusion of the six-week intervention, the pre-post survey (Table 3) responses presented that eight of the 11 coach-participants explicitly affirmed that the PRIMED framework had increased their self-identification as Servant Leaders. As the demographic data demonstrated, this is a seasoned and committed group of high school coaches committed to serving the best interests of their athletes and teams. As noted in the discussion (above) on the coaching self-efficacy survey results, the
process of personal growth is often not a singular event, but rather takes time to take root, and the nuances of such growth can be difficult to note quantitatively through a 5-point rating scale. While it is noteworthy that eight of the 11 coach-participants recorded growth in their self-identification as Servant Leaders, the rich data from the interviews at the end of the six-week intervention presented below provide suggestive evidence of growth in the coach-participants perceived self-identification as Servant Leaders.

The Coach-Participants’ Adherence to the Precepts of Servant Leadership

Around PRIMED Design Principles: Intrinsic Motivation, Empowerment, and Development (long-term). Bier (2021) depicts Greenleaf’s conceptualization of Servant Leadership as a “virtues-based philosophy” of leadership committed to “relationships of persuasion rather than command and control” (p. 29). In speaking to how the approach to Servant Leadership could be incorporated effectively into all aspects of society, the former President of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, Larry C. Spears (2004) shared how Servant Leadership presented an emerging, shifting focus away from traditional autocratic or authoritarian models of leadership (Bier, 2021; Stone et al., 2004; Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016) to more of a Servant Leadership approach displayed in teamwork, collaboration, empowerment of voice, and care communities (Spears, pp 7 & 8).

The precepts of Servant Leadership depicted above align well with the six design principles of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, most notably: The cultivation of Intrinsic Motivation, Empowerment, and Development (long-term). The coach-participants in this study articulated how these PRIMED design principles, reflective of Servant Leadership practices, are positively impacting their coaching
practices. Ten of the 11 coach-participants noted how they are working to better incorporate one or both design principles intrinsic motivation and empowerment into their coaching practices (Theme 9, Figure 15). They found that these two design principles presented a new way of thinking and operating that they welcomed and embraced to be better Servant Leader coaches. To grow, we need to stretch ourselves to think and act outside of our normal habits or ways of operating.

**Intrinsic Motivation.** Like nine of the other coaches, Coach #11 expressed her increased committed to cultivating a team culture through her coaching that adheres to the third design principle of the PRIMED framework: Intrinsic Motivation. PRIMED has positively impacted her to grow and seek ways to cultivate intrinsic motivators with her teams, which is indicative of what Bier (2021) speaks to regarding a Servant Leaders’ commitment to building “relationships of persuasion rather than command and control” (p. 29).

This coach was influenced by examples learned from the PRIMED framework on how to shift away from extrinsic motivators for more lasting and impactful intrinsic motivators that were presented to her through this six-week study. The literature review noted that the sport landscape has become hyper-focused on the results rather than the process and pursuit of excellence. In terms of the “why” kids (and their parents) choose to participate in sports, the obsessive compulsion for trophies, championship rings, and division one scholarships reign supreme. As the coach-participants in this study confirmed, the cultivation of intrinsic motivators for “why” youth should participate in sports provides a much more lasting and impactful approach and endgame. Coach #11 continues to look for ways to incorporate these effective practices into her coaching. She
remarked, “I’m definitely a work in progress…The intrinsic motivation resonated the most with me, and just learning how to praise more individually rather than praising one person in front of the team.” Though many of the coach-participants admittedly revert back to past ways of doing things, they are seeing the impact of incorporating these design principles as fresh, new ways of coaching for long-term character.

**Empowerment.** Like nine of the other coach-participants, one coach expressed how he is implementing more leadership opportunities for his players to better empower them through his coaching. He discussed how he and his coaches are cultivating empowerment and intrinsic motivators with their players through having them lead youth sport camps for younger students. This is something that they had not focused on prior to him learning about PRIMED. In doing so, the coaches are demonstrating Servant Leadership through their conscientious efforts and noted progress in finding new and more frequent ways to empower the members of his team through his use of the PRIMED framework. In the hierarchical or even dictatorial culture of youth sports this empowerment design principle can seem counterintuitive but, as the coach-participants in this study noted, it provides a fresh and uplifting approach to coaching for character.

**Development (long-term).** A vital component of Servant Leadership is one’s commitment to the well-being of those that they lead. As the founder of the principles of Servant Leadership, Greenleaf spoke to the care that the Servant Leader must have for those that they are serving. He stated, “The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (1991, p. 7). The sixth and final design principle of the PRIMED framework posits this same focus for
those aspiring to be effective character educators. Despite not asking a specific qualitative interview question about Servant Leadership, all 11 coach-participants provided testimony that the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework helped them focus more on growing the student-athletes on their teams to be better people and better leaders.

The following two excerpts are representative of all 11 coach-participants in demonstrating how the PRIMED framework is impacting their commitment to the long-term development of their players and teams (Themes 4 and 5), and ultimately their self-identification as Servant Leaders. Coach #3 reflected on how PRIMED relates to the principles of Servant Leadership in stating:

It is all about Servant Leadership and how we can best develop lifelong learners, and send these kids, send our student-athletes, out into the world better equipped with the right character development tools, and the things they need to be successful.

Coach #9 encompassed Servant Leadership through coaching for long-term development in stating the real prize:

We are looking to invest in kids for the sake of their overall development, specifically character development in this case. While, winning is sometimes the way success is measured, especially in the high school sports world. The real win here, obviously, is going for life change and more of a longer lasting impact than simply a score at the end of the game, telling us whether we win or lost…Sure, a state championship would be great. But let's just call that gravy on top. The real
win for us is seeing these girls grow and develop as humans and as teammates and gain some life skills.

The representativeness of the coach-participants’ statements above on cultivating intrinsic motivation, empowerment, and development (long-term), when combined with the Servant Leadership scale results, paint a powerful picture of the suggestive impact that the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework had on the coach-participants’ self-identified growth as Servant Leaders.

From the empirical evidence presented in this section focused on the three key ideas of this study, it is strongly suggested that the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework increased the 11 coach-participants’ perceived commitment to and self-efficacy for character education, as well as their self-identification as Servant Leaders. These primary findings speak to the two major gaps in the (sport) coaching for character training landscape. There is evidence to suggest the effectiveness of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework to meet the need for an empirically based framework, as well as a potential means of combatting the “fade-out” effect challenge with most professional development training programs (expanded up in the next section on Secondary Findings).

**Secondary Findings**

In addition to the three main areas of interest, there were two secondary findings that emerged from the research results that could be of relevance in addressing the two noted gaps in the literature. The first additional finding was that short interventions can support effective character-focused professional development training programs, and the latter provides a potential innovative solution through “weekly text prompts” to reduce
the likelihood of the “fade-out” effect often associated with professional development trainings.

**Short intervention**

An important finding from this study was the brief and non-intrusive nature of the PRIMED for Coaching Character intervention. As stated in the participant consent agreement (Appendix), the total time commitment for the coach-participants was about two hours in total; including the 20-30 minute orientation on the PRIMED framework with the six design principles including the research supporting PRIMED, as well as time to complete the pre-post research surveys, mid-study one-question survey, review the short weekly text prompts, and the 20-25 minutes semi-structured interviews at the conclusion. Additionally, the desired expectation was that the coach-participants would seek to apply the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework to their coaching during the six weeks.

This secondary finding on the “short intervention” was specifically focused on the effectiveness of the actual 20–30-minute orientation of the PRIMED framework with the six design principles in this study. This was not a long and onerous training session, but rather a quick overview to provide the participants with a basic understanding. Despite the breadth and depth of best practices in character education that the PRIMED framework is grounded in, the six design principles of PRIMED in the model are presented in such a succinct and clear manner through the mnemonic device that it is easy to recall and reflect on (as noted by overarching Themes 3 and 6 [Figure 15] that emerged from the data).
The intervention was purposefully kept short from a time standpoint, as discussed in the methods section, to account for the busy schedules that high school sport coaches tend to have (as coaching is often not their primary occupation). The coach-participants were provided additional resources (e.g., a copy of the PRIMED book, as well as other resources) though the coaches were not required to read or use these resources. Despite the brevity of the intervention orientation, there were suggested strong effects noted. Some researchers may be surprised by these strong effects, however, a recent meta-analysis on character education interventions aligns with this finding that shorter interventions showed stronger effects (Brown et al., 2023).

**Weekly Text Prompts to Combat “Fade-out”**

Rogers and Milkman (2016) emphasize that “Forming an intention is easy; following through is hard” (p. 973). In an effort to increase commitment to one’s intention, they stress the importance of keeping one’s intention(s) front and center. Rogers and Milkman posit an approach to enhancing follow through via “reminders through association.”

This secondary finding from the “weekly text prompts” was a potential innovative means to combat the “fade-out” effect noted by researchers as a major challenge to coach professional development training programs (Ettekal et al., 2017; Ferris et al., 2015). As a current high school coach of 25 years, I have taken part in a handful of well-intentioned professional development trainings and I can attest to what the literature says on the waning of impact from such programs due to the “busyness” of coaches, as the information ingested quickly fades away.
To combat this “fade-out” effect, I provided weekly text prompt reminders of the PRIMED framework on Mondays and Wednesdays prior to the coach-participants’ practice times. These were not complex, but rather strategically placed key components (e.g., design principles, short videos) of the PRIMED framework to keep it in the forefront of coach-participants’ thought. The coaches did not have to respond or even acknowledge that they received these text messages, though on occasion a coach or two would respond with a positive affirmation of their own accord. These weekly text prompts were non-intrusive and did not take me, as the researcher, more than a few minutes twice per week to provide the text prompt reminders for the coach-participants.

This aspect of the intervention provided a possible solution to combat this “fade-out” effect that is prominently noted in the literature. It is noteworthy that all 11 voluntary coach-participants completed the full study from start to finish through the six-week period of time, which may be an indicator of the relevance and import of these key secondary findings that short interventions and weekly text prompt reminders to coaches throughout the study can be highly effective strategies to keep coaches engaged and committed to the study.

**Future Research**

This pilot study, to my knowledge, was the first time that the PRIMED for Character Education framework (Berkowitz, 2021) was applied solely to sport coaches during a study that involved an orientation, application, and reflection over multiple weeks of time. From this six-week study of 11 in-season high school sport coaches, there are ample opportunities for future research to build off the specific findings and overarching themes that emerged. There are millions of coaches who are untrained in
coaching for character at all levels of youth sport participation, thus, examining if the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework can be applied to a variety of participant levels would be worthwhile avenues of future research to consider, from the “Pee Wee” levels of sport participation all the way up to the collegiate level, as athletes can be highly impressionable at all levels, especially by influential coaches.

Significant opportunities abound to build off this short pilot study focused on providing a coaching for character training program (PRIMED) that is grounded in empirical data and applicable and relevant to sport coaches and sport groups seeking to increase their commitment to and self-efficacy as coaches of character, as well as perception as Servant Leaders. The first would be to follow up with the 11 coach-participants in this study in six months or a year to see if they are still applying the PRIMED framework to their coaching with the same enthusiasm.

From a scalability standpoint, if resources (research team, time, and budgets) were available, an ideal follow-up major mixed-methods study to examine this pilot study’s empirical evidence and suggestive impacts on coaches would be to increase the sample size to 50 or 100 participants, and the length of time of the study to two full years (to include two in-seasons and two off-seasons from which to assess). Such a study could still incorporate the qualitative richness with similar semi-structured interviews with coach-participants at the end of the intervention that randomly selected a small percentage of the coach-participants.

Adding to the future study above, the use of a control group could be a way to address the limitation noted (below) regarding the many variables, outside of the PRIMED for Coaching Character framework, that could have contributed to the results,
and the length of time of two years would make for a longitudinal study from which to
gauge coach-participants’ long-term growth. Included in such study would be student-
athlete feedback on the impact on their own character due to their coaches’ learning about
and applying the PRIMED framework to their coaching. This would provide a more
holistic assessment of the coach-participants’ impact on the intended long-term target of
such coaching for character development programs: to “nurture the flourishing of
goodness” (Berkowitz, 2021) in our youth - the student-athletes themselves.

One specific consideration in differentiating the control group from the study
group in a future two-year longitudinal study, could be made through the key secondary
finding from this study’s intervention on the “weekly text prompts” as a potential
innovative means to combat the “fade-out” effect. As noted in the extant literature as one
of two major gaps, all the coaches could receive the same 20-30-minute orientation
training and other resources, while the study group would receive the weekly text
prompts (throughout the longitudinal study) and the control group would not. This would
help identify the impact that the weekly text prompts had on the findings.

The final overarching Theme #9 that emerged from the interview data: “Good
Struggle with Intrinsic Motivation and Empowerment from PRIMED” presents a
potential future study looking at why these two design principles stood out as more
challenging for coach-participants to incorporate into their coaching for character
practices. As discussed, PRIMED design principles Intrinsic Motivation and
Empowerment could be viewed as counter-intuitive to common high school sport
coaching practices, though they are highly valued principles to promote human health
and well-being.
Limitations

Knowing the coaching landscape to be one where coaching for character is not the prioritized approach for a substantial percentage of coaches, the first limitation was the need to use purposeful, non-random sampling in inviting coaches to take part in this six-week, voluntary study. All coach-participants opted into this study suggesting that the topic matter around character development was already an important topic that aligned and resonated with them. This purposeful sampling is likely to have affected the results and leads to another limitation in that the coaches who, perhaps, most need such training programs naturally would have opted out, thus the sample itself is almost certainly not representative of the high school coaching landscape. It is my best guess that only 25% of the high school coaching population shares the same commitment to prioritizing coaching for character that the 11 coaches in this study had. The recognized selection bias (non-random sample) of coaches self-selecting into this study creates a limitation in the generalizability to the population of high school coaches.

Another limitation, from a quantitative standpoint, was the sample size, as only having 11 coach-participants did not allow for tests of statistical significance. However, with the primary method being qualitative in nature, 11 participants for the six-week study were sufficient, and the fact that all 11 participants completed the entire study is noteworthy because it demonstrates that they were very engaged and committed. This study was exploratory with its prioritized focus being qualitative, and it did not have a control group common in experimental research. Along this vein, causation could be seen as difficult to conclude because there could have been a variety of other variables outside of the PRIMED framework that contributed to the results. The six-week timeframe of this
pilot study could be seen as another limitation, as some may argue that six weeks is not a long time to apply a new framework to one’s profession and see and reflect on its impact. Despite the short period of time, the data did suggest evidence of impact.

Another limitation of this study is that the results were derived from coach-participants’ perceived reflections on themselves as character educators and their responses may not be an honest or accurate reflection of the reality of their impact on their student-athletes’ and teams’ character growth.

Lastly, as the sole researcher in this study, my passion for the relevance and applicability of the PRIMED framework could have influenced the coach-participants, though I attempted to present the framework orientation in a simple and non-judgmental manner to allow for them to make their own judgement on the effectiveness of the framework.

**Conclusion**

This six-week pilot study was conducted using grounded theory from “What Works in Character Education” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014) and specifically the “PRIMED for Character Education” framework (Berkowitz, 2021) applied to 11 high school sport coaches. The three key ideas of focus were on whether the PRIMED framework could increase the coach-participants: commitment to character education; self-efficacy as character educators; and self-identification as Servant Leaders in an effort to “nurture the flourishing of human goodness” (Berkowitz, 2021) of our youth, and in this case, specifically, high school student-athletes.

With millions of youth involved in sport in North America and across the world, the potential positive impact for good that sport coaches can play in the development of
character is significant. The relevant literature in coaching for character training programs points to two major gaps in the literature: the need to establish grounded theory around what constitutes effective character education training programs for sport coaches, and a means to combat the “fade-out” effect prevalent in coaching for character training programs. It is integral that coaches are provided effective, evidence-based, training programs from which to influence their coaching behaviors and practices for character development.

This mixed methods (six-week) pilot study with high school sport coaches was the first of its kind to utilize the grounded, evidence-based theory of the PRIMED for Character Education framework while applying it to sport coaching. Qualitative research was the primary method of data collection in this study (resulting in nine overarching themes), though the quantitative research data (though not statistically tested due to small sample size) also contributed important findings.

In the end, the five key findings (three primary and two secondary) of this short six-week pilot study with 11 high school sport coaches provide evidence to suggest that the PRIMED for Coaching framework, as an evidence-based grounded theory, was applicable and relevant to their coaching. In the first key finding, PRIMED increased their commitment to coaching for character evidenced through their explicit words of affirmation, their enthusiasm for using PRIMED and sharing it with their colleagues, and how well the framework resonated with who they are. In the second key finding, PRIMED increased their perceived confidence as coaches of character through their expressed words on such growth, in how well it resonated with their actions and approach to coaching, as well as their ability to implement the principles of the framework to their
coaching and the positive results noted with their teams. In the third key finding, the coach-participants’ self-identification as Servant Leaders with their teams increased due to learning about PRIMED. This perceived increase was noted through the growth in their pre-post survey results, as well as their growing adherence to the key precepts of Servant Leadership through seeking to apply PRIMED’s design principles: intrinsic motivation, empowerment, and development (long-term).

The fourth and fifth key findings emerged from the secondary findings. The fourth finding revealed that short coaching for character professional development interventions could be effective, especially considering the fact that sport coaching is often not their primary profession, and time is always of the essence. Lastly, the fifth finding came from the innovation of the “weekly text prompts” as a potential solution to combat the “fade-out” effect that is noted as a major gap in the literature on coaching for character training development. These text prompt reminders were noted in the end of study interviews as a source of support for the coaches. The five findings from this short pilot study can be built upon in future studies to enhance coaching for character training programs to benefit the millions of youth participating in sport.
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Zippia Career expert on Demographics in Sport: 66.7 high school coaches in the United States are male and 33% are female: https://www.zippia.com/high-school-coach-jobs/demographics/
Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Invitation E-Mail

Dear Coach X:

I am a doctoral student at University of Missouri, St. Louis studying Servant Leadership & Character Education. I have been a youth sport coach for the past 25 years. I am reaching out to you to see if you would be interested in participating in a six-week research study on coaching for character. The title of my dissertation study is: PRIMED for Sport Coaching: A Mixed-Methods Pilot Study of a Six-Week Intervention.

The length of time for this study is 6 weeks, and I am seeking 10-20 high school coaches to participate. The first and last week would require you and me to connect via Zoom for 25-30 minutes for an overview (week 1) and interview (week 6), as well as another 10 minutes to complete pre- & post surveys, while the remaining weeks will be a very minimal time commitment to consider and reflect on the PRIMED framework for character education and how it applies to your coaching.

This study on character education and Servant Leadership does not have any potential harmful risks to the coach-participants. In my written dissertation, your name, school, and any other identifying information will be kept confidential (e.g., the coaches who participate will be listed as Coach 1, Coach 2, etc.). If you choose to participate, your participation would be voluntary, and if for any reason you decide that you no longer want to participate in this study, you are free to do so and none of your participant responses will be used in the study.

I hope that you will gain value in participating in this study focused on coaching for character, as all coaches and teachers can play a vital role in the development of youth. Coach-participants will receive a $50 gift card upon completion of the 6-week study, free access to my PRIMED for Coaching for Character Google Drive Playbook during the 6-week study, and two complimentary books that can be used as resource guides during the study and beyond. The goal of this study is to advance the existing research geared around character development and Servant Leadership in sport, and your feedback data will help to achieve this goal.

Please respond via email if you would like to participate in this 6-week study focused on coaching for character and I will follow up with you with the next steps, which would include a consent form to participate in the research.

Sincerely,

--Pete

Pete Paciorek
Doctoral Candidate, Servant Leadership & Character Education
University of Missouri, St. Louis
Appendix B: Consent Form with Waiver of Documentation

University of Missouri–St. Louis

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Project Title: PRIMED for Sport Coaching: A Mixed-Methods Pilot Study of a Six-Week Intervention
Principal Investigator: Pete Paciorek
Department Name: College of Education
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Marvin Berkowitz
IRB Project Number: 2092784

Key Information About the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research study is to increase sport coaches’ commitment to and confidence as character educators and Servant Leaders. You are being asked to participate in this 6-week study. The first and last week would require you and the principal researcher, Pete Paciorek, to connect via Zoom for 20-30 minutes for an overview (week 1) and interview (week 6), as well as another 10 minutes to complete pre-&-post surveys, while the remaining weeks will be a very minimal time commitment to consider and reflect on the PRIMED framework for character education and how it applies to your coaching. The total time commitment is about 2 hours to complete the research survey, scales, and the short semi-structured interview at the conclusion (though the goal is that you are applying the character-focused intervention strategies to your coaching). There will be an optional 30-minute mid-study Zoom discussion forum for coaches to share how they are applying PRIMED to their coaching, in order to learn from others, otherwise, you will not be interacting with the other coach-participants.

Please read this form carefully and take your time. Let us know if you have any questions before participating. The research team can explain words or information that you do not understand. Research is voluntary and you can choose not to participate. If you do not want to participate or choose to start then stop later, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits.

Your participation is voluntary and at no cost to you, and if for any reason you decide that you no longer want to participate in this study, you are free to do so and none of your participant responses will be used in the study. Coaches who participate will be listed as Coach 1, Coach 2, etc. in the final publication. A possible risk is loss of confidentiality.

Purpose of the Research

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a current high school in-season sport coach. The purpose of the research study is to increase sport coaches’ commitment to and confidence as character educators and Servant Leaders.

What will happen during the study?

You are being asked to complete the following 5 steps throughout the study:
1. An initial 20-30-minute virtual Zoom meeting with principal researcher, Pete Paciorek, to provide an overview of the PRIMED Framework for character education, how it can be applied to your coaching, and provide you with a chance to ask any clarifying questions that you might have on either the PRIMED Framework or the 6-week research study. The researcher will confirm your consent and answer any questions you have about this consent form.

2. You will then be emailed a short pre-Servant Leadership scale and a short pre-character development confidence scale (these two scales should not take more than 5 minutes each to complete).

3. At the end of Week 3, you will be emailed a one-question, open-ended question on how you have been using the PRIMED framework (this should take 5-10 minutes to complete). There will also be an optional 30-minute Zoom discussion panel to share how you are using PRIMED with the other coaches in the study. There is no specific prompt for this optional discussion panel.

4. At the end of Week 6, the researcher will conduct a 20-minute semi-structured interview via Zoom where you will have an opportunity to respond to 7 questions pertaining to the PRIMED framework and your coaching. This interview will be recorded for research purposes, but your name and any identifiable information will be removed from the transcript for confidentiality purposes once your responses are paired with your survey data, after which the recordings will be destroyed.

5. Immediately following the interview in step 4, you will be sent the identical Servant Leadership scale and character development confidence scale to complete these two scales post-study (these two scales should each take 5 minutes to complete).

As part of the research study, the researcher will record your image and voice in a Zoom recording. The recording will not be used in any presentation or publication about this research study.

Also, the recording will not be kept for future research studies or educational purposes. After the researcher has transcribed and taken notes from the recording, it will be destroyed to protect your identity.

The recording will include your face/sound of your voice, but the researcher will not reveal your name or other identifying information.

- Yes, I can be audio/video recorded
- No, I don’t want to be audio/video recorded.

Your participation in this study is expected to last 6 weeks. There will be a maximum of 20 subjects participating in this study.

What are the expected benefits of the study?

There are no direct benefits as a result of your participation in the study. Information learned from this study may help other coaches in the future by providing data on the benefits of using the PRIMED model in coaching.

What are the possible risks of participating in this study?

There are minimal risks that may occur if you take part in this research study. They include loss of confidentiality risk. Despite the content matter being non-sensitive, I will do everything I can to protect your privacy. To help lower this possible risk, as described in the “Will information
about me be kept private” section, your identity or any identifying information will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this study.

We will tell you about any new important information we learn that may affect your decision to continue to participate in this study.

What other choices do I have if I don’t want to be in this study?

You are not required to be in this study. You can choose not to participate.

Will I receive compensation for taking part in this study?

You will be compensated for taking part in this study. For your time and effort, you will receive two guidebooks at the beginning of the study and a $50 gift card at the end of the study. Should you decide to not complete the study, you will receive a pro-rated amount of $50 in the form of a gift card for your participation in the study.

Are there any costs for participating in this study?

You should not expect any additional costs by participating in this study. You should discuss any questions about costs with the researchers before agreeing to participate.

Will information about me be kept private?

The research team is committed to respecting your privacy and keeping your personal information confidential. We will make every effort to protect your information to the extent allowed by law.

When the results of this research are shared, we will remove all identifying information so it will not be known who provided the information. Your information will be kept as secure as possible to prevent your identity from being disclosed. In order to protect your information, the researcher, Pete Paciorek, will not use or reveal your name and/or video recording in any publication or presentation that may result from this study. Coaches who participate will be listed as Coach 1, Coach 2, etc. in the final publication.

What we collected from you as part of this research will not be used or shared for future research studies. It will only be used for purposes of this study.

Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns?

If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, or if you have any problems that occur from taking part in this research study, you may call the principal researcher, Pete Paciorek.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the University of Missouri–St. Louis Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 314-516-5972 or irb@umsl.edu. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

Do I get a copy of this consent?

You will receive a copy of this consent for your records. We appreciate your consideration to participate in this study.