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Growing the "We:" Collaboration and Character Education

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Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies

Growing the "We:"
Collaboration and Character Education

A Project in
Creative Studies

By

Judy Bernstein

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

May, 2017

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An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

Growing the "We:" Collaboration and Character Education

This project explores the intersection of collaboration and character education for elementary school children. Though character education has gained increasing popularity, most school programs seem more focused on cultivating the individual than on developing group identity, group creativity or group productivity. Some character education programs speak to global citizenship or being a responsible and contributing community member; but, few focus on the elements of character that enable successful and rewarding collaboration. In response, the author created a classroom resource called *Growing the "We:" Collaboration and Character* that details ten collaboration-related character strengths and activities intended to help young people experience and become excited about working collaboratively.

Keywords: Collaboration, character education, play, improvisation

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Signature

April 18, 2017

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Date

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April 18, 2017   _____
                              Dr. Cynthia Burnett
                              Associate Professor
                              International Center for Studies in Creativity

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                              Judy Bernstein
                              Graduate Student

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Section One: Background to the Project

Purpose and Description of the Project

The purpose of this Master's project is to develop a classroom resource that helps young people develop an understanding and appreciation of collaboration. This resource will include content and activities to explore the intersection of collaboration and character education. It is intended for grades four through eight. The project will be complete when I have developed a sufficiently strong conceptual vision, created enough content, and gleaned enough initial reactions to establish that my resource is both relevant and feasible.

Character education today is a multidimensional and growing movement. According to Character.org (2016), "Concepts such as positive school culture, moral education, just communities, caring school communities, social-emotional learning, positive youth development, civic education, and service learning" (p. 1) all fall under the banner of character education. Character education efforts are informed by a variety of programs, curriculums, frameworks, and resources.

Most character education initiatives focus on cultivating individuals' mental and moral disciplines so that they can reach their full potential and realize academic and professional success. The emphasis appears to be on developing capable, motivated, and decent individuals. I strongly support these goals, but I believe that the role of character education should extend beyond fostering the individual to include fostering the tenets of collaboration. In other words, in addition to equipping young people with a robust "I" mindset, character education should strive to cultivate a high-functioning "we" mindset. Children should learn group integrity and enjoy what Spolin (1963) called "a healthy group relationship" (p. 9). With my resource, I hope to share what an able and agile "we" mindset means and why possessing it is important. My work,

Growing the "We:" Collaboration and Character, will describe character virtues and activities that promote group discovery, invention, creativity, and growth.

To accomplish this, I look forward to harnessing the cognitive and affective thinking skills that map to my preferences and talents, as well as those that tend to especially challenge me. For example, I know myself to be a strong diagnostic, visionary, and strategic thinker. According to the FourSight assessment (http://www.foursight.com), I gravitate toward ideating and clarifying. The assessment also suggests that I have little preference for developing and implementing and that evaluative thinking does not come naturally to me. Having arrived at my vision, I must now gather the data related to the specific ideas and activities I wish to promote. Then, I must synthesize these into fresh articulations and imagery that help to advance my agenda. Doing this should tap into my existing diagnostic, strategic, and ideational skills, as well as my correlating affective skills, mindfulness, gap-sensing ability, and playfulness. However, it will also require evaluative, contextual, and tactical efforts.

Although I have a natural inclination to resist premature closure and a keen sensitivity to emotional environments, neither my tolerance for risk nor my impulse to converge is high. I see virtue in persevering despite weakness and, thus, hope to glean both rewards and enjoyment through the process of developing *Growing the "We."* In the end, I hope to have exercised each of the cognitive and affective skills that support Creative Problem Solving (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2010). I also hope to work iteratively toward a unique and relevant tool for character education.

Rationale for Selection

I was first exposed to activities, ideas, and mindsets that generated vibrant, collaborative, and inventive communities concerned with humanity and integrity through theater training.

Effective ensembles were established through a reverence for the whole, as well as the unique contributions of each participating individual. Among other virtues, acting and improvising cultivated discipline, presence in the moment, tenacity, comfort with risk, a growth mindset, a sensitivity to one's environment, an openness to interdependence, and a capacity to play. However, theater training is not the only way to learn these virtues, nor is theater the only place they matter. Although I struggle to imagine contexts in which these virtues are not important, I believe that they are especially relevant to the collaboration resource I plan to develop.

This belief was driven home during a recent visit to my son's fifth-grade class, where I observed a brief and engaging group activity transfix and then transform a roomful of people. The teacher, Mrs. Wallis, invited each student to dab some toothpaste onto a paper plate and then try to return that toothpaste to the tube. As each child smudged blue goo, everyone's anticipation was heightened, and a communal curiosity was evoked. After each child tried and failed to get any toothpaste back into the tube, Mrs. Wallis offered a metaphor. She invited the class to think of the tube as a mouth and the toothpaste as things that are said. She then asked the group, "Can you ever really take back things that you say?" In less than seven minutes, armed with just a tube of toothpaste, a paper plate, and a circle of seated children, Mrs. Wallis brought focus and importance to kindness.

Afterward, I asked Mrs. Wallis if she conducted exercises like this often. She responded, "No, I can't. I'd need a whole book of things I could do" (S. Wallace, personal communication, November 7, 2016). My resource, which incorporates my ideals, experience in facilitating ideas, and passion for collaboration, seeks to respond to her need.

Section Two: Pertinent Literature and Resources

Beyond the impact of the many scholars and expert sources that were part of my formal creativity studies, four key areas were instrumental in both inspiring and influencing my effort to create a collaboration-centered character education resource for young people. The areas that I found myself revisiting during the course of this project were (a) improvisation, (b) collaboration, (c) character education, and (d) play. In the following, therefore, I have clustered the resources I used according to these four areas.

Improvisation

I first encountered improvisation as a young theater student. I have long believed that (nearly) everything I ever needed to learn about humanity and community could be found in the principles, practices, skills, and techniques of improvisation. Through improvisation, I have experientially explored the collaboration, creativity, joy, and dynamics that I very much hope to foster with my resource. The following are several improvisational leaders to whom I look for guidance and inspiration:

Johnstone, K. (1981). *Impro. Improvisation and the theatre.* London, United Kingdom: Methuen.

This is a book by former Associate Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theater in London. Like so many profound works, this book is deceptively simple in that it appears to offer only some practical tips and tricks for the theater practitioner. Scratching that surface, however, reveals deep explorations of human interaction, creativity, spontaneity, conditioning, observation, and culture. The book is organized into four sections, with pregnant headings suggesting more than what might register at first glance. These headings are "Status," "Spontaneity," "Narrative Skills," and "Masks and Trance." I have almost reverential

appreciation for Johnstone's thinking and techniques. He is a masterful, generous philosopher who seems to invite the reader to consider, explore, and experiment along with him. His work is collaboration at an almost sacred level.

Koppett, K. (2013). *Training to imagine: Practical improvisational theatre techniques for trainers and managers to enhance creativity, teamwork, leadership, and learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Koppett is a leading figure in the burgeoning field of applied improvisation. This book, like the applied improvisation movement, asserts that the tenets and practices associated with improvisation can be harnessed to enhance worker productivity and innovative success in professional organizations. The book is divided into two sections. Section One, "Principles," details six virtues associated with improvisation: trust, spontaneity, accepting offers, listening and awareness, storytelling, and performing with presence. Section Two, "Activities," lists more than 60 theater games that can be used to learn and practice the virtues outlined in Section One. I used the structure of this book and much of Koppett's thinking as a springboard for envisioning my own resource.

Schiff, S. (2006). *A great improvisation: Franklin, France, and the birth of America*. New York, NY: Holt.

This biography by Pulitzer Prize winner Stacy Schiff tells the story of the eight years Benjamin Franklin spent in France to secure support for America's War for Independence from England. The book is not at all about improvisation for the theater. Instead, for me, it emphasizes how improvisational skills can be critically important for success in contexts unrelated to theater. As this book shows, Franklin's success in France was due to character strengths that are now strongly aligned with improvisation. Examples include Franklin's forward movement despite

unimaginable uncertainty and his brilliance and boldness in the face of ambiguity. Other keys to

Franklin's success included his energizing positivity, use of humor, ability to accept and build on

offers, willingness to learn as he went, and unflinching service to the whole, which was the

vision for his country. In France, Franklin relished playing a game despite (or perhaps because

of) the magnitude of the stakes involved. Schiff's telling of his response to challenges represents

both a fascinating history and a great example of many fundamental principles of improvisation.

Schoen, R. (2014). *Improvation: 14 improv activities to upshift your next facilitation or training*

session. Retrieved from http://www.mindgardeninnovation.com/improvation-c20jk

In this short e-book, Russell Schoen (2014), an innovation facilitator and creativity

expert, offers 14 of his favorite improvisation-based activities that he has personally integrated

into his practice. A seasoned improviser, both onstage and offstage, Schoen selected these

exercises specifically for their capacity to "enable participants to connect, laugh and play" (p. 1).

Since these are also goals I hold for the activities recommended in *Growing the "We,"* I studied

both the collection of activities and the concise and clear way in which Schoen described each

one.

Spolin, V. (1983). *Improvisation for the theater: A handbook of teaching and directing*

techniques (Rev. ed.). Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Spolin, V. (1986). *Theater games for the classroom: A teacher's handbook*. Chicago, IL:

Northwestern University Press.

Viola Spolin is often considered the "mother" of improvisation, and her books are

considered sacred texts among her disciples. I use religious imagery to describe both of the

books listed here because their impact has been revelatory to me and to countless others. I find

her emphasis on play, her utilization of games as a vehicle for learning, and her vision of more

people using their intuition more of the time to be endlessly compelling. I also marvel at her absolute confidence in her own thoughts and impulses. This confidence was poignantly captured by her son, Paul Sills, in the preface to *Improvisation for the Theater* (1983). In this work, Sills listed coaching phrases he fondly remembered hearing his mother frequently say. Spolin's coaching remarks like "When it bogs down, play a game" (p. xiii) and "When you are in a state of reflection you are including another; when you initiate you deny yourself" (p. xiii) reveal her expertise and powerful sense of self.

<div style="text-align: center;">**Collaboration**</div>

The resources below helped inform my thinking about collaboration.

Nussbaum, B. (2013). *Creative intelligence: Harnessing the power to create, connect, and inspire*. NY, NY: HarperCollins.

In this book, Nussbaum emphasized the importance of cultivating five creative competencies and an economy based on what he calls indie capitalism. Comprising three parts and a short epilogue, *Creative Intelligence* urges readers to aggressively pursue innovation. Its three parts are titled "Reclaiming Our Creativity," "The Five Competencies of Creative Intelligence," and "The Economic Value of Creativity." I found Nussbaum's emphasis on teams, the trust team members should feel, and the purposeful creativity they should seek to be especially meaningful and relevant to my project.

Kristiansen, P., & Rasmussen, R. (2014). *Building a better business using the Lego Serious Play method.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Rasmussen, R. (2015). *Rasmussen consulting* (T3 ed., Vol. T3). Assens, Denmark: Rasmussen Consulting.

Kristiansen and Rasmussen developed the Lego Serious Play method. Both of the resources listed above offer information on Lego Serious Play theory and practice. *Building a Better Business* (2014) provides a less technical discussion than Rasmussen's (2015) training manual, which details each of the intended applications of Lego Serious Play. I found the Lego Serious Play tools for harnessing visionary thinking, dreaming, and surfacing perceptions of the environment to be powerful additions to my creative problem solving toolkit, which was actively used in developing *Growing the "We."*

Sawyer, R. K. (n.d.). Individual and group creativity. *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity,*

366–380. doi:10.1017/cbo9780511763205.023

In this chapter, Sawyer introduces his framework, discusses collaborative emergence, and reveals his conviction that the best scientific explanation for creativity should comprise multiple levels of analysis and incorporate properties and laws associated with both individuals and groups. Sawyer (n.d.) concludes that collaborative emergence is necessarily improvisational and supported this argument with examples from an improvisational theater group and an in-session writer's room creating a cartoon TV series.

Character Education

This section includes some of the relevant sources I reviewed relating to current thinking about character education.

Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (2009). *Learning and leading with habits of mind: 16 essential characteristics for success*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

In this resource, Costa and Kallick list and elaborate on each of the 16 aspects of character they believe necessary for children to acquire to be successful in school and life. These

habits are "Persisting," "Managing impulsivity," "Listening with understanding and empathy," "Thinking flexibly," "Thinking about thinking (metacognition)," "Striving for accuracy," "Questioning and posing problems," "Applying past knowledge to new situations," "Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision," "Gathering data through all senses," "Creating, imagining, innovating," "Responding with wonderment and awe," "Taking responsible risks," "Finding humor," "Thinking interdependently," and "Remaining open to continuous learning" (Costa & Kallick, 2009).

Kriete, R., & Davis, C. (2014). *The morning meeting book*. Turner Falls, MA: Northeast

Foundation for Children.

This is a teacher's resource explaining the Responsive Classroom approach to morning meetings. It is filled with examples and guidelines for holding class meetings during which children can practice social and emotional skills and become engaged and excited about the day's agenda. My resource, *Growing the "We,"* was heavily influenced by this resource's approachable style, sensible content, and streamlined format.

Character Lab. (n.d.). *Tools*. Retrieved from https://characterlab.org/tools

Character Lab is a non-profit organization founded in 2013 by Angela Duckworth, a MacArthur fellow; Christopher H. Browne, a distinguished professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania; Dave Levin, co-founder of the KIPP public charter schools; and Dominic Randolph, head of Riverdale Country School. Character Lab is dedicated to helping all children develop character by enabling "world-class scientists working hand-in-hand with world-class educators to iteratively develop, test, and refine new tools and measures that build character" (https://characterlab.org). Character Lab has developed an assessment called the Character Growth Card, which is designed to help students and adults discuss and set goals

relating to character growth. The eight traits in the Character Growth Card are "Curiosity,"

"Gratitude," "Grit," "Optimism," "Self-control (interpersonal)," "Self-control (school work),"

"Social intelligence," and "Zest" (https://characterlab.org).

Character.org. (n.d.). *11 principles of effective character education.* Retrieved from

> http://character.org/more-resources/11-principles/

This is a free publication available from Character.org, a non-profit organization focused

on developing character within schools. The 11 principles serve as an evidence-based framework

that Character.org uses to evaluate schools that apply for the Schools of Character designation.

Schools that earn this designation are "to be honored and serve as mentors to others"

(http://character.org) in implementing and evaluating character development.

<div align="center">

Play

</div>

Since I intended for play to be integral to both my process and my product, I reviewed the

following sources about play.

Brown, S. L., & Vaughan, C. C. (2010). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination,*

> *and invigorates the soul*. New York, NY: Avery.

Brown and Vaughan's assertion that play is essential not just for children, but for all

human beings closely mirrors my own belief. This book is divided into two parts: "Why Play?"

and "Living the Playful Life." Throughout the book, Brown and Vaughan argue that play is

important. They support this argument by discussing such topics as the play of animals, personal

play histories, and the role of play in brain development. They also invite us to possess playful

spirits as adults. My resource, *Growing the "We,"* is intended for children, a population that

tends to be very capable of embracing play. Nevertheless, I believe that even children often

regard play as having value only for the purposes of frivolity. Brown and Vaughan's

comprehensive treatment of play helps to elevate its role and distinguish it as a worthwhile human activity.

Henricks, T.S. (2016). Reason and rationalization: A theory of modern play. *American Journal of Play, 8*(3), 287–324. Retrieved from http://www.journalofplay.org/

In this article, Henricks reviews historical perceptions and conceptualizations of modernity and play. He describes the thinking of Max Weber and the multiple theories of play represented by Plato, Schiller, Kant, Freud, Piaget, Erikson, Bruner, Singer, Sutton-Smith, Huizinga, Callois, Bakhtin, Handleman, Turner, Geertz, Mead, Goffman, Vygotsky, Bourdien, Dunning, and Sheard. Henrick's conviction is that play is and has always centered on the tension between two human impulses: an attraction to what is improvised, irreverent, unpredictable, and disordered, and a wish to design the world so that it can be approached with greater confidence and control. These impulses map to Callois' notions of ludus and paidia.

West, S. E., Hoff, E., & Carlsson, I. (2016). Play and productivity: Enhancing the creative climate at workplace meetings with play cues. *American Journal of Play, 9*, 71–86. Retrieved from http://www.journalofplay.org/

Despite this paper's title, the study it describes focuses more on playfulness or "play cues" (p. 76) and their relationship to productivity than the link between play and productivity. The article includes a relevant and compelling review of play theory and its role in organizations. However, the authors examine only the degree to which the presence of sweets and novelty items (e.g. colorful toy guns or fake mustaches) in work meetings signals "that play is permissible" (p. 78). This conflation of play, an activity, with playfulness, a quality, strikes me as inappropriate. Nevertheless, this article helped to crystallize my vision of the potential of play as a method of

action or means to an end. It also bolstered my interest in relying on play as a tactic to explore aspects of character.

Additional Resources

The following resources were not as central as those mentioned above, but were also influential to my thinking.

Amabile, T. M. (1997). Motivating creativity in organizations: On doing what you love and loving what you do. *California Management Review, 40*, 39–58. doi:10.2307/41165921

Bogost, I. (2016). *Play anything: The pleasure of limits, the uses of boredom, and the secret of games*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Burnett, C., & Figliotti, J. (2015). *Weaving creativity into every strand of your curriculum*. Buffalo, NY: Knowinnovation.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2009). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset*. New York, NY: Ballantine.

Gray, D., Brown, S., & Macanufo, J. (2010). *Gamestorming: A playbook for innovators, rulebreakers, and changemakers*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly.

Gray, P. (2014). *Free to learn*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Keller-Mathers, S. (2011, November 21). *TIM education model* [SlideShare presentation]. Retrieved from https://www.slideshare.net/kellersm/tim-education-model

Mather, A. D., Weldon, L. B., & Braun, E. (2006). *Character building day by day: 180 quick read-alouds for elementary school and home*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Oech, R. V. (2001). *A kick in the seat of the pants: Using your explorer, artist, judge and warrior to be more creative*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Tough, P. (2014). *How children succeed: Confidence, curiosity and the hidden power of character*. London, United Kingdom: Arrow Books.

Section Three: Process Plan

My Goals and Outcomes

I thoroughly explored my vision and determined that I wished to create a classroom resource that functioned at the intersection of character education and collaboration and was heavily integrated with play. Rather instinctively, I achieved this goal by working through the Creative Problem Solving Thinking Skills Model (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011), continuously assessing the most various modes and stages relevant to my current position. Throughout the process, I stayed mindful of the cognitive and affective skills I was employing and the degree to which I was successfully managing those feelings that do not come naturally to me, including evaluative, contextual, tactical, thinking, and risk tolerance skills.

Exploring the Vision

I identified key data relating to my vision. This process involved reviewing the resources listed in Section Two, conducting informal discussions with my fifth grader's principal regarding our school district's approach to character education, and conferring with my fifth grader and his friends about collaborative activities they did and did not find engaging. I also relied on the experience and expertise of my sounding board partner, an elementary school teacher.

Formulating Challenges

As I captured key data, I diverged and ultimately converged on the set of virtues, or components of character, around which I wished to cluster my ideas and activities. I also realized the value in visualizing my ideas dynamically so that teachers and students would feel invited to consider them on a regular basis. I decided to collaborate with an illustrator and ultimately produced a poster with the headline "10 Character Strengths Collaboration Grows". Together, the illustrator and I worked with my conceptual vision of using a school or class of diversely

drawn fish representing different styles, attitudes, and personalities. We asynchronously, but very collaboratively ideated visual scenarios that could help dramatize the words I wrote. I also produced a booklet containing suggested activities for actively exploring the ten character strengths described on the poster.

Exploring Ideas

Having determined the set of character virtues I wished to promote, as well as their articulation, I again diverged and converged many times on all the ways in which these virtues might be cultivated in and for classroom communities. I recruited friends, fellow parents, educators, and family to help expand my thinking and offer feedback. During this stage, I reviewed and curated existing activities, as described in the sources detailed in Section Two. I also recalled and used favorite collaborative activities from my past.

Formulating Solutions

At this stage, I refined the overall concept of the resource, its structure, each of the components comprising each section, and the content of the accompanying booklet.

Exploring Acceptance

Throughout the process, I shared my progress with my sounding board partner and with friends and colleagues whose judgment I respect and whose cognitive and creative strengths differ from my own. I also kept my advisor apprised of my progress.

Formulating a Plan

I hoped that my exploration of the intersection of character development and collaboration, as well as the resource I developed, would feel worthy of my time and attention even after the conclusion of CRS690. I look forward to reinforcing my current impression that the creative product I have produced is relevant in its first iteration and will continue to gain

relevance as it is optimized. As I continue in my journey of improving this resource, I look forward to using CPS (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011) to determine the appropriate next steps.

Project Timeline

Table 1.

Key activities and timing.

	Activity	Time Involved
1/16 – 2/3, 2017	Drafted concept paper, shared with sounding board partner Submitted concept paper draft, awaited advisor's feedback	20 hours
2/6 – 2/10, 2017	Submitted revised concept paper per advisor's feedback, awaited project approval Began reviewing source materials	10 hours
2/13 – 3/13, 2017	Reviewed source materials Conferred with fifth grade school principal Conferred with my fifth grader, his friends, and respected family and friends Stayed open to novelty, embraced ambiguity, and persevered through complexity to comprehensively capture, consider, and diverge on relevant improvisation, collaboration, play, and character education-related fodder Diverged, clustered, and converged on key virtues (character strengths) and determined their articulation Determined the umbrella concept for the resource and the components (poster and booklet) it would comprise	60 hours
3/13/17	Submitted first draft of Sections One, Two, and Three, awaited advisor feedback	1 hour

3/15/17	Submitted second draft of Sections, One, Two, and Three	1 hour
3/16 – 4/10, 2017	Diverged and converged, developed the ten character strengths, their supporting visual imagery, the poster, and the booklet intended to help exercise the character strengths in classrooms with young people Refined the concept, structure, design, and content of the resource	60 hours
4/10/17	Submitted Sections Four, Five and Six	1 hour
4/17 – 4/24, 2017	Reached the intended endpoint for the Master's project Submitted the final project, including revised and completed Sections One through Six, references, appendices, etc.	20 hours
4/24 – 5/1, 2017	Edited the final work, as necessary, and digitally bound the completed project Uploaded the final work to Digital Commons	10 hours
		183 total hours

Evaluation Plan

Given my strong preferences for clarifying and ideating, as well as my relatively low capacities for developing and implementing, I viewed completing this self-directed project as an indication of success. I feel that I have isolated and uniquely articulated character strengths bred and fed by collaboration and have created a set of catalysts for exploring those strengths that I expect to be used in many classrooms. I deem my creative process successful.

Section Four: Outcomes

My effort to create a resource for school-age children that supported both collaboration and character education yielded two anticipated concrete products and two unexpected process outcomes.

Products

Growing the "We" evolved into an illustrated poster and an accompanying booklet. Each component aims to trigger consideration and exploration of collaboration and its corresponding character strengths. The poster is particularly designed to engage and delight children, while the booklet is intended to support teachers in their efforts to promote collaboration. Given these goals, I strove to make the poster both visually appealing and informative and the accompanying booklet user-friendly.

Illustrated Poster

The first product is a professionally illustrated poster that concisely describes the ten character strengths that collaboration grows and helps dramatize these strengths with colorful scenarios depicting anthropomorphized fish. The fish reflect the kinds of cognitive, affective, cultural and stylistic diversity one might have in a classroom of elementary school children. The heading "Growing the We: Collaboration and Character" spans the top of the poster, and the sub-heading "10 Character Strengths Collaboration Grows" is positioned just beneath. The poster can be sent via electronic mail and is formatted to print on standard 8.5" x 11" paper. It can also be enlarged to fill larger papers or poster boards. An iteration of the poster can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Iteration of poster.
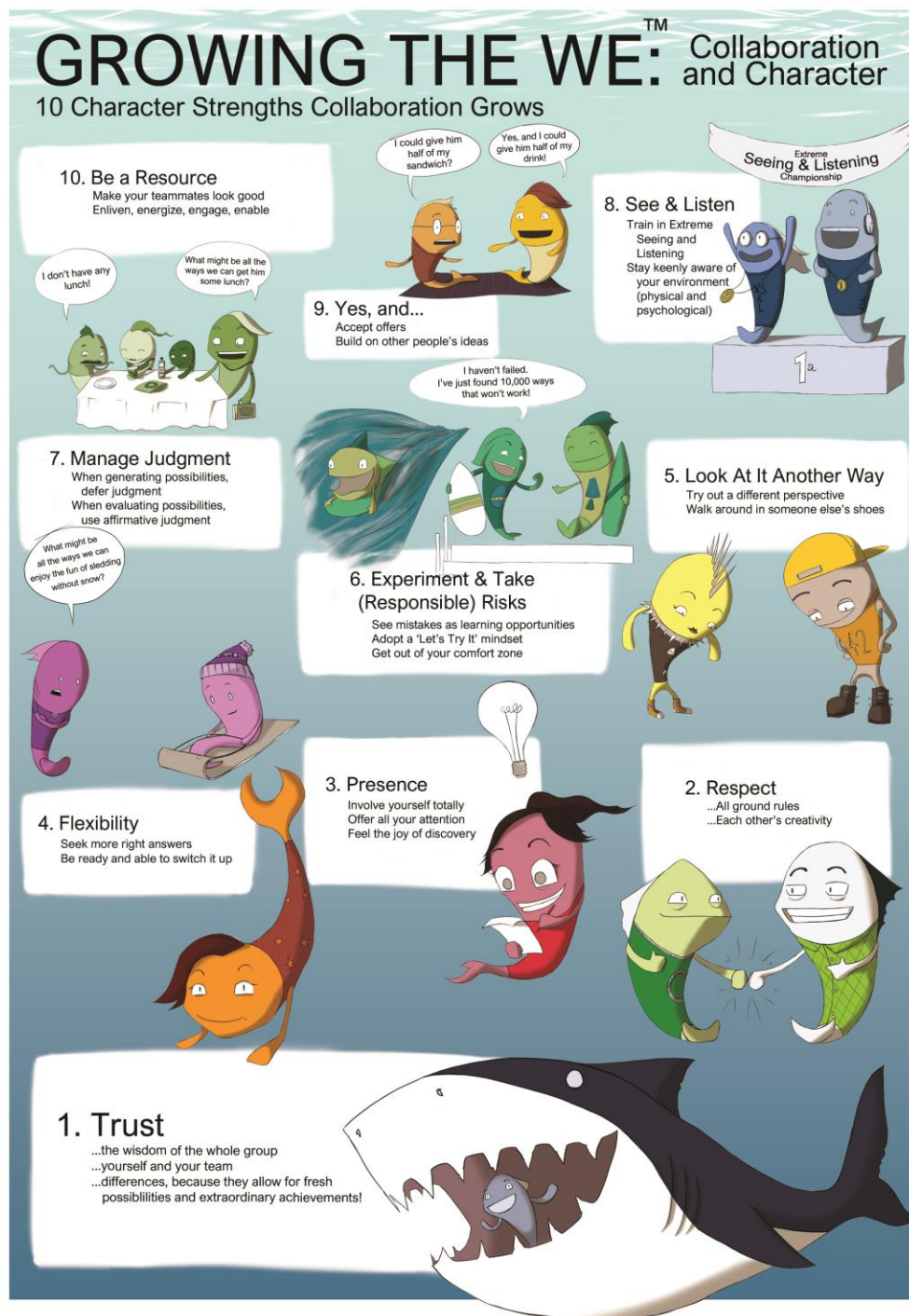
Subsequent iterations of the poster include modified imagery and more concise descriptions of each strength. While the articulation of the ten character strengths of collaboration continues to be prototyped, their fundamental nature has remained consistent. This nature includes:

10. Be a Resource

9. Yes, and…

8. See & Listen

7. Manage Judgment

6. Experiment and Take (Responsible) Risks

5. Look At It Another Way

4. Flexibility

3. Presence

2. Respect

1. Trust

These character strengths are listed in descending order as a nod to the Top 10 Lists that my sons enjoy making "just like Letterman" (M. P. Riseman, personal communication, July 23, 2016).

Booklet

The accompanying 43-page booklet reiterates the ten character strengths and includes an Introduction discussing *Growing the We*'s reason for being and two suggested activities per character strength that teachers can use to help students experientially learn collaboration.

Figure 2.

Portion of booklet's introduction.

Introduction: *Growing the We* and its reason for being

Character Education matters, perhaps now more than ever. It is clear that individual integrity, in all its dimensions, should be cultivated. Fortunately, many schools are answering this mandate by providing such programs as whole child, service learning, social-emotional learning, and civic education, all intended to teach children to "do their best and be their best" (character.org. 2017).

> Schools, parents and community members are grappling with the importance of virtues such as civility, respect, integrity and hard work, and trying to determine how these relate to success in life... (Character Education Partnership, 2012)

My children's school district uses Costa's sixteen *Habits of Mind* as a touchstone for character education initiatives. *Habits of Mind*, like many other approaches to character education, seems an effective framework focused on developing capable, motivated and decent individuals. Individuals who feel a responsibility to contribute to their communities and live as honorable global citizens. I am a fan and supporter of approaches like *Habits of Mind*.

Still, I don't think the job of character education should just be to cultivate the individual. **Along with equipping young people with a robust 'I' mindset, character education should strive to cultivate a high functioning 'We' mindset.** There is value in fostering the tenets of collaboration. Young people are entitled to learn group integrity. They should understand what it means and why it is important to possess an able and agile 'We' mindset. The goals of character education should include fluency in collaboration.

Growing the We: Collaboration and Character Education is intended to help young people develop an appreciation for and competency in collaboration.

Suggested activities are described using a unique and, hopefully, collaboration-affirming framework called G R O U P. This framework assigns a consistent structure to the way in which each activity is relayed and was designed to enhance readers' understanding of and comfort with the activities. Within the framework, each letter comprising the word 'group' represents a key element teachers should be mindful of when leading a given exercise. These elements are described in a legend following the booklet's introduction.

Figure 3.

G R O U P framework legend.

G R O U P Framework. Each activity is explained according to *Growing the We's* G R O U P framework. The framework reflects an experiential approach (i.e. do, then discuss.) I suggest conversation about the activity be minimal before it is tried. The thick line separating row R (Reveal) from row O (Open Ended Questions) indicates when, in the framework's sequence, the activity should occur.

G	Game, Goal, Guidelines	Always share the activity's name, key objective and any guidelines that need to be understood and/ or agreed upon. Guidelines can include rules or safety considerations
R	Reveal	Reveal/ make clear whatever obstacles or constraints challenge achieving the goal
O	Open Ended Questions	Use to trigger rich discussion during debrief
U	'Us' Impact/ Implications	Explore perceptions of relevance. How does this relate to us? What mean to/ for us? Probe connections to other situations
P	Power Gleaned, Strength Practiced	What collaboration-related character strengths feel involved? How? What, if any, seem less central? Why? In what other ways can we practice these strengths? In what ways do they help grow our 'we'?

There are two suggested activities per each of the ten character strengths. Whenever possible, I tried to design at least one activity per pair that lent itself to physical expression. For example, to help explore and discover the character strength *Be a Resource*, I suggested both a physically active exercise, Airport, and one with less movement, Envelopes. These can be seen in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4.

Airport.

Encourage Character Strength
#10. BE A RESOURCE
Make your teammates look good
Enliven, energize, engage, enable

G Game, Goal, Guidelines	**Airport** Teams of two. Use tape or paper to delineate a large rectangle (e.g. 4' x 12'). Objects of various size are placed randomly within rectangle. One child is the pilot, the other is the control tower. The rectangle represents the landing strip. Because of poor visibility, the tower must guide the pilot to a safe landing through the large rectangle. To make a safe landing, the pilot can't touch or knock over any of the obstacles. The pilot also can't step outside the rectangle. The round is over when the pilot has either encountered an obstacle or made it through the course. If space allows, several rectangles can be set up and used by several teams at the same time.
R Reveal	To represent poor visibility, the pilot is blindfolded and must rely on the tower's verbal/ sound cues to get through the obstacles. (e.g. "slide right foot forward") Note: If distinguishing between left and right is difficult, give pilot a physical symbol to hold (e.g. piece of paper) in right hand and instruct control tower to say ("slide piece of paper side foot forward")
O Open Ended Questions	What was it like to be Tower, how did it feel? What was it like to be pilot? How feel toward your teammate? How did that feeling change during the activity?
U 'Us' Impact/ Implications	How does this relate to our classroom community? What might it mean to/ for us? PROBE connections to other situations. How can we use what we experienced today to enhance our classroom community?
P Power Gleaned, Strength Practiced	What collaboration-related character strengths feel involved? How? What, if any, seem less central? Why? In what other ways can we practice these strengths? In what ways do they help grow our 'we'?

Figure 5.

Envelopes.

Encourage Character Strength
#10. BE A RESOURCE
Make your teammates look good
Enliven, energize, engage, enable

G Game, Goal, Guidelines	**Envelopes** Attach small manila envelopes labeled individually with student names (1 student name per envelope) to back of classroom door. Explain that, over the course of two weeks, each student will fill each envelope with either a written or drawn message that answers why *it is great to be in class with* the person named on the envelope. Each child submits a sincere answer to that question for each child (including him/ her self) Note: If helpful, small sheets with the sentence "You are great to be in class with because …" can be distributed.
R Reveal	All messages must be anonymous. You must find something positive to say that is specifically about each classmate. After two weeks, each student will receive their envelope. Note: Instructor may choose to review messages
O Open Ended Questions	How did we do as a group? As individuals? What was it like to look only for the positive? How did that mindset affect your experience/ outlook/ thoughts/ feelings about others? About yourself?
U 'Us' Impact/ Implications	How might this relate to our class community? What might it enhance? What, if anything, might it complicate?
P Power Gleaned, Strength Practiced	How does this activity relate to collaboration? What collaboration-related character strengths feel involved? How? What, if any, seem less central? Why? In what other ways can we practice these strengths? In what ways do they help grow our 'we'?

Eager to encourage the regular use of my resource, I tried very hard to keep the booklet user-friendly. I assumed that dedicated teachers would appreciate a simple layout with easily understood and actionable information. While the theories underlying the activities and the stories about their origins would fascinate me, I suspected that they would slow down teachers. Therefore, I sought to minimize superfluous content. I did, however, feel some obligation to speak to sources and so included a short paragraph about attributions, which can be seen in Figure 6. I do not know whether this paragraph is sufficient. Koppett (2013) spoke about encountering this conundrum while creating *Training to Imagine*, noting that "One of the most daunting tasks I faced in writing this book was tracking the origins of the exercises" (p. 5). Ultimately, Koppet (2013) "made peace with the impossibility of tracking each activity" (p. 5). To address this challenge, I may eventually choose to add an appendix to the booklet that relays how I became aware of or developed each activity.

Figure 6.

Paragraph about attributions.

The phrasing and activities that comprise Growing the We come from various sources, including myself. Having first studied collaboration as a theater student, then through the professional lens of marketing insights and most recently through a Master's in creativity and innovation, it can be a struggle to determine a given element's exact provenance. This iteration of Growing the We represents a prototype created in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in Science. A thesis document about this resource containing more stringent attribution will be submitted and made available at http://creativity.buffalostate.edu/

I also sought to emphasize that, though I assigned specific activities to specific character strengths, any collaborative experience could evoke any or all of the ten strengths listed. For this reason, I urged teachers to stay open to whatever connections students might make.

Process Outcomes

Given the relatively short time frame we had to complete our Master's projects, I intentionally designed an initiative that was not dependent on other people's schedules. As I progressed, however, it became apparent that I needed and very much wanted the benefit of someone else's expertise: specifically, an illustrator's.

Collaborative Relationship

Within a few hours of reaching out to five professional illustrators via the website http://www.hireanillustrator.com, I received an eager response from a talented illustrator based in Sussex, England. From the start, Nick understood my vision and was excited to help bring it to life. Working with Nick to visualize and refine scenarios and characters continues to delight me and reinforce my reverence for collaboration. It has also furthered my belief that collaboration requires and bolsters interpersonal integrity for both children and adults.

Overcoming Self-Imposed Limits

Ackoff and Vergara (1988) defined creativity as an ability to modify self-imposed constraints. I see this ability more as a function of creativity or a consequence of the productive creative process. My process of creating *Growing the We* has reinforced this perspective. In striving to realize my vision, I repeatedly transcended obstacles that, prior to my creative problem solving training, would have stymied my progress. These triumphs have involved both small barriers and significant ones. As previously mentioned, I am not a natural implementer or tactical thinker. I have a strong eye for perceiving challenges, but a weak one for seeing opportunities to overcome them. During the course of this project and the production of this document, I chose to act as if I felt all challenges were surmountable. One can take only so much

responsibility for her feelings, but one can take full responsibility for her actions. In acting as if I could overcome obstacles, I ultimately found myself doing so.

Section Five: Key Learnings

My key learnings cluster around three distinct themes: ideas for which I feel a deepened faith, creative heroism, and pathways.

Deepened Faith

There are several ideas and practices for which I now feel increased commitment and certainty.

Incubation. Prior to this project, I relied on incubation but was reluctant to speak about it to those who regarded it as a euphemism for procrastination. Having discovered that incubation is essential to delivering my best work, I now assert this reality when a task requires my creative input. In the Insights realm, as in most, clients expect high-quality deliverables at impossible turnaround speeds. I am no longer sheepish about explaining that the richness of my thinking will grow exponentially with the amount of time I have to work on a project.

Upshifting. I have also grown more aware of and insistent upon my (and others') need to transition from ordinary thinking to effective creative thinking. I have also determined that my preferred term for this transition is not 'warming up' or 'ice breaking,' but 'upshifting.' Upshifting speaks to a change in mode, and so I believe that it best encompasses the attitudinal and physiological changes that enable inspiration, collaboration, and useful connection-making.

Extrinsic motivation. Much to my surprise, I have grown quite fond of extrinsic motivators. I have realized that I too often operate on a solely emotional level. I too frequently make choices about what to do or pursue based on whether an activity feels worthwhile. In other words, my default is to act only on what motivates me intrinsically. As mentioned previously, I have little natural preference for developing and implementing. Extrinsic motivators, such as deadlines or remuneration, carry me through the periods of development and implementation that

attend projects about which I already feel intrinsically motivated. This has especially been the case while creating my resource, *Growing the "We."*

Collaboration as a humanizing force. While I have discovered that extrinsic motivators help me complete the work I do independently, collaborating with others can motivate me through almost everything else. I have learned that I find happiness, or what Csikszentmihalyi (2009) called *flow,* in group activities, especially group activities involving shared goals and creative thinking. I believe that this is because collaboration contains within it the potential to advance our humanity. Effective collaboration rests on an awareness of, appreciation for, sensitivity to, compassion for, connection with, and trust in someone else. Therefore, I find great reward in promoting collaboration.

Qualitative research. It was a disenchantment with qualitative marketing research that first triggered my interest in studying creativity. I was uncomfortable with the industry's apparent trajectory and unsatisfied with the minimal contribution that I felt I was making as a qualitative marketing research consultant. However, I now find myself with a creative product that will benefit from qualitative feedback. I also realize that to effectively optimize *Growing the "We,"* I need the smart, qualitative insights I provide my clients, not merely reports of what respondents have said. I am more than a little surprised to find myself in this position.

Power of framing. My mother is fond of saying that "truth is truth" (C. J. Bernstein, personal communication, June 16, 2013). This tends to be her generous response to seeing something she already knows or does freshly articulated or considered from a different angle. Successful marketing is often based on this skill. For example, all soap cleans, so Irish Spring talks about deodorizing and Coast talks about refreshing. As a seasoned qualitative marketing research consultant, I am deeply aware of the power of framing in making something sound

different or important. My project, however, extended my understanding of framing to include

using a new lens to actually create something different and, hopefully, important. Neither

character education nor the tenets that underlie collaboration are new; however, looking at

collaboration through the lens of character education helped to create something completely

novel. Yes, truth is truth, and one truth seen through another can create a new one.

Creative Heroism

I use the phrase 'creative heroism' to refer to acts of creative effort that sit outside one's

comfort zone. In completing this project, I have learned that, for me, creative heroism has several

dimensions. These include:

- Forcing myself to untangle complexity, especially when I feel that I cannot. If I
  cannot always feel fearless and confident, I can at least stay dogged through
  challenges.

- Persisting through the development stage.

- Staying mindful and in service of objectives. Lego Serious Play co-developer Robert
  Rasmussen said "process is play, product is work" (R. Rasmussen, personal
  communication, February 16, 2015). I am vulnerable to indulging in process because
  it brings me joy, so I have learned that it takes discipline to resist that kind of
  indulgence.

- Enabling my ideas to collaborate with one another. Like many ideators, I struggle to
  organize my bits and pieces of insight. Working through this struggle, however, often
  leads to a stronger product. More importantly, I see virtue in struggling.

Pathways

My incubating mind is still working on two notions, each related to successfully moving through process.

The first notion has to do with the benefit of deferring status as a way to bolster collaboration. Spolin (1986) deliberately used play to vanquish status among participants. She said that play allows people to "meet as fellow players" (p. 6). Perhaps there is value in extending our understanding of deferring judgement, the first rule of divergent thinking, to include deferring status?

The second notion, which is still very much in its infancy, has to do with my experience of sometimes losing an important link between associations. I call this dynamic the "vanishing bridge." It has to do with more than just a weak memory. I find that sometimes a key connection to a realm of insights or creative possibilities becomes more challenging to find or return to the deeper into I go into that new realm. I am not yet sure what I am puzzling through with this notion of the vanishing bridge, but I look forward to the possibility of it resulting in a key learning.

Section Six: Conclusion

I see an important connection between collaboration and character education and believe that my resource, *Growing the "We:" Collaboration and Character,* can help promote the exploration of that connection. I firmly believe that character education should be expanded to include the cultivation of able groups as much as it is currently focused on cultivating able individuals. Efforts to ready young people for success should include teaching the character strengths that enable group identity and group efficacy. This type of education strikes me as being practically necessary.

Beyond the practical necessity of such education, however, I also see virtue in exposing children to the humanizing effects of collaboration. It was while engaging in the kinds of activities suggested in my booklet that I first began growing my own impressions of integrity. It was this kind of experiential play that first and continues to help me envision the kind of person I want to be.

I very much hope that *Growing the "We"* becomes a tool educators rely on to instill in their students both an appreciation and a capacity for collaboration.

Next Steps

Though still in their prototype forms, both the booklet and the poster are sufficiently finished to justify my seeking stakeholder feedback. Therefore, my most immediate next step is to conduct a handful of qualitative in-depth interviews with educators to inform further development.

Goals for these interviews will include gauging overall interest, soliciting perceptions of benefit, and measuring relevance and uniqueness. I am also eager to explore stakeholders' impressions of each of the ten character strengths and how they are articulated and dramatized,

as well as the perceived fit between the poster and the booklet. I seek to explore if and how

educators envision using each component of the resource and what specifically cues these

expectations. I would also like to determine what resistance, if any, educators show to leading

the suggested activities; what elements, if any, encourage comfort with the activities; and what

may be minimizing interest in giving each a try. I am also eager to glean responses to the G R O

U P framework to understand the degree to which it simplifies registration and invites trial.

In addition to responding to educators' feedback, I hope to incorporate additional changes

into the next round of production. At the moment, the poster and the booklet are linked only

loosely with respect to design. I would like to see the booklet echo the poster in tone and style,

understanding that the poster is intended more to engage children in the character strengths and

the booklet is intended more to help teachers provide experiential learning. A key opportunity to

infuse more of the poster into the booklet will be designing the booklet's cover. My illustrator is

currently working on that task.

I would also like to generate ideas for aligning the resource more closely with teachers'

already packed agendas. *Weaving Creativity into Every Strand of Your Curriculum* (Burnett &

Figliotti, 2005) provides a useful model for ensuring compatibility between objectives and

educators' content goals. I would very much like for my resource to serve educators in pursuing

their already identified objectives, rather than represent additional ones. I also believe that there

is value in exploring children's reactions to the poster and inviting them to help identify

opportunities for use.

I would like to include a more substantive attribution section in my next round of booklet

production. While identifying the genuine provenance of each suggested activity seems

impossible, I could at least include an appendix detailing how I first encountered or came to design each activity.

I also plan to use the resource as a credentialing tool. To aid in this goal, I may offer the poster and the booklet to local schools as gifts. Combining these gifts with offers to conduct workshops seems to be an effective way to both establish myself as an authority on collaboration and advocate for collaboration as an integral part of character education.

As stated, collaboration is a reliable source of personal happiness. For this reason, I anticipate adapting this resource for an adult audience and using it to promote collaboration skills and strong character across a vast array of organizations.

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College to place a digital copy of this Master's Project, *Growing the "We:" Collaboration and*

Character, as on online resource.

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Judy Bernstein

April 3, 2017

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