Flourishing as an educational aim:
An insight into the value of artworks for
moral deliberation on life's challenges

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Abstract

This paper is about the role of visual art in a course of education that aims at virtue literacy. It focuses on one virtue which is courage. While flourishing as an educational aim is challenging, the arts are helpful in that respect. The visual arts have a role to play through some of their notable qualities such as imitation and representation, including cognitive and emotional aspects, and as a worthwhile pursuit in themselves. In this paper I present a four-dimensional model which describes the benefits of the visual arts for moral development. According to my research, artworks promote critical thinking on moral issues, induce affective responses to virtues such as courage and empathy, admiration of character strengths, and general sensitivity to moral and personal challenges. Furthermore, through art creation, participants in my research displayed significant disposition to conceptualize ethical concepts and express existential, emotional challenges in their artworks.

Introduction

In recent decades the emphasis on education in general as an ethical and value-based practice has been mounting (Kristjánsson, 2015). However, this broad socio-moral perspective has introduced some qualms concerning the role of educators in this respect and their options as to fulfil these aims, not least in regard of flourishing which Aristotle (1955) considered could only be achieved near the end of life. Kristjánsson (2016) writes that despite several convincing accounts on flourishing as a central aim in education, he suspects that this puts unreasonable pressure on educators. Harðarson (2019) suggests that if teachers as role models are to promote their pupils' development of practical wisdom they need to have opportunities to enjoy professional liberty which allows them to develop their own practical wisdom. All this points to the importance of the teacher as a role model or example in moral education (Sherman,

1999), regardless of teachers' awareness of their position as role models, for better or for worse (Berkowitz & Bier, 2006).

The subtlety of role modelling extends to teachers' attitudes towards moral problems, how they present the moral issues at hand and how they create a safe-zone for pupils to deliberate on these. As flourishing is an open-ended educational aim which may be difficult to connect directly to a specific syllabus and unidirectional methods, there still are some feasible options for educators. These include working with pupils on projects that promote critical thinking and collective deliberation on moral issues, involving both cognitive and affective aspects. Such projects allow teachers to exercise their moral cognition with pupils, displaying their sincere quest for deeper understanding of human conduct and morality.

Presently, I am working on a research project which looks into the benefits of the visual arts for developing virtue literacy, a concept which The Jubilee Centre of Character and Virtue (2017) coined as an essential constituent of character education and which could eventually help individuals to flourish. In this paper I will discuss the ***creative part*** of an eight-week intervention with pupils in an upper elementary school in Iceland.

During the intervention, pupils were invited to create artworks inspired by their conceptions on two virtues: courage and friendship (the discussion of friendship waits until later opportunity). While pupils' ***creativity*** is corallary to my research, another equally important aspect is ***philosophical***; an analysis of pupils' textual responses – vignettes (Gray, Royall & Malson, 2018), to artworks in pre- and post-tests administered before and after the intervention. While my in-depth analysis of pupils' vignettes is set to be published elsewhere (see Ólafsson Waage, forthcoming), I will, however, briefly summarize pertinent results from the ***philosophical*** part, in order to expand the foundation of my argument for the benefits of the visual arts for moral development.

In my paper on the ***philosophical*** part (Ólafsson Waage, forthcoming) I argued that by inspecting artworks, pupils showed the abilities to reflect on life's challenges. It appears that the artworks could help them to put the content into a meaningful context, both on a personal level of experiences and on a more general and universal level of morality; "the right thing to do". Three of the artworks I used, inspired pupils to deliberate about aspects of courage. In his painting *The Problem We All Live With* (1964)[1], Norman Rockwell tells the story of Ruby Bridges, a black girl escorted to school by four U.S. Marshals. She had to endure constant threats from white citizens who opposed desegregation (Bridges, 1999). Ruby's intention to continue her education despite violent opposition is a telling example of courage and determination. The second artwork is Briton Rivière's *Daniel's Answer to the King* (1890)[2] which illustrates a biblical story from the Old Testament. Rivière paints Daniel in captivity, facing a window turning his back to the hungry lions in the den. The painting invites beholders to deliberate about courage and fear in rough situations. The third artwork is Edvard Munch's autobiographical painting, *The Sick Child* (1895-96)[3], which portrays his older sister on her deathbed fighting terminal illness (Messer, 1985). A close relative is by her side, hiding her face in despair. Despite these circumstances, the young girl seems to be comforting the older woman. This picture can raise questions about courage, dignity and equanimity when facing the inevitability of death.

It is the aim of the present project to employ and harness the creative force of the visual arts to approach moral deliberation through their ability to reach beyond the language in

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[1] Norman Rockwell, The Problem We All Live With:
"https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Problem_We_All_Live_With

[2] Briton Rivière, Daniel's Answer to the King:
"https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_in_the_lions'_den"

[3] Edvard Munch, The Sick Child: "https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sick_Child"

conceptualizing the visual dimensions of reality. The primary channels of the visual arts are the emotions, and it is the emotional impact of the artworks that stimulate moral deliberation.

Here, I will argue that artworks and art creation can be helpful in this respect from at least four perspectives (see table 1). Dimensions **1** – concerning the pupil, and **2** – concerning teacher/school are vertical in the table below, while dimension **A** holds the personal/local/particular context and **B** the larger context of "the other" or society in a Universal/general context.

Table 1 Four dimensions of benefits of the visual arts for moral development.

Four Dimensions of Benefits of the Visual Arts for Moral Development	1: Concerning the pupil	2: Concerning the Teacher/School
A: Personal/Local/Particular	Articulating thoughts and experiences through artistic creativity helps the pupil to clarify these for himself and develop further moral comprehension.	Pupils' artworks make visible their concerns, interests, and conceptual understanding of virtue themes. This helps teachers to adjust approaches.
B: Society/Universal/General	Pupils learn about their peers' perceptions on moral issues, helping them to broaden their own understanding.	Heightened awareness of moral subjects through the hidden agenda. Visual arts make these subjects visible – e.g. pictures on walls.

Flourishing

At the heart of Aristotle's ethics is the notion of human flourishing (gr. eudaimonia). If individuals are to flourish in the Aristotelian sense, they must possess virtues, exercise them accordingly and feel the appropriate emotions. This means that it is not enough to act virtuously without the appropriate emotions. Therefore, the act in itself cannot be fully virtuous without a corresponding emotion. This articulates Aristotle's theory of the golden mean: A fully virtuous individual desires, feels and acts in the right medial way (Aristotle, 1955). Applying this to the virtue of courage, it becomes apparent that true courage is the mean between the two extremes of cowardice and foolhardiness as both these ends of the spectrum represent an imbalance between emotion and action. Although this describes the qualities of a virtue, the final judgement rests on the value of the end that is sought and the context which it is in, and the relationship between those. Compare for example the recording of an immigrant from Mali climbing a building in Paris in order to save the life of a toddler in distress[4] to numerous selfies and videos available on e.g. YouTube, recorded while solo-climbers risk their lives for no apparent reason.

Virtues

Aristotelian virtues may be classified as four main types: 1) Moral virtues of character: such as courage, justice, honesty, compassion, gratitude and humility/modesty. 2) Civic virtues that correspond to citizenship and public service. 3) Performance virtues such as courage, endurance, resilience and confidence. 4) Intellectual virtues such as being open minded, where truthfulness and curiosity which enable us to reason to truth and are essential for the acquisition of knowledge. While the good sense, also referred to as the practical wisdom (phronesis), is an intellectual virtue, it can be considered as a meta-virtue; an overall quality of judgement

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[4] The recording of the young man from Mali scaling the building to save the toddler is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEqWh6fl_sA

(Arthur, Kristjánsson, Harrison, Sanderse & Wright, 2017). Practical wisdom concerns good moral choice which needs to be responsive and sensitive to the particular circumstances of moral agency (Sherman, 1999). Practical wisdom helps us to evaluate how and when we act appropriately, under which circumstances, at what time and with what motive. (Kristjánsson, 2015). Practical wisdom makes virtues open-ended because its development continues through adult life (Sherman, 1999).

A central virtue in my discussion is courage. It is not a simple task to define courage properly, there exist accounts that describe courage from what Curzer (1996, p. 2) described as a "[...] natural view on courage which may be displayed toward a variety of different objects of fear and in a variety of different contexts". Such natural views tend to incorporate related virtues into courage such as confidence and that fighting our fears of evil would not be necessarily a description of courage because the sphere of courage is not, according to Aristotle, the fear of all fearful things (Curzer, 1996, p. 3).

Virtue Literacy

An important constituent of virtue development is virtue literacy. Intelligible discourse about moral issues and virtues requires command of appropriate concepts and vocabulary. Although virtue literacy does not in itself guarantee moral conduct, it may nevertheless be considered necessary for it (Arthur et al., 2017). Moral development as an educational objective can then be regarded as an attempt to develop or deepen virtue literacy. Virtue literacy provides the pupil with the necessary moral concepts for further moral cognition and deliberation, as the enhancement of the cognitive aspects increase their moral sensitivity (Jubilee Centre, 2017).

The visual arts

The existential nature of flourishing as a substantial human dimension requires that within the school-setting we must address moral development through similar procedures as in real circumstances, where emotions, cognition, metacognition and self-correction are essential for learning to take place. Instead of having direct experiences in real circumstances, the arts can serve as a substitute, providing a pedagogical *playground*, allowing for risk-free exercises in moral conduct. When people use imagination, critical thinking and creativity in problem solving, or developing approaches to meet challenges of the environment, they may go through various cycles of trial and error. In many cases these cycles can take place in real life, as when one subjects an item to a test scene before trying it out in real circumstances. In moral cases, this is often not possible or desirable. Here, the arts may play a central role by staging hypothetical circumstances that still bring about a suggestion of the emotional force of real-world situations. Such hypothetical circumstances may take the form of what-if thought experiments in the mind of an individual, but it is in art, whether literature, theatre, painting or other art-forms, that these are brought out in the public sphere. This articulates the need to harness students' creativity to take theoretical discussions to another level by their own activity within the educational context. Mobilizing student in such ways has been practiced in various contexts using drama, music, literature, and the visual arts (Harrison, Bawden & Rogerson, 2016). John Dewey recognized the importance of a continuity of aesthetic experiences with normal processes. At the heart of aesthetic experiences is the quest for order which is analogous to the notion of life fighting disorder. Dewey emphasised the role of the senses. He regarded them as the organ through which we participate directly with the comings and goings in the material world and the quality of such experiences would influence our wonder and reflections (p. 22), and to perceive, a beholder must create his own experience (Dewey, 1934, p. 56). Susanne Langer wrote that works of art express ideas about how feelings and emotions come and go, how they rise and grow as a synthesis of our inner life unity and personal identity. The

inner life is the inside story of our own history - vaguely known because its components are nameless, and it is hard to turn an idea of anything that has no name – it has no handle for the mind. This has led many to believe that feeling is a formless affair with no structure of its own (Langer, 1957). Hence, artworks can make invisible feelings and unclear associations tangible and visible, in a sense it can be concluded that artworks are an objectification of the subjective life (Langer, 1957). The mechanism behind this are some of the major qualities of the arts, such as imitation (Aristotle, 1988) and representation (Young, 2001). Artworks can invite beholders to put themselves in others' shoes and possibly induce empathy with the respective subject (Carroll, 2010; Oatley, 1999), or admiration of the character strengths displayed through the affective qualities of art (Aristotle, 1962). Within the school setting, this is possible through discussions about artworks, and through creativity as the very act of painting, drawing or sculpting a challenging situation, imagined or real, can foster both cognitive and emotional dispositions to deal with the circumstances in question later on. From the moral perspective, when considering the ethical implications of an artwork, we are always weighing in our own actions in terms of these, be it our past actions or present (Shimamura, 2013, p. 166). For this reason, artworks allow us to deliberate on our own lives.

Method

The artworks discussed here, were created during a two-month intervention program in visual arts classes. Participants were 80 13-year-old pupils in 8 visual arts classes and their work was guided by four visual arts teachers, including myself. Pupils were invited to reflect on courage and encouraged to relate to personal experiences, events, activities or circumstances that demanded or required them being courageous. In the following, pupils were instructed to create artworks based on these reflections. However, many pupils chose rather to work on general conceptions on courage than personal experiences, and in some instances, pupils expressed that

they weren't ready to share these experiences as they felt they were too private for sharing in a group.

When the project had finished, I took photos of each artwork before delivering the portfolios to the pupils. The sizes of the artworks were variable, ranging from small drawings in size A6 up to larger paintings in size A3 which was the preferred size of the majority of the pupils. Many pictures were painted with gouache or watercolours, some were made with coloured pencils, some were shaded grayscale drawings, and yet others were made with ink, markers or oil-pastels.

Before starting the analysis, I developed an exclusion criterion. I excluded images which were largely unfinished and vague – e.g. if the idea was far-fetched to the extent of being incomprehensible, and if the image was not relevant.

I started by getting familiarized with the images by inspecting them closely numerous times. Following Gillian Rose´s (2016) method of content analysis of each artwork in short text. Such methods are widely used in visual research methods and fit equally well for an in-depth analysis of few images and a large set as in my case (Rose, 2016). The textual data established from the content analysis was then further analysed with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similar procedures have been used when analysing large sets of images (see e.g., Shanahan, Brennan & House, 2019).

In addition to general ethical concerns in research, the sensitive position of minors in educational studies requires attention and care. In this research project, I did not collect any sensitive information and my methods are consistent with the ethical requirements laid out by Shamoo and Resnik (2009, p. 276). Before the intervention and data collection took place, I received informed consent from parents and pupils, who were free to opt-out of participation at any time. The research was conducted in compliance with guidelines from The Icelandic

Data Protection Authority and was acknowledged by the University of Iceland's committee on ethical conduct in research.

Results

The creative project on courage seemed to produce a large variety of images, which often were vivid and imaginative, and from which I developed several themes which illustrate pupils' conceptual understanding of courage. In many of these artworks, courage appeared as a performance virtue displaying actions that represented a significant theme: 1) *expansion of personal comfort zone.* This central theme contained three sub-themes: a) *Leisure activities*, b) *personal and emotional challenges* that if conquered would lead to greater capacities, and c) *acting for better future*, taking the necessary steps to "move on" and expand the horizon.

The artworks that displayed leisure activities (a) included doing physical things that in themselves would usually not be considered very dangerous if practised with reasonable security. In many instances, the actions were seen from a comfortable distance, similar to wishful thinking or dreaming, concealing the fears the actor needed to overcome. These actions involved dealing with height, going fast or even both. Some of these displayed the act in question in colourful sceneries against the backdrop of a sunset or with a great view; familiar imagery from advertisements, TV-shows and movies. The activities included rock climbing during picturesque sunset or by the side of an impressive waterfall; jumping into the sea from a high cliff; soaring in an air balloon; skiing downhill a steep slope or looking down from the Empire State Building – using perspective for a more significant effect of height. Other artworks, however, expressed the emotions involved in these activities such as in images of terrified parachute-jumpers in mid-air with eyes and mouth wide open – suggesting the primal scream of fear; or the pupil in the swimming pool, relieved with a smile on her face, after having descended a long tube slide.

A different set of activities that could ***expand the comfort zone*** (1) included ***personal and emotional challenges*** (b). Many of these artworks exhibited the pupil doing performative actions that sometimes require an exposure of the self, such as being alone on a large theatrical stage; singing with friends in a song-contest; or speaking in front of an audience. In other paintings, however, the pupils made *fear* or *anxiety* the main subject, expressing these emotions through metaphor or analogy. An example of this is a painting which depicts a ballet dancer leaning shyly behind a theatrical curtain, looking into an empty audience hall which is metaphorical to uncertainty and the unknown. In another painting a small human being stands on the doorstep of a large grey and lifeless school building, suggesting the fear and anxiety to enter; an analogy of the insignificance pupils sometimes feel against large institutions, social systems and interactions. One painting focused on the inner and hidden fears, portraying a girl that had opened a wardrobe in which a green-eyed monster lurks in the darkness. The girl seems to show composure and determination in confronting the monster by either intending to drag it into the open or letting the daylight dissolve its powers.

The third sub-theme illustrated pupils' conception of courage as taking the necessary steps to move on in life; ***acting for a better future*** (c). Consider for instance the example of the goldfish jumping out of its bowl through the window and into the ocean – where a seagull awaits, ironically, his next meal. This scene is analogous to departing from the secure existence in comfortable captivity into the open uncertainty of liberty and the unknown future. In a similar artwork, a goldfish is leaving its friends or family behind by jumping into another bowl, analogous to the courage needed to start a new life and establishing independence.

In many of pupils' artworks courage is seen as the virtue needed to ***perform physical skills*** (2) often in competitive sports and sometimes overshadowed with ***performance anxiety*** (2a). In some instances, the protagonist in the artwork is taking a penalty. In one painting, taking the penalty appears to be a duel between the player and the goalkeeper, while

other picture displays the suspense in the audience while the teams are waiting on the middle line, a common scenario in cup finals. Here the pressure from others contributes to the *performance anxiety* where failure could prove to be disastrous with the responsibility on the shoulders of the player. Similar performance anxiety appears to be present in paintings that display acrobatic jumps in gymnastics or running on a lane in front of a cheering audience. However, in these artworks, the performance anxiety seems to be different from sports where the player, or the team, is competing head-on when goals count more than quality. Although gymnastics are a competitive sport, they share many things with dance, where overall quality matters the most. Examples of this are paintings that show a skate dancer during broadcasting or a diver on the diving board moments before the jump. In two pictures, the procedure of an acrobatic leap is drawn in a series of 'freeze frames' from a recording (recalling the images by Eadweard Muybridge), discerning every movement of the jump – similar to a mental preparation before doing something spectacular, having only one chance to perform.

A third significant theme is that it takes courage to *be yourself* (3) by exposing your vulnerabilities through removing a wig on stage in front of a group or audience, revealing a bald head due to a medical condition; or simply feeling different from others. A fourth theme displayed courage as a heroic attitude in fighting for your existence *against all odds* (4). Consider, e.g. the analogy displaying a hedgehog raising his spines against the ominous claws of a grizzly bear or similar monstrous animal, or Jerry kicking Tom, a familiar scene from the popular Disney cartoons. A fifth theme, illustrating *rescuing or protecting others* (5), is concerned with the welfare of others by putting one's own interests aside. Some artworks displayed rescuing in water; helpless people in a barge or a boat; or diving to come to the rescue of a drowning person in deep waters.

Pupils' vignettes

In the philosophical part of my research project I invited pupils to write short vignettes on well known artworks; *The sick child* by Edvard Munch; *The problem we all live with* by Norman Rockwell; and *Daniel's answer to the king* by Briton Rivière. According to the pupils, the virtues have a practical, outward looking dimension, they are equally important for personal development and character, and not least, for a good life. Pupils described the notion of courage as a conscious decision which helps you become better or stronger. Courage also could help in stopping bad things happening or stopping people from doing wrong things. Courage could help you to conquer your fears and assisting you in getting through life in the right way. There was also present the idea of courage as a character trait regarding acceptance and meet your destiny with dignity as in the case of Briton Riviere's *Daniel's answer to the king*, when facing the inevitable. Pupils' vignettes about Edvard Munch's *The sick child* generated poetic reflections on the importance of appreciation and forgiving when struggling with life-threatening condition. This same painting also brought about similar emotions as the painting expressed, fear, sadness and gloomy disposition. However, Munch's *The sick child* also generated empathy, compassion and hope. In some instances, Munch's painting made pupils relate to their own painful experiences; the painting was found to be tragic as the pupil related to prior experience of losing someone close and loved. Similarly, *The sick child* inspired one pupil to relate to what might happen in the future (see Ólafsson Waage, 2020, for further details).

Discussion

Pupils' conceptual understanding of courage is in many aspects connected to their everyday reality and concerns and reflects what Curzer (1996) described as a natural view on courage. This means that pupils' conceptions on courage are somewhat confused or unclear in the strict

Aristotelian sense (Aristotle, 1955). Although this position can be justified in the light of participants relatively young age, it carries important educational opportunities for discussing the nature of the virtues.

The themes I developed can be partially connected to Aristotle´s classification of the virtues. ***Expansion of personal comfort zone*** – and sub-themes, and ***performing skills*** describe courage as a *performance virtue*. ***Being yourself***, going ***against all odds*** describes courage rather as confidence, while ***rescuing and protecting others*** portrays courage as a *moral virtue*. Considering the complexity of the notions that pupils express about courage, show how inviting pupils to deliberate on the virtues provides a rich foundation for further and deeper understanding. An important part of this are the special qualities of the visual arts where many different elements of visual representation allow for multi-layered interpretation giving beholders the opportunities to compare their own conceptions to pupils' visual expression and to a more general understanding of the virtue.

Many of the ideas which became the foundation of the five themes, describe actions that would generally not be considered as courageous – at least from an adult perspective, mainly because of their temporality and their ends as doing something fun. Pupils' concerns can be categorized as local and temporal, not least because of participants' age. That which adolescents consider brave or courageous, because of their young age and limited experiences, would possibly not be taken seriously by adults or those that have the appropriate experience and knowledge in the field. Parachute jumping would then be more of a routine than an act of courage for an experienced parachutist. Similar judgements can be passed on e.g. rock climbing, speaking in public, or jumping into the sea. In spite of this, the artworks that display genuine fear, or other emotions, must be taken seriously because the expression of fear as a true emotion experienced while expanding the comfort zone is pointing to the personal aspects of moral emotions and to the importance of taking steps in expanding the horizon. However,

these considerations do not undermine the reality of courage as experienced or seen by young people. In fact, it is possible to consider their concerns as amendable because of the importance of building confidence in harmony with one's growing capacity. This aspect points to how it could be possible to educate pupils' notions on courage through creativity and collective deliberation.

In other instances, pupils seem to confuse courage with other virtues. This aspect also suggests that the virtues are multi-faceted. They are seldom clear-cut, just as life is never simple, we cannot pick a direct road, we must always consider all kinds of aspects and dimension while deciding on what to do. It is possible to ask if exposing your vulnerabilities is courageous or if it is more of a equanimity - a much more delicate and fine-tuned virtue which is present in e.g. pupils' vignettes about Munch's *The sick child*, on which they display understanding of the notion of equanimity, although they do not seem to possess the relevant vocabulary yet.

The results of my project show that in many instances pupils possess the abilities to discern complicated ethical and existential matters. Their responses to artworks that depict people facing adverse situations displayed significant sensitivity to the moral and personal challenges faced by the persons represented. Artworks such as Edvard Munch's *The Sick Child* and Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With* prompted pupils to reflect on morally salient issues, showing sensitivity to virtues such as *equanimity* when a human being is facing the inevitable, or when deciding to confront challenges in spite of possible consequences. In a similar vein, pupils displayed compassion and empathy to persons in adverse situations and they were able to relate challenging situations to personal experiences. Pupils' artworks showed how they were able to conceptualize and express emotional and moral challenges through representation, and discuss these with peers.

At the outset of this paper I proposed a four-dimensional model to illustrate the benefits of the visual arts for moral development (see table 1). The first dimension (A1) describes how creating artworks and images involves visualising pre-existing notions that are not necessarily clear to begin with, as they sometime do not have any linguistic handles as Susanne Langer (1957) describes it. Therefore, making a notion or emotion visible can be helpful for the pupil to articulate and conceptualise his thoughts and feelings. The green-eyed monster in the wardrobe is a good example of how an uncomfortable feeling can be isolated and articulated as distinctive from other feelings. The same principles are applicable when pupils are expressing their thoughts and emotions in the vignettes, consider e.g. the conceptualisation about courage and equanimity when the inevitable awaits, such as in the cases of Munch's and Rivière's paintings.

The second dimension (A2), describes how pupils' conceptions and emotions become visible to teachers, especially when there is a lack of clarity, allowing for probing for deeper conceptual understanding. For instance, teachers could raise questions about the difference between courage and resilience in competitive sports, or if singing in a song-contest could be rather a sign of confidence than courage. These considerations also allow discussions about the unity of the virtues and how they encompass our lives. In a similar vein, pupils' discourse and texts about artworks e.g. Munch's or Rockwell's can inform teachers about prevailing perceptions and attitudes, helping them to address these issues in a constructive fashion, encouraging pupils to develop their moral thinking.

The third dimension (B1), extends from the personal sphere to the peer-group. Pupils can learn about each other's thoughts and emotions, they can become aware of pupils' vulnerabilities – removing the wig that hides a medical condition, which could lead to welcoming personal differences, enhancing mutual trust in the group. The same applies to pupils' discourse and texts about artworks which can inform peers about each other's

perceptions and attitudes, helping them to discuss different attitudes and opinions, eventually helping them do develop as democratic citizens.

The fourth dimension (B2), describes how the presence of pupils' artworks about moral issues within the school setting, e.g. exhibited in the school, discussions about them, puts moral development overtly on the agenda, setting the stage for flourishing as an educational aim. While pupils' artworks are indispensable in this respect, the presence of well-chosen artworks by established artists, that encourage critical thinking about moral issues and provide aesthetic experiences that enrich such deliberation, should also be of a central concern for teachers and principals.

Conclusion

While my results are promising in many aspects there are limitations to consider. Mesuring virtue is a challenging task (see e.g. Curren & Kotzee, 2014) as moral development is a life-long achievement, however, related projects have been proven to be beneficial, such as the Jubilee Centre's Knightly Virtues Project (see e.g. Arthur, Harrison, Carr, Kristjánsson & Davison, 2014; and Carr & Harrison, 2015). My long experience of teaching the visual arts and discussing philosophical issues with my pupils has reassured me that such work is beneficial for the general atmosphere and educational disposition within the school, not to mention the pupils' personal growth that I have witnessed. The short and simple answer is that the use of concepts, ideas and images in education – adressing the meaning of them and their relation to human life through creativity and imagination – is possibly the best way to teach, and I can say with confidence that it applies to all school subjects.

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