

Virtue Literacy

There are two stages to enhancing Virtue Literacy. The first is developing a knowledge and understanding of virtue terms. The second is developing the ability and willpower to apply the virtues to real-life contexts. Virtue Literacy consists of three inter-related components:

- (i) Virtue 'Perception';
- (ii) Virtue 'Knowledge & Understanding'; and
- (iii) Virtue 'Reasoning'

The determination of whether a child is virtue literate should not be reduced to simple outcomes but should consider all three components. Children need to be persuaded of the moral force of acting virtuously. Schools need to provide opportunities for children to exercise the virtues in practice as well as encourage a rich discourse of virtue language, understanding and reasoning.

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues (2017) *A Framework for Character Education in Schools*, p.8.

Mastering the language of virtue underpins an individual's ability to be virtuous (Vassalou 2012: 67). The reduction in use of virtue terms and their religious and formal register means "that the learner of virtue may need to use language in ways that seem extraordinary or inappropriate to the ordinary ear" (ibid.: 72-73). Yet beyond comprehension is the ability of language "to prescribe—to serve as a tool in the task of moral education" (ibid.: 70). To achieve virtue "fluency" (ibid.: 86) in both an individual's speech and behaviour, begins with literacy.

Empirical research has validated what the corpus data and critical observations about the scarcity of virtue terms suggest, with very few virtue terms being used by those engaged in activities that require virtuous acts (Arthur et al., 2015). Other empirical studies have found that pupils can acquire virtue literacy through study of literature, with teachers and parents stating such programmes helped pupils specify and apply virtue language (Arthur, Harrison and Davison, 2015). Other research specifically using text, has shown a tendency for participants to use virtue terminology (Fernandez-Quintanilla, 2020: 139).

Indeed, literacy projects such as [Knightly Virtues](#) highlight the success of using of literature in virtue literacy (Davison et al., 2016). Some even claim that literature's ability to teach virtue literacy is unique (Hart et al., 2019).

What these studies reiterate is that virtue literacy is not simply a matter of vocabulary. The extralinguistic phenomena arising from reading and stylistic effects (such as empathy, for example) are part of comprehension (McFee, 2020). For literary fiction, this is especially true. In a genre which is typified by wordplay, ambiguity, and which prefers showing over telling, a scarcity of virtue terms does not reflect a dearth of narratives that deal with virtuous action. Rather, they present a store of resources and possibilities for reasoning and comprehension, closely aligned with the literary skills practised at A-level. To this end, narrative exploits human reasoning skills and provides an environment in which they can be practised.