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# Teaching virtues through literature: learning from the 'Narnian Virtues' Character Education research

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## **Abstract**

Character education through curriculum subjects has taken increasing political importance in England after its inclusion in the school inspection framework. Here we present a pedagogical approach to developing virtue literacy through English Literature. As part of a longitudinal, mixed-methods research project, this article uses empirical evidence from interviews with 26 students to identify and discuss the processes students used in the development of virtue literacy. The authors argue that the study of literature has a unique and valuable place in helping students develop virtue, and present areas for development in literature-based character education in the future.

**KEYWORDS:** character education, virtue, English, literature, Narnia

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## **Introduction**

Literature-based character education programmes have been globally popular for some time (inter alia Arthur et al., 2014; Carr, 2005, 2014; Davison et al., 2016; Pike, 2015), and the majority focus on their own predefined sets of virtues or values. The Narnian Virtues curriculum is one such programme. Here we report on a pedagogical process around teaching virtue concepts, finding evidence of virtues within texts, and using dialogical techniques to deepen understanding of virtue. The research highlighted the importance of specific elements, including: knowledge and awareness of virtue, reflection and empathy. We conclude by suggesting our experience of Narnian Virtues demonstrates the value in a shift in literary-based curricula to facilitate the development of a school's or young person's own chosen virtues and possible directions for future research.

The article begins by considering the existing research on literature-based character education, before introducing the research project and its methodology. The findings section presents the dominant themes from the research, moving to a critical consideration of how those findings relate to a school's desire to impart their own virtues or values to students.

## **Character Education**

Character Education is a broad and contested field with myriad ontologies, philosophies, and purposes driving a range of school-based interventions. However, as a broad definition character education is 'those educational practices that foster the development of student character. Character is, then, defined as the set of psychological characteristics that motivate and enable the individual to function as a competent moral agent, that is, to do 'good' in the world' (Berkowitz 2011, 153). Character Development has taken on increased importance in schools, particularly since it was added to the school inspection framework in England (OfSTED, 2019).

An Aristotelian virtue ethics is currently ubiquitous with Character Education. Its popularity stems from the assumption that character is a collection of teachable virtues (Kristjánsson 2015). Virtues represent the disposition to act 'at the right time, to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way' (Carr 2003, 219). They represent a tendency towards doing what is right

(i.e. good) in situations that ‘enables one to excel as a human agent’ (Lutz 2012, 128) and seek goodness, wellbeing and flourishing (Shields 2011, 50).

In literature-based Aristotelian character education curricula virtues are often pre-defined by the designers of the curriculum as there are practical constraints around how many concepts can be taught, measured, and related to specific texts. However we acknowledge that a disposition to act in a way consistent with human flourishing cannot be reduced to a list of ‘preferred virtues’ (Shields 2011, 50), a limitation we address in the conclusion.

## **Literature-based Character Education**

In literature-based character education programmes there is often an assumption that fiction can present the reader with characters, events, behaviours, motivations and consequences that have the power to shape the reader’s perception of the world (Carr and Harrison 2015; Pike 2015; Bohlin 2005; Carr 2005). By engaging with the narrative the readers become aware of reference points for what is ‘good’ (Bennett 1993) and the complexity and ambiguity of judging what is ‘right’. The readers can, depending on the appropriate levels of critical reflection, draw upon the struggles of fictional characters to analyse their own responses to issues of character (Bohlin 2005; Leming 2000).

Leming refers to approaches of literature-based character education that assume the moral resides within a narrative as a ‘phenomenological analysis’ (2000, 423). This method is limited as most authors did not attempt to provide ‘clear cut moral imperatives’ through their work (Carr 2005, 148), and even where they *are* attempting to present a moral lesson, the manifestation of virtue changes over time. Therefore, actions and attitudes that may have seemed to demonstrate a virtue in one culture at a given time may not relate the same way in another context.

Typically, however, simply reading literature is not assumed to constitute enough to facilitate the development of character. Leming (2000) recognises this and, drawing on Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977; Bandura and Walters 1977), considered active engagement with literature a form of observational learning. For Leming (2000) clear models of virtuous behaviour should be presented, linked to examples with the vocabulary of ethics, which then translate into actions. Finally, there is an attachment of appropriate (virtuous) motivation to cognitions and behaviours. So a text may not be ‘moral’, but the development of virtue is facilitated by the *study* of the text. Previous studies have also highlighted ‘virtue literacy’ as a key area of change in character development that underpins other elements of virtue (Arthur et al., 2016; Lickona, 1991; Rest, 1986). In this study we define virtue literacy as the ‘knowledge, understanding and satisfactory application of virtue terms, as distinct from the development of virtuous emotions or virtuous behaviours’ (Davison et al. 2016, 17).

We argue that the study of English can therefore be suitable for the development of virtue literacy as it excels at developing the knowledge of vocabulary and understanding of virtue, in part, because a common language is required to engage in reflexive dialogue about character (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007; Francis et al., 2017). This assumes a Vygostkian perspective, where the understanding of language must exist before the development of concepts and adaptation of behaviour. Therefore, attempting to find virtue using a phenomenological analysis is limited as it fails to examine subtext and it fails to develop critical reading skills required to learn more about virtue in a text without a clear moral. However, the efficacy of discussion or directed reflection on a text does not appear to be overtly researched and reported.

## **Narnian Virtues**

Narnian Virtues is a dedicated literary curriculum that draws upon three novels by C. S. Lewis to develop character with students between 11 and 14 years-old. It is a longitudinal project, informed by the *Knightly Virtues* programme (Arthur et al. 2014) and developed from a pilot study (Francis et al. 2017; Pike 2015). The result of that six week pilot showed an increase in students’ knowledge of virtues,

but no evidence of change in attitudes or behaviour. Analysis of these results suggested insufficient attention had been paid to the gap between having an internal moral identity and enacting that identity in everyday experience (Blasi 1980, 1999). Therefore to meet this challenge we increased the tasks that attempt to engage an emotive and empathetic response from students and introduced home activities to put knowledge into practice. It was also decided to extend the curriculum to twelve weeks and reduce the number of virtues taught from twelve to six. The *Chronicles of Narnia* were chosen for several reasons, namely their congruence with C.S. Lewis' Aristotelian theory of ethics as expounded in *The Abolition of Man* (1943), the protagonists included children of a similar age to the students, and the popularity of fantasy literature.

The Narnian Virtues curriculum focuses on six virtues (love, wisdom, integrity, fortitude, justice, and self-control) and was designed to aid the development of students' understanding of the virtues, including improving students' ability to identify the virtues in the narrative, to value the virtues and to consider their application in their lives. Although it uses a pedagogy for English literature, the dominant task for year one was the reading of extracts from *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950) and identifying evidence of particular virtues or vices and discuss that evidence in class. It is a magical tale about four siblings: Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy, who find themselves in the land of Narnia – a place that is always winter but never Christmas; a land of talking animals, magics, and hospitality; but also a place of cruel oppression. One of the four siblings, Edmund, is tricked into betraying his family, but coming to his senses before the end he attempts to prevent his siblings coming to harm. Meanwhile the other three children have befriended Aslan, a lion and the rightful ruler of Narnia, who sacrifices himself in order to save Edmund.

In the curriculum, the students participate in classroom activities supported by a Workbook and home activities supported by the Character Passport. Embedded in the Workbook and the Character Passport was a 'Virtue Tracker', which stimulates students' continuous reflection on the six virtues in general, and on two specific virtues they choose to focus on for their individual 'Virtue Improvement Plan'.

Considering these different aspects of the curriculum, 'Narnian Virtues' is situated between a Social Learning Theory (SLT) and a phenomenological approach, as there *is* a process of engagement with the text and reflection mirroring the stages of SLT, but the texts themselves are treated as if they present a clear moral message. For the most part this is somewhat uncontroversial; the manifestation of 'good' and 'evil' in Narnia remains relatively obvious to readers throughout, and ultimately those who are 'good' are rewarded and 'evil' is punished. However it did limit the critical reflection on the implicit assumptions within the text that reflect the author's context, and we highlight the potential importance of choosing texts with a more ambiguous moral message in the discussion section. That is, the students were not specifically asked to reflect on the normative values displayed in the novel, but there were efforts to address them within the curriculum. Taking a case in point, fantasy literature is often criticized for promoting outdated norms around gender roles and prioritising 'masculine' virtues (Tepper 2000). In the Narnian Virtues curriculum, the effect of 'masculine' and 'feminine' virtues are mitigated as much as is reasonable by utilising extracts as examples for virtues that are different from the gendered norm (e.g. Lucy as an example for fortitude). We recognise, however, that there are other sociological criticisms of the dominant forms of Character Education in the UK we have not directly addressed in this research as it is being delivered in a generally individualistic neoliberal educational system (e.g. the pathologising of the effects of inequality into exclusively individual deficiencies)(Allen and Bull 2018; Taylor 2018).

## Methodology

This paper reports on the findings from 19 interviews with 26 students aged 11 to 12 from seven schools, conducted at the end of the first year of the intervention (2016/17). The schools were recruited from Yorkshire and the North East of England in 2016. Three schools were recruited through pre-

existing relationships with members of the research team while the remaining four responded to a mailing to head teachers in the region. The participating schools were self-selecting and included a Catholic school, a Christian-ethos academy, three community schools, and two very small independent Christian schools. An eighth school was recruited, but withdrew part way through the curriculum so its data was not included in the analysis.

The recruitment of students for interview was conducted by the teachers, following specific guidelines from the research team. More than 1000 students completed the curriculum between the seven schools and teachers from each school were asked to randomly select two to six willing participants (depending on the size of the school) from the attendance lists for interview. Guidance for teachers included information about students' right to decline. The teachers also confirmed that all students were sufficiently able to understand the consequences of taking part in the interviews and therefore provide consent for themselves. All the school's safeguarding arrangements for the interviews were followed and parents were given the opportunity to withdraw their child from the research at any time. The University of Leeds Research Ethics Committee approved the research design and data collection methods for the project, and ethical considerations were revisited regularly by the research team.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Each interview lasted between 15 and 35 minutes and the interview protocol was designed to elicit information from the students regarding their experiences of the project and of its influence on their virtue literacy. When there was evidence of change in character, the questions focused on the underlying mechanisms that may have contributed to those changes. Following these aims, the initial interview questions were broad and open-ended (Seidman 2013). Some examples are 'Have you thought about what kind of person you want to be when you're older?', or 'Can you describe your English lessons this term?'. These were then followed by more specific questions regarding the project, including 'Could you let me know what your two personal target virtues are?', or 'Which character do you relate to the most?'.

The analysis of the interview data followed an inductive approach assisted by the development of a codebook (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011; MacQueen et al., 1998) to ensure consistency in the coding of data and to guide the interpretative analysis. The analysis was conducted by two researchers: the first, a full-time researcher with previous knowledge and research experience on the topic of moral education and character formation; and the second, with no previous knowledge or experience in these topics. The team considered such balance important to allow for some theoretical sensitivity that is fundamental for the formulation of theory emerging from the data, but also to maintain a fresh look, free from any particular doctrine and focus on what emerges from the data (Glaser and Strauss 2006).

The data analysis was an iterative process, and after several rounds of reading the transcripts, coding, refining the codes and recoding, the researchers focused on the process of change in virtuous reasoning and behaviour reported by the students. The researchers posited that this process was initiated by the students' increased knowledge about virtue, which led to a greater awareness of virtues in real life and manifested in processes of reflection, empathy and, to a lesser extent, change. These findings are now presented in the following sections.

## **Presentation of main Themes**

This section explores the dominant themes from the research, before considering what this means for character education, school wishing to impart values and virtues, and the study of literature. The themes from the interviews were: increases in knowledge and awareness of virtue, reflection, and empathy. These will be discussed in turn.

### **Knowledge and Awareness**

Knowledge was a key area of change, with students reporting that they knew more about virtue. In many cases, students were able to speak about virtue with a sense of nuance and depth that showed the knowledge had not only been memorised but the concept of virtue understood.

Some students reported the vocabulary around virtues to be new and taking some time to become proficient. They also reported using this new vocabulary in other classes.

*It was hard at the start because I kept on getting virtues and vices mixed up, but now they're really easy. [School 1, Student 1]*

*It's been good because we know how to describe them, love, fortitude, integrity and all the rest of the virtues. Now we can actually do it in our other classes and describe it in that way. [School 2, Student 1]*

Learning about virtues and learning how to identify virtuous behaviour created a new opportunity for reflection through the curriculum. Some students reported thinking about the 'Narnian Virtues' in different situations (e.g. reading other books). They also reported a development of their 'real life' awareness of virtuous/non-virtuous situations and behaviours. Therefore, this new understanding of virtue has led to students reporting an increased level of awareness and ability to identify virtuous behaviour in everyday life as well as in literature.

*I think it made me think a lot because I have a younger brother and I don't normally think about sacrificing for anyone. I used to just read it, think about it and then just carry on with whatever I was doing, but now I just put into thought that I have got a family and I need to look out for them (...). [School 2 Student 2]*

Students also reported recognising virtuous behaviour in others, where previously they would not have such framework to reflect on, both for real and fictional situations.

*In history I thought about it because we were doing about a war (...), I just thought to myself, why can't they just care for people and split it because they're being a bit boastful and they were just fighting because only one of them could be the king or queen. I just thought to myself, why can't they just be the king and queen together and not fight. [School 2, Student 2]*

Overall, the new vocabulary gave students a new way to interpret their actions and the actions of others around them, and the techniques they used in English lessons provided the tools to reflect on virtues in different situations.

## **Reflection**

Reflection seemed to occur on multiple levels. There was reflection in the use of knowledge to identify examples of virtues in the text; students using characters to identify similar behaviours in their lives; students identifying areas they would like to change and in some cases an explicit motivation to change. Finally, some students reflected on their own character with reference to virtue but not to the text. However, there was clear evidence of students departing from their experience with the novel and the curriculum to think about virtues.

*Because I've got the exact same book at home and I read it every night and I just think about what Peter does and what I do. And comparing every day what I do that day and what he does in the book to try and get myself comparing with him, and like follow what he does (...). [School 1, Student 2]*

Interestingly, student reflections on the characters were often focussed on negative behaviour they would like to change, rather than on positive role-modelling behaviours. For example, one student

reflected on Edmund betraying his family as a negative example that gave her courage to tell the truth for fear of becoming like Edmund.

*I think it's help me because Edmund betraying his family and stuff it's helped me to realise I don't want to be like that. I want to be more helpful to people and I don't want to betray my family; obviously I won't do that, but it's made me realise how bad it is to think like that. [School 3, Student 1]*

Several examples of reflection were relatively abstract, but they did evidence students were thinking introspectively about points of contact between the novel and their own lives. Often, students reflected on their character through comparison with the fictional characters, and then developed an awareness of a need to change. Indeed, students reflected on the characters that resonated with them.

*Because I've realised that some of the stuff that they're doing wrong is what I'm doing, and that I need to sort of, stop doing that and change my ways, I guess. [School 4, Student 1]*

In some cases, students explained there were things they already knew in the curriculum, but the focus on virtue helped them to continue developing what they had learned in other places. For example, some students explained they already did 'good deeds' at home but the curriculum provided the impetus to do more. Others focused on the increased freedom in secondary education to promote their use of the virtues.

*I think that I have changed because of Narnian [Virtues] because in primary school there wasn't much to be determined to do and have fortitude towards but now we're in proper secondary school, there's more stuff to be determined on. Stuff like the football team or being in top set English or something like that. [School 5, Student 1]*

Overall, the knowledge of virtue is suggested to contribute to an increased awareness of virtues and an ability to identify virtuous behaviour thanks to this new framework through which students observe their actions.

*Sometimes when I do stuff wrong, and it feels right while I do it, but then I look back at it and I was like, 'Oh, I probably shouldn't have said that'. But then think about it and then I go apologise to the person if they were upset about it. [School 6, Student 1]*

The suggestion is that this increase in knowledge and awareness has led to (and was supported by) an increase in reflection both on external situations, and internal thoughts and motivations.

## **Empathy**

In our analysis, sympathy and empathy emerged as another mechanism through which the students showed their increased understanding of virtues and ethical situations. Students showed sympathy firstly in relation to the Pevensies – Peter, Lucy, Susan and Edmund and they related to the characters physically, emotionally, and regarding context. Often, the students drew parallels between their lives and personalities and the lives and personalities of the characters.

*Lucy's small and I'm small. [School 5, Student 2]*

*I think I most related to Susan, because I'm wary of things that I don't know about. [School 6, Student 3]*



*I can be quite like Lucy and quite like Edmund at the same time because I also have a younger sister, but she's not that much younger, and sometimes we squabble over the littlest of things and sometimes I do sometimes wind her up a little bit, and I would admit that. [School 5, Student 4]*

The students also showed a willingness and ability to empathise with the characters beyond the physical and emotional similarities they shared with them, by considering the possibility of multiple perspectives on similar issues. For example, students 3 & 4 in school 2 were able to provide a defence for Edmund's actions when he betrayed his siblings by considering his perspective. They agreed that Edmund's reaction was a response to Peter's harsh words. At this point, the students demonstrated empathy to consider the same situation through various lenses and values. Consequently, the students were able to acknowledge the wider context in which Edmund's reaction had a plausible explanation. This illustrated their ability to understand the nuanced and contextualised nature of virtuous behaviour.

Finally, for some students, empathy regarding the novel's characters and their actions made them look at the characters as role models and identify virtuous characteristics that they wanted to emulate in their own lives.

*When Peter said we need to go back, in the book and the film, that's when I started to think more about my family, because Peter is honest and he helps his family. I just copy Peter, see what he does. [School 2, Student 2]*

In these cases, students used empathy towards the characters as a mechanism to identify virtuous thoughts, emotions and behaviours. What the students report is not necessarily an abstract consideration of what it means to be virtuous based on an interpretation of the book. Instead, the data demonstrates they looked at specific examples of virtuous emotions and behaviours depicted by the characters, relate them to their lives/contexts and show the desire to emulate them. As discussed previously, a similar process took place with the desire to avoid emulating what they perceived as the characters' vices.

Finally, the students' ability to empathise with other people also generated a sense of accountability that motivated students to change towards more virtuous behaviour. This occurred not so much through the overt setting of goals, but through the more gentle social pressure associated with collectively setting a standard of behaviour through discussion and dialogue. For example, one girl said she changed her behaviour around 'stopping' (being overly argumentative and stubborn) because she did not want to set a bad example to her siblings. Overall, having younger siblings and the desire to be a good role model was an important motivator to the students regarding changing their behaviour.

## **Discussion**

There may be multiple motives for schools to use English Literature to impart a set of virtues and values, what is perhaps pertinent for this article is simply that there is a general assumption that promoting virtues and values are something school leadership often see as important (Ellenwood 2014; Pike 2010). What we aim to provide in this section, therefore, is a description and problematizing of the pedagogical approach described as being successful in Narnian Virtues. This will lead us to consider a fledgling model of how to use literature to facilitate the development of other values and virtues and highlight future areas of research to move literature-based character education away from the currently popular phenomenological approach. We are not, however, avoiding the possibility that school leadership can also be interested in developing a set of characteristics that make students compliant and able to fulfil the schools' requirements to pass exams and inspections – indeed there appears to be a significant lack of research into the purpose, role and efficacy of school values/virtues.

Overall, the interview data presented in this article suggests that students' virtue literacy improved during the project. The data highlighted three associated themes: knowledge of vocabulary of concepts, reflection and empathy. Students displayed a development in their knowledge of virtue; they were able

to use the concepts appropriately in a range of situations and contexts, although some students reflected it took time to master the language. New vocabulary allowed the development of a set of tools for the identification, interpretation and reflection of virtuous behaviour. This new knowledge provided a different way of observing the world and students identified a range of places to practice the virtues. There are still questions over the longevity of this change, recognising that twenty four hours of activities over twelve weeks (plus home activities) is a relatively short amount of time. However, the curriculum is aiming to develop reflexive skills and an ethical lens through which students encounter all stories, and this *may* constitute a paradigmatic shift reminiscent of a threshold concept (Mayer and Land 2005) in the development of virtues which is more difficult to reverse than simply the application of virtue knowledge. More research is required to support this hypothesis however.

This is reminiscent of Vygotsky's argument that culture affects cognitive development and learning (Vygotsky 1978), which complements a neo-Aristotelian social constructivist account of the manifestation of virtues (e.g. MacIntyre 2011). Vygotsky argued that social interactions guided learning and the development of knowledge. That knowledge is acquired through the internalisation of language, therefore language must come before thoughts and actions. In the data, there were multiple examples where students reflected on previously explored experiences in a new way, analogous to Vygotsky's example on maths:

*The new higher concepts in turn transform the meaning of the lower. The adolescent who has mastered algebraic concepts has gained a vantage point from which he sees arithmetic concepts in a broader perspective (Vygotsky 2012, 202)*

Indeed, reflection emerged in the data as a natural consequence of students' improved abilities to identify and interpret virtues. This appeared to be influential in creating a motivation for change in the students. Our argument is, thus, that the exploration of virtue through characters in stories provides a dynamic, growing repertoire of behaviours that can be attributed to virtues and create deeper levels of reflection. From the student perspective, the reflection on how the narrative relates to their own situations appears to increase a desire to change their behaviour.

### **Critical engagement with texts**

These findings, though rooted in Narnian Virtues, have wider implications. We focussed on six pre-defined virtues taken in equal measure in class, but with some flexibility around discussion at home and in the school. The most important element was the pedagogical approach used to support students in their journey towards autonomous ethical reflections. Nonetheless, we recognise there is a need for greater research to move from a heavily scaffolded curriculum to students' as 'practical reasoners' within their own moral lives (MacIntyre 1999, 71). So what can we learn about the role of literature in virtue development in schools? A focus on the specific vocabulary of the virtues/values, and a teaching of the concepts through engagement with and reflection on the text, can promote the application of those concepts to a range of other situations. This journey from the abstract, moving to the contrived and fictional, and then to lived experience develops a deeper understanding of virtue. While it is likely that some novels will better suit some virtues, we do not believe that the semi-phenomenological approach we adopted is necessary, though future research is required to test this assumption. Our data suggests it is the lens through which students examine the narrative that is particularly important, and the development of concepts that allow the application of knowledge of virtues in other situations when students are asked to reflect on them. The relative speed with which a student can explore multiple different applications of the same virtues/values within various narratives serves to deepen that understanding in a way that learning through experience is limited, as the opportunity to actively observe and reflect on situations from the perspective of virtue is restricted to the context in which students find themselves.

### **Local to Global: Literature as a catalyst for virtue**

In virtue ethics there is an ongoing debate around the universality of virtue: that is, are they global traits that affect all aspects of life or are they localised and confined to the context in which they were learnt? A common belief, with some evidence (Chen 2015), is that virtues begin as local traits but can grow to become global traits if they are broadened through a range of experiences that are reflected on and associated with that virtue. The local to global is a continuum, and the student learns to recognise increasing types of situations that trigger the internal mechanisms that dispose a person to act consistently with the virtue. This, we argue, can be facilitated through education, specifically the study of literature. If a person is moving from local to global, ‘this person must be led to correctly perceive and discern the common ground of moral requirements springing from apparently different situations, and he must also be willing and properly motivated’ to use virtues in those situations (Chen 2015, 410). Through written and ‘speaking and listening’ exercises students are able to engage in personal reflection of the virtues. They are able to practice the kind of analytic and communication skills required to study literature, but gently modified towards reflecting on themselves. This is similar to the kind of writing some professions recommend for reflexive journals (Jude 2018).

A popular criticism of character education is the narrow definition of good characteristics and a possible dismissal of the individual’s context. For example, in our data a student described herself as ‘stroppy’, and while she may have recognised an aspect of herself she wished to change to improve home relationships perhaps this is also reinforcing normative gendered behaviours. While this is speculation, it is important to note that most character education literature does not readily address this issue. However, this example also shows the potentially liberating forms of character education through virtue: it shows the importance of knowledge and wisdom so students can reflect on their situation and act appropriately, and to know that standing firm against authority figures can be the morally correct action. Our view is that literature can provide multiple perspectives of the same virtues/value, and allow students to internalise them through continued dialogue with others around the myriad ways the presence of a virtue can influence a situation. Here, the role of the teacher is to teach the concepts associated with virtue, but also to guide the conversations into places of ethical reflection.

## **Conclusion**

In this article we argue that the students’ virtue literacy increased through three distinct, yet connected processes: knowledge and awareness of virtue, empathy and reflection. The considerations presented here took into account the limitations of self-reported data that was compared with previous research and with the other sources of qualitative and quantitative data from the project. When possible, the readers were directed to publications that can add to our analyses. However, as part of an ongoing project, with one more year of data collection, what we present here is but one part of a larger narrative.

A limitation of choosing texts with an author presenting a clear articulation of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is an inability to genuinely take an SLT approach. However, as a way to scaffold the development of ethical reflection we believe texts with a clear moral message have their place in developing an underpinning moral framework. That is: providing knowledge of specific virtues, encountering a text in which those virtues are present, reinforcing those virtues through identifying evidence for their presence in the text and using dialogue to consider them from multiple perspectives. This pedagogical approach, we argue, increases knowledge and awareness of virtue, reflection on the ethics of the text, and empathetic responses. A next step in the research around literature-based character education would be to take students who began with a semi-phenomenological approach to literature-based character education and observe a SLT approach without a predefined list of virtues and greater freedom when discussing the texts to understand if these skills translate into a less constrained environment.

What Narnian Virtues highlights is the lack of research about how a school can use literature to develop their vision of character for their students. The findings do show potential to move literature-based character education beyond a set curriculum to a model in which teachers use novels to develop

understanding of virtue concepts, through empathy with characters and reflection. We suggest the next step in this research is to see if this improves students' ability to reflect both on the text and on lived experience using virtue as a 'lens'.

It is important to consider that, given the competing priorities of schools and the imposition of external targets, this may be problematic if a school seeks to use literature to reinforce characteristics that prioritise its needs more than the students' needs. Therefore, we suggest future research with a commitment to using an Aristotelian framework to prioritise mutual dialogue, critical engagement with the text, and a focus on the flourishing of the student. To select a set of values or virtues a school wishes to impart seems relatively uncontroversial (see Morrin 2018, for a problematising of this assumption), however there are questions over how a school develops these virtues and whether students are afforded the ability to voluntarily subscribe to them.

We have demonstrated that English offers the natural place not only to teach definitions of words, but also to provide exercises and activities that allow students to understand and reflect on the words and concepts, and actively seek to apply knowledge of virtue onto a range of circumstances in the context of a longer narrative. It allows for conversations and dialogue to expand beyond a small extract or 'case study' of a moral dilemma, to a level of depth of character found in novels that can echo reality. By exploring the life of characters in an extended narrative, students are able to reflect on the nuance, debate, and tension between the virtues. They practice the virtues vicariously through the lives of the characters in the safe space of the narrative, experimenting with different alternatives and situations and, thereby moving virtues from the local to the global more efficiently.

With regard to character education through literature, we have argued that most programmes we have encountered are attempting to teach a specific set of virtues and the research methodology does not readily separate the content of the curriculum from the mechanisms through which students develop virtue. The Narnian Virtues project, while still using a set of predefined virtues, has attempted to do that. Studying literature to develop virtue should focus on developing an intellectual understanding of the concepts and vocabulary of the chosen characteristics. Then, literature should be seen as a catalyst from moving virtue from the local to the global through ongoing reflection on multiple situations. Finally, moving beyond literature and beyond the remit of the Narnian Virtues project, there is a need to understand how students can develop the skills to seek after virtues that are not presented to them – recognising that the ultimate aim is for young people to be self-governing in their ethical lives.

To conclude, we recommend using literature as a vehicle for the development of virtues by: choosing a novel where characters display virtues; provide the knowledge of the virtues to the students; and continually reinforce the concepts through identifying the virtues in the text. Then schools should also provide space for students to reflect on the virtues outside of the text too and, finally, encourage self-reflection on how the students could enact the virtues.

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