

## CHAPTER 14

# The Visual Arts in Contemporary Education: Exploring How Artworks Can Promote Moral Deliberation

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### ABSTRACT

The current interest in moral education reflects the need for holistic education that embraces the broad spectrum of human life. It has been suggested that the arts have a significant role in this respect, mainly through the insights they provide into human life and experiences from which an audience can relate and learn. This chapter discusses the results of a research project that aimed at discerning how analyzing artworks in an elementary school setting could provide insights into the potentials of the arts for moral deliberation. The theoretical background draws on Aristotelian virtue ethics, especially to a fruitful branch of Neo-Aristotelianism that has been termed as Aristotelian character education, and contemporary accounts of the moral and epistemological value of the visual arts. Results suggest that artworks induce emotional experiences that give insights into real situations, suggesting educative elements which can be a precursor for moral development. The artworks discussed in this chapter generated student reflections on various issues, ranging from general social justice threatened by civil wars, racism, misogyny and poverty, to the moral virtues such as courage, compassion and empathy, and to emotional responses where pupils related what they saw in artworks to their personal challenges and experiences in life. The results suggest that the visual arts are an untapped educational source that can have a significant impact on teacher education and classroom practices in addition to interdisciplinary opportunities. In general, giving moral issues an educational focus through pictorial and philosophical analysis appears to help opening new pathways for value-based education.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, researchers and theorists at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham in England have argued that current educational discourse could benefit from Aristotle's virtue theory to give education a much-needed focus on character and moral sensitivity (Kristjánsson, 2015; Jubilee Centre, 2017). Their view is diametrically opposed to the narrow instrumentalism about educational aims that is prevalent in our western educational systems (Biesta, 2010, 2018; Kristjánsson, 2015). The Jubilee Centre's research has shown that its program, Aristotelian Character Education, has had an impact on educational prospects in England (see e.g. Arthur, Kristjánsson, Walker, Sanderse & Jones, 2015; Carr & Harrison, 2015). However, the implementation of these educational aims is not only dependent upon teaching materials but also on teachers' professional development and identity as role-models in moral education (see, e.g. Sherman, 1999). This calls for greater emphasis on teachers as role-models and facilitators in ethical deliberation and the first steps in that direction are through teachers education (Arthur, Fullard, Watts & Moller, 2018).

The development of character and moral sensitivity rests on a person's cognitive and emotional ability to reflect on life's challenges. In this regard, the teacher's role is to provide a playground for children to exercise these abilities, in which critical thinking is a key concept (Sanderse, 2012). While the objective is well established, it remains a challenge to implement character education in schools. There is, however, evidence that the arts can have an essential role in this respect, primarily because they invite the audience to think for themselves, helping them to evaluate ideas on personal grounds and experiences involving both cognitive and emotional processes (see, e.g. Carr & Harrison, 2015 on the value of literature for character education). However, the neglect of the visual arts as a suitable vehicle for character education is surprising given the recent emphasis on literature, music and cinema for that purpose (see, e.g. Sanderse, 2012; Kristjánsson, 2015; Kim, 2016; Arthur, Kristjánsson, Harrison, Sanderse & Wright, 2017).

As a visual arts teacher, I have been doing experiments in classes by inviting pupils to participate in philosophical discussions about artworks in addition to suggesting that they create art inspired by the virtues and what it means to lead a good life. My professional development led me to gather my reflections on the value of the visual arts for character education in a doctoral research project in

which I designed an intervention for visual arts classes of 13-year-old pupils. The intervention was created to develop teaching methods to enhance virtue literacy and moral sensitivity through art creation, philosophical group discussions and the writing of short texts about selected works of art.

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the philosophical part of the project and the qualitative analysis of student writings. The research question guiding this part of the project is: How do pupils respond to ethical questions about five works of visual art that have a virtue related theme? I approached the research question from three perspectives, which I suggest are present in the artworks I chose to use in the project: social justice, moral virtues and moral emotions. I chose four oil paintings and one artwork in textile that are rather conventional figurative artworks with a narrative structure.

In 1830, Eugène Delacroix painted *Liberty Leading the People*<sup>1</sup>, a painting which he intended to be his contribution to the civil war when Charles X was overthrown during the July Revolution of 1830 in Paris (Delacroix, 2001). The painting depicts a female form symbolizing liberty leading a group of citizens who had overpowered the King's soldiers. The first impression of the picture suggests the notion of bravery, freedom and leadership. However, closer inspection invites the onlooker to discern the horrors of the war and whether real justice and freedom could be reached through violence.

Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With* (1964)<sup>2</sup> depicts young Ruby Bridges escorted to school by four U.S. Marshals. She was the first black child to attend an all-white school in New Orleans in 1960 after desegregation became law in the U.S. She had to endure constant threats from white citizens who opposed desegregation (Bridges, 1999). Despite the challenges, Ruby persisted in her intention to break down the walls of racism and hatred. This painting raises many pertinent questions about social justice, racism, courage and determination.

The textile artwork *The Fisherwomen* (1971)<sup>3</sup> by Hildur Hákonardóttir shows a group of women working in a fish plant under the watchful gaze of the manager. The artwork addresses women's rights and displays the inherent hierarchy in society and the power underlying it.

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty\\_Leading\\_the\\_People](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberty_Leading_the_People)

2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Problem\\_We\\_All\\_Live\\_With](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Problem_We_All_Live_With)

3 <https://www.arkiv.is/art/878>

Briton Rivière's *Daniel's Answer to the King* (1890)<sup>4</sup> illustrates a biblical story from the Old Testament. Although the religious content of this painting is not of interest for the present research, the artist depicts how Daniel shows composure when locked up in the lions' den. The picture can raise questions about courage and the importance of controlling fear when faced with an adverse situation.

Edvard Munch's *The Sick Child* (1895-96)<sup>5</sup> is an autobiographical painting that portrays his older sister on her deathbed fighting tuberculosis (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 dignity and equanimity when facing the inevitableness of death.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### The role of the arts in education

The role of the arts in education has been debated for decades or even centuries or millennia. Many accounts have focused on a clearly defined instrumental value of the arts, such as the idea that the arts could promote learning in unrelated subjects, skills or qualities (Biesta, 2018), or that they could be beneficial for health (see, e.g. Mastandrea et al, 2019 about the relaxing effect of visiting museums). In contrast to the instrumental value of the arts, proponents of the arts maintain that aside from providing aesthetic experiences, the arts have no practical usefulness whatsoever and should have their place in education for their own sake with no further need of justification (Biesta, 2018, see also Carroll, 2010 about *Art for Art's sake*). In the present-day educational discourse, these incompatible options seem to cancel each other out, leaving us with art programs in education that are increasingly marginalized (Biesta, 2018).

Gert Biesta (2018) proposes, instead, that the value of the arts in education is not to be found in predefined instrumental benefits but in their open-ended nature and how they relate to human cognition and emotions in a multi-layered fashion. This suggests that, in education, the arts allow for educational experiences that give pupils and teachers a mutual playground to delve into issues of human life that invite unexpected learning experiences. Through the arts, we can turn our focus to issues that are of real concern for human development,

4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel\\_in\\_the\\_lions'\\_den](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_in_the_lions'_den)

5 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Sick\\_Child](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sick_Child)

including sustainable moral growth. When I refer to sustainable moral growth, I am referring to Aristotelian virtue ethics, especially to a fruitful branch of Neo-Aristotelianism that has been termed as Aristotelian character education (Kristjánsson, 2015).

### **Aristotelian character education**

The concept of character was a concern of the ancient Greeks. Socrates (Plato, 1941) insisted that if a human agent knew what was good, he or she would want to act accordingly (Arthur, Crick, Samuel, Wilson & McGettrick, 2006). However, the main inspiration for character education in modern-day educational discourse is Aristotle (384-322 BC), whose works are the primary inspiration of contemporary virtue ethics (Kristjánsson, 2015; Arthur, Kristjánsson, Walker, Sanderse & Jones, 2015). Aristotle maintained that virtues comprised various components, the most salient one, perhaps, being the emotional qua motivator of action that moves us to act virtuously.

According to Aristotle, the virtues require abilities to reason about human good. Therefore, people need to practice moral deliberation to become entirely virtuous, although children take the first steps towards moral virtue through habituation and adult guidance (Aristotle, 1955). To be sure, there can be proper actions without virtue as duty and personal advantages can guide our actions, but virtuous individuals would know what was good, want the good and possess the abilities to act accordingly (Arthur et al., 2006, see also Kristjánsson, 2007, 2015; and Carr & Harrison, 2015). According to Aristotle, full virtue requires practical wisdom in addition to natural virtue, or natural goodness, which is primarily emotional. Becoming a virtuous human being is a life-long task that incorporates both virtuous actions and the ability to reflect on moral issues and conflicts (Arthur, Harrison, Carr, Kristjánsson & Davison, 2014).

Each virtue, e.g., courage or honesty, consists of seven distinctive components: perception, knowledge and understanding, emotion, identity, motivation, reasoning, and action and practice. Three of these are interrelated and concern virtue literacy. Virtue perception “is concerned with noticing situations involving or standing in need of the virtues”, and virtue knowledge/understanding relates to the acquisition of language usage through familiarity with virtue concepts. Lastly, virtue reasoning focuses on making reasoned judgements on moral situations (Jubilee Centre, 2017, pp. 5-8). Virtue literacy as the ability for moral reflection and deliberation requires a command of relevant concepts

and vocabulary. Moral development as an educational objective is an attempt to develop virtue literacy, which could provide pupils with the basic ethical concepts for further moral cognition and deliberation (Jubilee Centre, 2017; Kristjánsson, 2015).

### **Truth, beauty and morality**

In *The Republic*, Plato (1941) considered the arts to be subversive of knowledge, truth, and morality in the ideal state. His harsh judgement of the arts derives from his theory of forms, according to which reality reflects substantive, but non-physical, ideas or forms. True knowledge could only be obtained via rational deliberation, not through sense experience or imagination. In contrast to Plato, Aristotle (1988) described imitation as an important educational aspect of the arts that might arouse morally appropriate emotions and thereby help people to become more virtuous and wiser. This would draw on the human ability to relate to experience through imagination.

Aristotle cited various types of poetry and music as modes of imitation that are distinctive in three respects: the medium, the objects and the manner (or mode) of imitation. In this respect, the medium refers to the artwork itself, the object to the content, and the manner to the performance or execution, the style of the artist. In *Poetics*, Aristotle (1988) characterized arts as the mediation of the possible, an open-ended educational quality, which could allow for the expanding of the learning horizon (Marini, 2013). In *Politics*, Aristotle pointed out the power of music to express or represent anger or courage and writes that “if a man enjoys looking at a statue of someone for no other reason than that he likes the look of it, then inevitably he will enjoy looking at the original, whose likeness he is at the moment contemplating” (1962, p. 309).

According to present-day discussions, works of art can promote inquiry and reflection, even emotional responses, that remind us of our shared humanity and collective experiences (Carroll, 2003). Works of art and fiction can sometimes even be “twice as true as facts” (Oatley, 1999, p. 101), and they can appear to us as good examples for moral development (Wivestad, 2013). In this aspect, images can be seen as refined representations where we can articulate or imagine experiences and objects, and these would be essential in communication and generally understanding others’ worldviews (Eisner, 2002). In other words, “art-works can provide an understanding of reality” similar to “scientific hypotheses and historical narratives” (Young, 2001, p. 23).

## METHODOLOGY

My doctoral project uses a pragmatic theoretical framework that focuses on the concept of education as a values-based practice (Biesta, 2010, Kristjánsson, 2015). One hundred and fifty pupils, all 13-years-old in an upper elementary school in the capital region in Iceland participated in the research. In the participating school, each year group is divided alphabetically into two groups when attending classes in arts and crafts; half of the pupils are in the visual arts for the autumn semester and the other half in textile crafts and vice versa during the spring semester.

I designed an intervention (see introduction) for the visual arts classes which took place from late September through November 2018. Before and after the intervention, pre and post tests were administered to the whole year-group, where the pupils in textile crafts served as a control group for later quantitative analysis. In these tests, pupils were asked to write short reflections, or vignettes (Gray, Royall & Malson, 2017), based on open questions on four artworks. This procedure allowed me to collect responses from the whole year-group on four artworks resulting in 150 texts on each artwork; *Liberty Leading the People*, *The Problem We All Live With*, *The Sick Child* and *The Fisherwomen*. In addition, the pupils participating in the visual arts classes reflected by writing about one additional artwork, *Daniel's answer to the King*, resulting in 75 texts. The tests were only marked by random numbers without any personal identification.

I used thematic analysis to analyze the data using a theoretical approach that “tends to be driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytical interest in the area” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). In line with this, I looked for texts that expressed virtue-related themes: How do pupils perceive the need for virtue in a given situation? Do they possess a conceptual understanding of what ethical virtues are and why they are important? Do they express emotional dispositions to the situations displayed in the artworks, or do they demonstrate the ability to deliberate on circumstances when two or more virtues collide? Since the pupils’ texts were handwritten, I transcribed them on a computer into a word processing program, which is usually considered to be the first step in getting familiar with the data. The analysis included reading and re-reading the texts; I took notice of concepts and ideas that seemed pertinent, I developed initial codes across the dataset since I was interested in how the participants as a group responded to the artworks. Eventually, I generated themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that

allowed me to draw conclusions about the potentials of the arts for enhancing moral deliberation and virtue literacy.

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.

## CENTRAL FINDINGS

### **Justice, hypothetically speaking**

When do we need to step in and put our efforts into seemingly unresolvable conflicts? Are our actions guided by particular and personal benefits or by a broader universal notion of morals and justice? To what extent would our efforts be well spent? As one pupil bluntly put it in regard of Delacroix' painting of liberty, "[w]hy sacrifice yourself for peace?"

Pupils perceived the need to fight for justice in proportion with their own reality. An artwork with a high level of conceptual abstraction and fewer options to identify with those portrayed, such as Delacroix' *Liberty Leading the People*, generated ideas that were more hypothetical and less infused with emotions. However, this disinterestedness allowed for a philosophical analysis that revealed the paradoxical and controversial nature of wars and fight.

How can she [liberty] declare peace and victory by waving the flag, even though a lot of people have died and a lot of people are still ready to kill?

Justice was not only perceived as a result of, but also as an essential quality of, the agents in question, and the contradiction between freedom and fight became apparent. "The goddess of liberty was holding a gun and threatening to kill", as one pupil pointed out. Pupils recognized that persistent repression and injustice could eventually bring about disastrous consequences. They commented on "how many people get killed in civil wars", and they asked, "why are wars needed?." It was suggested that "greed was the root of all evil", but humans were also to



blame because “people could be unjust and cruel.” Participants recognized the importance of internal cohesion in social structures. They feared that these could collapse if “widespread anger” was left to ferment until reaching the point of total disruption where “each was against all” and the distinction between “the good and the evil” could no longer be made.

While pupils’ reception of *Liberty Leading the People* was rather passive, pupils responded differently to artworks that examined issues of social justice that were closer to their reality. These include the Norman Rockwell’s *The Problem We All Live With* and *The Fisherwomen* by Icelandic textile artist Hildur Hákonardóttir. Both these artworks induced intense indignation about racism and misogyny.

The 1963 painting by Norman Rockwell, *The Problem We All Live With*, produced worries about injustice in societies in which racism, hatred and xenophobia are prevalent. Norman Rockwell’s message is even more pertinent today. Pupils expressed bewilderment over and strong repulsion to the fact that people would fight against human rights and try to hinder young children from going to school on the grounds of skin color. One student wrote: “I am angry. One should not maltreat people just because of their race.” Another asked: “What is wrong with people when they are against people of different origin, colored people, or a different religion.” Many students expressed their disapproval and lack of understanding as to why the state of affairs in the world needs to be this way and asked in disbelief: “Why do people always have to think so much about other people[’s] race.” Pupils also wondered about why a girl would need to be escorted to school, and why she was threatened by her community. “It gets on my nerves. Nobody should need to be escorted to school by soldiers, threatened by flying fruits and tomatoes. It’s ridiculous!” Although Rockwell’s painting describes the situation in the US almost sixty years ago, similar conditions prevail in many parts of the world. As one participant put it, “[i]t hurts to think about that the world once was like that, and it kind of still is.”

Pupils’ responses to Hildur Hákonardóttir 1971 textile work *The Fisherwomen* focused on women rights, class struggles and labor. A student pointed out that the work appears to be “from the period when women didn’t have any rights, and it is irritating.” The artwork even generated contempt.

The man is in a higher position than the women and gets better paid, but the women do all the work. They are likely to revolt and reject how they are treated. I feel humiliation and shame when looking at this image.

The uneven distribution of resources and workload was also criticized. "It is unfair that the women are doing all the work while the man is just standing there and looking at them." Many pupils recognized that, in the past, women seldom had any choice about their jobs or working hours. A participant predicted that the women would revolt against the injustice and oppression.

These women cannot choose their jobs. They have always been working in this place to have money for food. One day, they will revolt and fight for women's rights because they are tired of others making the decisions that concern them.

Pupils seemed to be able to discern the cruelty sometimes present on the labor market, especially regarding women.

They are standing by a table while their boss is standing over them. Most of them are exhausted and irritated because they have been working for long hours without breaks for resting or eating. They had asked for a break many hours ago, but their boss denied it and decided to monitor them.

### **Virtue is desirable**

In the pupils' responses, virtue seems to be of significant importance for a good life. Displaying virtues such as courage and setting a good example is considered to be praiseworthy. Ruby Bridges, a young black woman who represents a marginalized group in her community, is regarded as a good example because she showed courage in attending a desegregated school despite of the obstacles inflicted on her by anti-desegregation protesters in her town.

She is brave going to a school of white kids only. She is proud of being the first, and she is a pioneer, both as a girl and as a black person.

Showing virtue is considered as something good. Ruby acts as a role model by showing character traits to which others can aspire. According to student interpretation of the painting, she is proud of her actions and proud of herself; being

virtuous is a part of her identity. “She shows courage because she cannot change how she appears.” Pupils wrote that, when facing adverse situations, courage would not only be seen in actions, but also in her fearless manner of encountering a challenge. “She is courageous because she stands straight and walks as if she has nothing to fear.” Being fearless is one thing but being dedicated and energetic when entering a difficult situation is considered even more admirable. “She shows courage and strength because she walks briskly, and it looks like she is not scared.” Being courageous involves a certain level of confidence, which becomes obvious to the audience. “She is self-confident because she walks calmly with the soldiers and her face is calm.” Another student described her as being “upright, with good confidence and doesn’t seem to be afraid.”

### **Virtue makes a difference**

According to pupils, the virtues are not only desirable as character traits, but they also seem to be a necessity for motivation and drive. Courage is also considered to be beneficial in many respects and has a significant practical dimension in dealing with other people. All leadership needs courage, as in the case of *Liberty Leading the People*. As a student stated, “[f]or a leader, it takes courage to lead the people.” Pupils ascribed virtues specifically to women, both in the case of liberty, who a pupil described as “strong and courageous”, and in the case of the Fisherwomen, where pupils recognized how women would sacrifice themselves for their children and families.

They are likely working for their families, to be able to feed their children when they are not able to feed themselves. They will most certainly spend the last minutes of their lives doing something for their families, like working or cooking.

Here, the fisherwomen are considered to represent the idea of motherhood, commitment and unconditional love. Despite adverse conditions and oppression from powerful men, these strong women are toiling through their difficulties in hope of contributing to the greater and higher good.

One of the practical aspects of courage can be seen in the pupils’ thoughts about Rivière Briton’s painting of *Daniel’s Answer to the King* (often referred to as *Daniel in the Lions’ Den*). When communicating with others, appearing confident and courageous is considered to be important in regard to mutual trust and respect. Pupils appear to ascribe these qualities metaphorically to

Daniel amidst the lions, since hungry lions are not likely to care about mutual respect and fearlessness. The idea of mutual respect as a result in interactions or communication was described as a conscious decision from showing courage.

It looks like the man is showing courage in not being afraid of the lions, then the lions are not afraid of him and have nothing to fear.

However, such a fearless appearance can be empowering and could influence the lions in such a way that they would not only hesitate to attack the man, but also become afraid of him. “The lions are afraid of him because he doesn’t show any fear and they become afraid instead.” This line of thought suggests that, in similar cases, the real intention of the antagonists would be unveiled by their reactions; bad intentions would result in fear but good intentions in peace. “The man shows courage and peace. He shows peace by not hurting the lions.” While most pupils focused on the benefits of virtues for a good life, some warned against vices. “He knows that if he shows weakness, the animals will not hesitate to eat him.”

### **Virtue for personal development**

While 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 that helps you become better or stronger:

When we show courage, we are increasing our comfort zone, which results in our capacity to deal with more challenges later on and show more courage.

Courage was also seen as a key element in doing the right thing or guiding others in order “to be able to stop bad things from happening or stop people from doing wrong things.” Courage is also important for self-development because it allows you to “conquer your fears”, and courage allows you “to get through life in the right way and deal with new and exciting things.”

There is also present an idea of courage as a character trait regarding acceptance, meeting your destiny with dignity. When describing what Daniel might be thinking, the notion of equanimity seems to be present. It was suggested that, as Daniel looks up through the window and into the light, he could be thinking

of “how wonderful it is outside.” As a pupil wrote, “he has accepted the fact that he is going to die.” Equanimity is also ascribed to the lions as fellow prisoners with Daniel, as everyone in the dungeon is waiting for the inevitable. “Instead of running to the door and trying to get out, they just look into the light and wait for it to come to get them.” Courage plays also an essential role when facing the inevitable, according to one pupil, who said that “[t]he man knows that he will die, and you have to be courageous to face the facts. Also, he knows that there is no way out of these circumstances.”

In the pupils’ texts, the virtues seem to be essential for our inner lives, health, future prospects and relationships. Edvard’s Munch painting of his dying sister induced serious deliberation about life’s challenges. Pupils noted that the reality of life can be harsh and that we needed to accept the facts of life and find a way to cope. “I think it is sad, but this is how life is, and you must be brave.” In a similar vein, but with added importance on gratitude, one pupil wrote that:

I think the woman with the red hair is seriously ill and maybe dying, she is possibly thanking her daughter ... for a good life and much help. I think the painting is sad because it hurts to lose someone, but you’ll have to go on because such is life.

With a similar focus on difficult moments, pupils wrote that virtues such as appreciation and forgiveness could be of great importance for psychological well-being after having been through emotional suffering. As such, Munch’s painting can be perceived as a reminder of appreciating life, and that each moment could be the last one. “Love your family and enjoy your friends. Because you’ll never know when you’ll lose someone.” The importance of forgiving and not holding grudges was emphasized in this vignette:

In the last days, they had a fight which ended badly, and they hadn’t spoken since. Then the mother gets a phone call where she is told that her daughter had been in a car accident ... They both realize the importance of forgiving. After some crying and laughing, the daughter dies, and five days later the mother dies of sorrow.

### **Virtuous emotions**

The third facet of the pupils’ responses to the artworks concerns affective and emotional issues. Looking at an artwork can foster emotionally induced moral virtues through perception and imagination. The emotional charge in Munch’s

painting seems to arouse similar emotions with the audience. One pupil wrote that “[h]er husband is so sad that he is praying for her. You perceive the sorrow and anguish of death in this painting, because of how sad he is, and she is afraid.” In some accounts, pupils expressed compassion and empathy with a hint of hope. “I feel sad for the woman who is crying and hiding her face in the other woman’s lap. It is as if she is saying: ‘Everything will be alright’.”

The prospects of imminent demise are also accentuated by the pupils: “I think the redhaired one is going to die, and I sense much fear and sorrow in this painting.” Other pupils added how the dark and heavy colors in the painting evoked similar feelings in them. For example, one wrote that “[t]his painting is somber, and I became sad when I looked at it.” Another remarked that “[t]he dark colors are bad for the atmosphere in the painting. If the artist had used brighter and more vivid colors, the painting would have been different.” One pupil commented on the darkness in the room concerning, saying that the darkness “makes me feel as if nobody has been around to help her.” Although the presence of sadness was pronounced, there was also a positive emotion that could counter the difficulties.

There will be much sorrow over the next days. The emotions I feel are sorrow because of the demise of the woman. But also, a lot of relief because the woman had been going through much pain and it is good to leave.

In some instances, Munch’s painting made pupils to relate to their own painful experiences. One pupil wrote that the painting “is tragic because I know how it is to lose someone who is close, and whom you love.” Another pupil took a precise example from her own experience:

They were like working outside because it looks like it is in the old times, then suddenly she passes out, but then she recovered. I get this feeling as it hurts in my stomach and things. This happened to my grandfather, but he is alright now.

In a similar vein, a pupil wrote that he or she felt “sorrow, anger and resentment. I feel these emotions because my grandmother is fighting cancer.” In one account, a pupil related to the situation as something that could happen to her.

She became suddenly very ill, so her mother took her to the hospital and there it was discovered that she suffered from an incurable heart disease. Then, they were sent home to be together until she would stop breathing. It feels sad because it could, in a way, be my mother and me.

## DISCUSSION

In line with theoretical literature on the value of the arts for moral development, my results suggest that when analyzing artworks, pupils can articulate moral concepts and relate them to both their external and internal reality. Pupils were not only able to objectively describe the events depicted in the artwork, but they were also able to justify their responses: what they thought or felt and why. Their responses also demonstrated that their reactions were dependent on the extent to which they could relate to the persons depicted in the artwork: this can be seen in their deliberations on social justice. In many instances, pupils' responses were infused with virtuous emotions: they expressed resentment, anger and shame, and they recognized sorrow and grief and showed empathy towards the persons depicted. Some described the importance of gratitude and forgiving, they perceived equanimity and tranquility, and they expressed admiration when beholding the virtues of others. They outlined how courage can be beneficial in many ways in human life, both regarding others and for personal guidance when facing fear or obstacles. Colorful and imaginative texts displayed how each participant brought his or her own experiences and background into the interpretation. This shows that art can be the bedrock for the open-ended deliberation that contemporary educational discourse emphasizes. This also follows Aristotle's theory about the development of the virtuous human being, which says that in our conduct and judgement, we need to be sensitive to a variety of different situations, which we must evaluate from various perspectives. Although the open-ended nature of art could, in theory, allow for moral relativism in our responses, these attitudes did not appear. Despite the colorful variety of texts, they shared an inner coherence which can be observed in how the main themes in the analysis are constructed.

At the heart of moral deliberation is the ability to think about moral issues and experience feelings and emotions as a result. Aristotle (1955) wrote that these qualities need to be developed through habituation, upbringing, and, not least, practice. Artwork such as that used in this research project seems to allow for deliberation about various moral issues. Through representation and imitation, visual images provide a playground for free and unhindered thinking

about how to deal with moral challenges in real life, and in some instances, the artworks allow for a deeper reflection on pupils' own (sometimes painful) experiences. Although it remains unknown whether pupils would act in accordance with their writing in situations similar to those presented in the artwork, their deliberation remains an important rehearsal or practice through imagination in which they can evaluate their thoughts and feelings.

Although my results are promising, it must be kept in mind that my project is limited in some respects. For instance, this research explores a single age group, and a different collection of artworks could have produced different findings. However, my experience in teaching the visual arts and philosophy in an upper elementary school tells me that the artwork chosen for analysis always induces emotional and cognitive reactions that allow for discussion and reflections, regardless of the pieces chosen.

Despite these limitations, I believe that my research project unveils an untapped educational source that can have a significant impact on teacher education and classroom practices. My research also suggests interdisciplinary opportunities, since the introduction of art into other school subjects could enrich learning. In general, giving moral issues an educational focus through pictorial and philosophical analysis appears to help open new pathways for value-based education.

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