

Perceptions of Virtue: An Experimental Approach

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Case 1 – Traditional Virtue Ethics (Habit & Practice):

After failing to complete their homework for the third time in a row, the teacher sits the student down for a conversation. Instead of focusing solely on consequences, the teacher emphasizes that responsibility and diligence are qualities that must be practiced regularly. They remind the student that completing homework is not just about grades, but about forming habits of discipline and perseverance. The teacher also encourages the student to establish a routine, emphasizing that through repeated effort, responsibility becomes second nature. Over time, the student internalizes this lesson, making homework completion a regular part of their habits.

Case 2 – Factitious Virtue Approach (Appearance of Virtue Without Substance):

After failing to complete their homework for the third time in a row, the teacher decides to remind her class everyday that they are responsible. She arranges a meeting with the student's other teachers. However, rather than addressing the student's responsibility, the conversation focuses on fostering a sense of cooperation between the teachers by daily affirmations. The student is reassured that their learning is a collective concern and that multiple people are involved in ensuring their success.

Abstract:

Youth will favor conditions that resemble situational approaches to virtue, regardless of their conscientiousness levels. Researcher will select a random sample of high school students aged 14- 18 ($\alpha = .95$). Two groups of students will be divided based on their scores on a provided conscientiousness measure. Both groups will read the same scenarios relevant to them: homework, peer groups, parents, etc. with various virtue twists. Students will be asked to select the option that they favor most. I present the foundations of this pre-experiment for colleague feedback.

Case 3 – Traditional/Factitious Virtue Approach (Sympathy and Understanding)

After failing to complete their homework for the third time in a row, the teacher takes a different approach. Instead of focusing on rules or routines, they take the time to understand why the student has been struggling. They remind the student that they matter, that they are responsible for their own learning, and that their education is valuable. By adjusting their response to fit the student's emotional and personal needs, the teacher creates an environment where the student feels motivated to complete their homework—not out of habit, but because they now recognize its importance within their unique situation.

Case 4 – Situational (Psychological Priming Instead of Ethical Framing):

After failing to complete their homework for the third time in a row, the teacher does not discuss responsibility, habits, or personal values. Instead, they create an environment that subtly encourages homework completion through sensory influence. Before assigning homework, they fill the classroom with the scent of freshly baked cookies, making the space feel warm and comforting. This shift in atmosphere relaxes the students, making them more receptive to completing their work. Without enforcing discipline or addressing ethical considerations, the teacher ensures the student completes their homework—not through personal growth, but through an external, subconscious influence.