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Chapter 9

Social and Ethical Dilemmas in Working with School Counselors in Secondary Schools for Students with Learning Disabilities

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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Abstract

We examined the differences in the way school counselors handle social and moral dilemmas in secondary schools for children with learning disabilities. This study compared educational counselors with open approaches to counselors with more conservative approaches to social and moral dilemmas. The study raised two questions. (1) How do school counselors with more open pedagogical approaches handle social and moral dilemmas? (2) How do school counselors with more conservative pedagogical approaches handle social and moral dilemmas? The participants were 15 school counselors in secondary schools who worked with students with learning disabilities. We asked the counselors to describe a dilemma that they had experienced in the course of their work. The findings show that we can divide school counselors into two groups based on the way they handle dilemmas: a more open group and a more conservative group. The results of our study will enable us to improve the training programs for school counselors and provide more effective treatment approaches to solve social and moral dilemmas school counselors encounter.

Keywords: social dilemmas, ethical dilemmas, moral dilemmas, learning disabilities, open approach, school counselor

1. Introduction

In the educational reform introduced in 1968, junior high schools (7th through 9th grades) were established, and senior high schools were to include only 10th to 12th grades. Senior high schools, in contrast to elementary and junior high schools, include specialized learning tracks. High school students select a few areas of interest on which to focus their studies.

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The goal of secondary school education is to develop the personality and creativity of students, offer them opportunities to develop diverse abilities, help them achieve their fullest potential as human beings, expose them to a variety of fields of knowledge, and provide them with the basic skills they will need as adults in a free society [1].

The major goal of this study is to examine the way school counselors handle social and moral dilemmas in secondary schools with students with learning disabilities. To date, no research has focused on counselors who work with students with learning disabilities, and therefore, this study makes a unique contribution to the literature. This study compares counselors who use a more open pedagogical approach to those who use a more conservative approach in solving social and moral problems.

Studying the differences among school counselors in their approach to solving such dilemmas will improve our understanding of their work and enable us to develop more effective counseling strategies in educational contexts. Furthermore, this research will help us identify the focus of problems school counselors encounter [2].

2. Social and moral dilemmas in secondary schools

Social and moral dilemmas have practical implications. When faced with social and moral dilemmas, we have to decide the best way to solve them, and the options available to us may be mutually exclusive. For example, a dilemma may be connected to values, beliefs, ethics, and behavior such as generosity, integrity honesty, the holiness of life, or obeying the law. The solution to dilemmas such as these is influenced by social and ethical values, and no single clear-cut approach exists. Human beings decide the importance of these values for themselves. To implement values they believe to be important, people must be willing to relinquish other important principles which they value less [3].

We can divide these dilemmas into two subcategories: dilemmas that occur when the interests of an individual clash with those related to the interests of the community and dilemmas in which the general interests clash with the general interests in which the individual must join one of two sides. These dilemmas arise in everyday life. We are aware of some of them and devote time to thinking about them, whereas there are other dilemmas which we are less aware of and unaware of the extent to which they affect us [4, 5].

Oser and Althof [6] claimed that when professional dilemmas occur in educational contexts, teachers respond as professionals, not as individuals, who might create a disequilibrium in their approach to moral dilemmas: concerned or caring behavior and honest behavior with a fair solution. The professional process of decision-making by the teacher is related to finding a balance between those directly involved in the dilemma without favoring one side or another, especially in the framework of schools with diverse cultural populations. Oser & Althof preferred a practical discussion as an approach to handling social and moral dilemmas over an ethical dialog.

Oser and Althof [6] defined five different models of decision-making in interpersonal conflicts. These models represent the structure of teachers' decision-making. The focus is on

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the process and the implementation. These are the models: **Model 1**, **avoidance**, the teacher avoids making a decision or taking responsibility for solving the problem; **Model 2, delegation**, the teacher transfers responsibility to an appropriate authority in the school, the principal, counselor, a colleague, etc. **Model 3**, **unilateral decision-making**, in this case, teachers make unilateral decisions based on their skills and professional experience and avoid negotiations with those directly involved. **Model 4, incomplete discourse**, in this case, teachers discuss the dilemma with the participants but make the final moral decision alone. **Model 5, complete discourse**, teachers facilitate the discussion with individuals involved in the conflict, and together they assume responsibility for the final decision and for its implementation. Maslovaty [7] expanded the model and developed two additional models: (1) **transfer of authority to the parents and the students** and (2) **private discussion dialog**—(2.1) **unilateral dialog**, (2.2) **incomplete dialog**, and (2.3) **complete dialog**.

One of Maslovaty's studies [8] touches on ways teachers in school cope with finding solutions to social and moral dilemmas. The research points out that teachers must first understand the problem and break it down into its components and only afterward suggest ways of thinking based on their professional experience.

Social dilemmas are characterized by an open and democratic approach, the characteristics of which are the preparation of appropriate treatment programs adapted to the students' unique needs. This approach emphasizes the student's abilities and enables appropriate and creative solutions. Supporters of the democratic approach believe in the ability of the students and enable them to find fair and creative solutions. However, moral dilemmas are characterized by a more conservative and closed approach and more routine solutions, which do not utilize innovative strategies. Those who use this approach favor the school and the system over the needs of the students [8, 9].

3. Various approaches of educators: conservatism versus openness

John Dewey (1052–059), an educational philosopher and thinker, was one of the individuals who strongly favored the open approach. He placed the learner at the center of the educational process, supporting learner-centered activities and an integrative curriculum [2]. Fereira [10] looked for open approaches and opposed conservative education, which he labeled "banking education," characterized by traditional roles in which the teacher teaches and the students learn, the teachers are in control and the students must obey, and the teacher determines the content of the lessons and the students accept it as a given. Fereira [10] attacked the present structure of schools in which the emphasis is on the achievement of the students and not on developing personalities. He claims that conservative schools as they exist today are becoming obsolete. In the future, learning will focus on independent activities of the student and greater individualization of learning [2].

Traditional, conservative education places the teacher at the center, and the students have to adapt themselves to the goals and values of society. These values are transferred from one generation to another by the principles of the tradition which symbolize continuity [11, 12].

4. The role of school counselors in treating students with learning disabilities

Students with learning disabilities have a neurodevelopmental disturbance with a biological base and cognitive implications. The biological background is evident in the interaction of genetic environmental factors that affect the ability of the brain to function effectively in cognitive activities such as perception and processing verbal and nonverbal information. These problems are long-term and impair learning in areas such as reading, reading comprehension, writing, spelling, and mathematics [13].

Four criteria are required to arrive at a diagnosis of specific learning disorder: (1) **Criterion A**—difficulty learning and using learning skills in at least one of the following areas: inaccuracy or slow pace in reading words, poor reading comprehension, poor spelling, poor written expression or difficulty in numerical concepts, and lack of numerical understanding which has persisted for at least 6 months, despite intervention and assistance. (2) **Criterion B**—The area of difficulty is below what is expected for the chronological age of the learner and causes disturbance in learning. (3) **Criterion C**—Difficulties begin in the early years of school, but it is possible that the full extent of the problems arises only when the academic demands became greater later on. (4) **Criteria D**—None of the following factors fully explains the learning difficulties: Intellectual impairment, overall late development, visual or hearing impairment, mental or neurological impairment, psychiatric distress, lack of language proficiency in the language used for studying, and poor instruction [13].

The effect of the learning disabilities on the life of the student is not limited to the school environment. It permeates every area of life, but it is within the framework of the institutions of formal learning that the learner experiences the greatest difficulties. The areas that present the greatest problems in school are reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics [14].

The mission of the school counselor working with students with learning disabilities is to enhance the educational experience of both the individual and the school by creating a cultural environment, respectful of the rights of the students [1]. The work of the school counselor can be summarized in the following ways:

1. **Work with the administration:** The counselor is a partner with the administration in the school in decision-making and locating and identifying the population in need of assistance.

2. **Work with the staff:** The school counselor provides assistance to staff both to individuals and groups training and developing the educational and therapeutic (teachers, assistants, volunteers) in the best approach and in development and prevention.

3. **Placement, absorption, and transfers:** The school counselor makes referrals, diagnoses, and placements so that the educational and therapeutic environment is appropriate for the personality of each student.

4. **Developmental programs from preschool to age 21—life skills:** The school counselor promotes implementation of developmental programs in keeping with the particular needs of each school.

5. **Intervention in times of pressure and crisis:** School counselors work to strengthen the resilience of the educational staff of the students to guarantee that they will function professionally during crises and prolonged pressure.
6. **Work with parents:** The school counselor promotes a school atmosphere in which the parent is an educational and central partner in the student's educational process and creates a climate of dialog with the parents.

In high schools, in addition to the roles already discussed, the guidance counselor is responsible for determining if the skills and ability of the students are consistent with their interests in learning specific subjects and their desire to learn in a specific type of program or to learn a vocation. The counselor has to help students make the best choices in choosing which subjects to learn and what type of program is suitable based on their ability.

Additionally, the school counselor must follow the progress of each and every student and offer advice regarding changes in subjects, levels, or course of study [15].

When an ethical dilemma arises in the work of a counselor, they must use their professional judgment to make decisions. This process is complex and sometimes does not lend itself to unequivocal solutions. Our study arose out of an interest in understanding the factors involved in the decision-making process of school counselors. We wanted to learn more about the ways school counselors cope with moral and social dilemmas and how they attempt to find a balance between the needs of the school establishment and the sometimes conflicting demands of the students and parents. We emphasized the types of dilemmas counselors regularly encounter, especially in secondary schools where these dilemmas are most likely to arise.

Simchi [16] claims that the perspective of guidance counselors is based on their personal outlook and that the approach they take is not connected to the actual event but is dependent more on the their personal beliefs, past experience, and training.

Shakedi [17] adds that the nature of the dilemma determines the way the counselors work forces the counselor to work according to particular ethical principles and to disregard other principles, which may be no less important.

In order for the school to perform all of its tasks, guidance counselors must be able to fulfill their roles and to handle the problems that arise in the schools with sensitivity. Our goal is to evaluate the way school counselors cope with social and moral dilemmas they encounter during the course of their work and the way they solve these dilemmas in schools with students with learning disabilities [18, 19].

The research compares counselors who use an open approach to those who use a conservative approach in solving social and moral dilemmas.

5. Research questions

1. How do school counselors with an open pedagogical approach cope with social and moral dilemmas?
2. How do school counselors with a conservative pedagogical approach cope with social and moral dilemmas?

6. Research sample

The sample study included 15 guidance counselors, most of whom were women (66%). All of the counselors worked in secondary schools with students with learning disabilities in the center of the country. The selection of the schools and counselors was random. They were chosen on the basis of their willingness to participate in the study. Twelve (80%) of the counselors had a BA degree, and the rest (20%) had an MA. All of the counselors had teaching certificates. Their experience ranged from 1 to 30 years (M = 11.50) (SD = 7.49).

Six of the counselors (40%) were also teachers, and the rest (60%) were coordinators or had another role in addition to their role as counselors in the school.

7. Research tools

We asked the participants to describe one major dilemma that had actually occurred during their work as counselors. Each of the 15 participants described a social or moral dilemma. We asked them what type of dilemmas they frequently coped with during the course of their work. Each of them selected one particular dilemma. We were particularly interested in their approach to solving the dilemma and the factors they took into consideration in solving it.

We categorized the strategies used in solving the dilemma into two groups. The more open, democratic group, for example, presented the dilemma for discussion to the class, listened to the student responses, asked them what they considered to be the best way to approach the problem, and considered their responses in implementing solutions. More conservative strategies simply told the students how they should behave, solving the problem for them.

8. Methodology

The research was conducted in secondary schools in the center of the country for students with learning disabilities. The schools all contained a heterogeneous population from a socioeconomic perspective—the parents were middle class and above. The investigator went to each of the schools and met with the principals and the counselors, and they all signed consent forms and answered the questions on the written form.

9. Analysis of the data

This is a qualitative study designed to examine how school counselors cope with social and moral dilemmas. The findings were analyzed in accordance with the research questions with an emphasis on the nature of the specific issues that arise in coping with moral or social dilemmas [17].

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After gathering the data by way of the questionnaires, we identified phrases that were repeated and assigned them a primary category/code. Afterward, we broke them down into categories that were closer to the research questions. The ideas were grouped according to content categories. We reread the replies and checked the connections between them. We attempted to find content not related to the research, and these replies were eliminated. After the final collection of data, we were able to see if the information we had answered our research questions.

10. Findings

Below are descriptions of a variety of dilemmas and the way we categorized them based on the pedagogical approach used by the counselors: an open, democratic approach versus a conservative, traditional approach. The characteristics of the open, democratic approach for social and moral dilemmas are consistent with the fifth model—the complete discourse—according to Oser and Althof [6], and the features of the traditional, conservative approach to social and moral dilemmas are consistent with models one through four according to Oser and Althof's theory [6].

10.1. The open democratic approach to coping with moral dilemmas

Dilemma 1—The first dilemma focused on a boy, considered to be the class clown, who frequently disturbed the lessons. The school, through the counselor, avoided involving the parents because they found it so difficult to cope with their son that they used excessive punishment, which harmed his development and personality. The dilemma was whether the school counselor could cope with the problem alone or should involve the parents.

The school counselor said, "I am familiar with this case, the parents are not willing to hear that their son disturbs the class in school, and every time we turn to them they punish him severely, which is very disturbing to his personality and mental development, which makes it difficult for me to ever approach them."

Notwithstanding, the school counselor and the school tried to manage the student alone despite the difficulties. A program was developed for him with careful follow-up, for every time he acted out of place or was involved in vandalism, the seriousness of his actions was made clear to him.

Dilemma 2—The second dilemma concerned the violent behavior of a student who claimed to have experienced a tragic event. The student behaved in an offensive way and in opposition to all of the rules of the school. He fabricated stories and was aggressive toward teachers. The dilemma was whether to punish him based on the seriousness of his actions or to try to understand what was behind his behavior.

According to the counselor, "He shouted out and almost attacked me. I gave in and returned to class."

In this episode, the school counselor, in consultation with the teacher, decided to find out what was behind the student's behavior. They met with the parents and discovered that the

student often lied, and they apologized for their son's behavior. The school counselor decided to stay in close touch with the student, to continue to encourage him, and to give him a chance to start again.

Dilemma 3—The third dilemma was about a student who asked to be excused from participating in a school project due to serious economic problems. The project required the use of a personal computer after school to answer questions. The dilemma was whether to excuse him from participating in the project or to try alternative ways for him to participate for the sake of the educational experience.

According to the school counselor, "It seems that the student does not have a computer and the socio-economic position of the family is very poor. I asked him to meet with me and he explained the financial difficulties and his willingness for me to find a solution."

Through the treatment, the counselor involved another student who had a computer to work with him on the project. The counselor solved the problem with the involvement and agreement of both students, and as a result, the student with the financial problem was able to participate in the project that was a very important part of the classwork.

Dilemma 4—The fourth dilemma was about a student who behaved offensively to the school counselor, who was also his teacher, when she returned exams. The dilemma was how to respond to the student's offensive behavior. Should he be punished or should the teacher help him understand that his behavior was undesirable?

The school counselor said, "One of the students got up and shouted, 'The teacher made an arithmetical error on my grade and I deserve full credit.'"

The student saw that the school counselor made a mistake in the calculation. In response, she tried to convince the student that his behavior is undesirable. The student accepted the comment of the counselor and understood that his behavior was out of place.

Dilemma 5—The fifth dilemma is about a student who behaved aggressively toward the proctor (who is also the school counselor) during an exam. The dilemma is how to behave with the student—to punish her or to try to explain the seriousness of her unacceptable behavior and tell her the way she should behave.

The school counselor said, "When I approach one of my students, she shouted out in rage for no reason. I tried to quiet her down in a nice way, but unfortunately, I did not succeed in understanding or figuring out her behavior."

Dilemma 6—The sixth dilemma was about a student with learning disabilities who was asked by the teacher (who is also the school counselor) to buy a gift for a classmate who had broken his leg and was absent for an extended period. The student was supposed to use all of the money that had been collected from the rest of the class to buy the gift, but in fact she purchased a gift with only part of the money and kept the rest of the money for herself. The dilemma was whether to tell the student directly what she has done, which may be emotionally damaging to her, or to make her indirectly aware of the severity of her actions.

The school counselor said, "I was aware that the gift that was purchased by a good friend of the girls, and that she had taken some of the money, and that not all of the money she received from the class was spent on the gift that was purchased."

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The school counselor decided not to directly insult the girl but to help her understand the message by presenting parallel cases that had arisen in class. The counselor delivered the educational message to the girl in a way that was not harmful and not in front of the class, but helped her understand the seriousness of what she had done.

Dilemma 11—The 11th dilemma was about a popular (female) student, whom all the girls liked very much, but considered herself to be superior to the other girls and was not willing to be their friend. The dilemma was whether to involve the popular girl and to speak to her about her improper behavior or to allow time to prove to her that her behavior is not acceptable.

The school counselor said, "Donna rejects her because if she becomes her friend, she will not be as popular. Tali complains that Donna keeps her distance from her and is unwilling to be her friend."

This situation was brought to the attention of the school counselor, and it was decided not to intervene. He believed that as time passes, the popular girl would understand the value of the other girls in the class and the importance of maintaining good relations with them all. The school counselor presented a number of stories to the class on the topic of accepting others to illustrate models of desirable behavior that were especially important for this one particular girl.

Dilemma 14—The 14th dilemma is about someone who is a teacher as well as a counselor and whether to show support and to identify and participate with a strike that the Parents Committee and other community organizations called, which would help their demands gain acceptance by the authorities. Alternatively, the counselor could take the side of the authorities and not identify with the strike in any way.

The counselor said, "The strike also has a negative side. Students in special education in secondary school would miss a lot of material, and if the strike persists, would make it impossible for them to learn what is required. On the other hand, it is important to join the parents and the community groups so that they will succeed in their struggle".

In this case, the counselor decided to participate in the strike, to strengthen the groups supporting it, and to disregard orders not to strike.

10.2. Traditional, conservative approaches to solving moral dilemmas

Dilemma 7—The seventh dilemma was about a students who made fun of a classmate who mispronounced words when he spoke.

The counselor said, "The dilemma was whether to punish the student for upsetting his classmate or to ignore the episode."

In this case, the school counselor decided to punish the offending student and to speak to him about the mistake he made in hurting the other student's feelings. Although the school counselor did not discuss the episode in class, he explained the mistake to the student and punished him appropriately for his actions.

Dilemma 8—The eighth dilemma was about a girl who cheated on an exam. The proctor (who is also the school counselor) saw that the student was using extraneous material during the exam. The dilemma was whether to approach the student during the exam and tell her that she was cheating or to discuss it with her privately after the exam.

The counselor said, "During the exam, I saw the girl using additional pages while she was writing […] and only after I was certain that she was cheating did I approach her and ask her to give me the pages."

The proctor, who was the school counselor, involved the exam coordinator who, on the proctor's word, rejected the exam.

Dilemma 9—The ninth dilemma was about a student who had saved a sum of money to participate in a class trip. Before the trip, the student's father needed the money and requested it from him. As a result, the student could not participate in the trip. The dilemma was whether to cancel his participation because his father had taken the money that he had paid or to try to find alternative sources of funding so that the student could come on the trip.

The school counselor said, "The student's father needed the money suddenly and that is why he asked his son to give him all of the money he had saved and not to go on the trip."

The school counselor said that the student should take the money that he had already paid for the trip back, give it to his father, and not participate in the trip. In this case, the seriousness of the harm that this caused the student (who had learning disabilities) was not taken into consideration. The school counselor did not attempt to find an alternative solution or to allow the student to come on the trip and to remain integrated in the class.

Dilemma 10—The tenth dilemma was about a group of students who decided to surprise the teacher and make him a party for his birthday. The students had not consulted the teacher about the preparations for the party. The dilemma was whether or not to continue with the plans for the party respecting what the class had organized or to stop the party plans because the teacher was strongly opposed.

The school counselor said, "The response of the teacher was very strong claiming that the plans were made without his knowledge, and was in conflict with the everyday work that should be carried out in a high school […]. The teacher expressed serious concern and asked that the party be canceled."

The response of the teacher was very strong and showed that he was unwilling to digress from the format of the curriculum. The teacher asked the students to cancel the party, but the counselor supported a more modest event.

Dilemma 12— The 12th dilemma was about two girlfriends, when one of them is very dependent on the other so much so that the stronger one exploits her and asks her for personal favors. The dilemma was whether to intervene to stop the exploitation or to ignore the situation and hope that the girl would find a way to end the dependence on her friend.

The counselor said, "One is following the other, when the second exploits her for personal purposes."

In this case, the school counselor intervened. He met with one of the girls privately and afterward met with them together. He explained more desirable ways of behaving toward friends and threatened both of them with severe punishment if the situation did not change.

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Dilemma 13—The 13th dilemma is about a social event held in the home of one of the students. The event was considered problematic because a few of the students who regularly misbehave were likely to destroy property in the home of the hosts. The dilemma was whether the counselor should intervene and prevent the event from taking place out of concern that the problematic students would destroy the home of the host or to leave it up to the host to handle the behavior of the students.

The teacher (who is also the school counselor) said, "In this class there are a number of students who are considered to be trouble makers and who are likely to destroy personal belongings in the home of the hosts."

Here the counselor decided to intervene and to forbid the students from having the event and did not allow the student to host the event. He spoke to them directly and gave them strict instructions forbidding the event from taking place.

Dilemma 15—The 15th dilemma is about a girl who took a history matriculation exam. Her father is a history teacher in the school. During the exam, the father walked into the class and gave her the answers to the questions. The dilemma was whether the school counselor should report this event to his supervisors and jeopardize the man's future and his income or to act as if nothing unusual had happened, allowing such immoral behavior to repeat itself in the future and making it impossible to guarantee that exams would be given fairly and honestly.

The school counselor said, "The history teacher entered the classroom and handed her the questions so she could copy the answers on her own exam sheet."

In this case, the school counselor decided not to report the episode, taking a traditional approach, protecting his own personal interests above the interests of the community.

11. Discussion and conclusions

The main goal of the research was to examine the ways school counselors coped with social and moral dilemmas in secondary schools for students with learning disabilities.

In this study, we asked 15 school counselors to describe the dilemmas they encountered in their work and tell us how they handled them.

From an analysis of the dilemmas that we examined, we observed two different approaches: one expressed a more open, democratic approach to solving dilemmas and the other a more closed conservative approach.

Handling dilemmas in the more open, democratic way was characterized by an individualized, therapeutic approach to meet the needs of the students with close follow-up by the school counselor. This approach included many creative solutions to problems they encountered. The counselors emphasized the internalization by the students of their unacceptable behavior, met with the students, and raised the dilemmas for discussion in class by presenting parallel examples [7].

The characteristics of the open approach are consistent with the fifth model—the complete discourse—according to Oser and Althof [6]. According to this model, the teacher facilitates a discussion among those involved and allows them to be involved in the decision-making process and in the implementation of the decision [7, 20, 21].

In contrast, the more traditional, conservative approach to solving dilemmas is through punishment related to the severity of the act by the school counselor or other authorities in the school. This is without giving a chance to the students to internalize the severity of the acts or to improve their behavior. Handling dilemmas in this way is based on traditional principles, which focus on the rules without taking into consideration the needs of the students.

These characteristics of the traditional, conservative approach to solving social and moral dilemmas are consistent with Models 1–4 of Oser and Althof's theory [6] which include avoidance, transfer of authority, one-sided decision-making, and incomplete dialog.

According to the typology used in this research, we examined the way school counselors handled social and moral dilemmas in two conflicting ways: the open democratic approach and the conservative, traditional approach. There are other pedagogical approaches discussed in the professional literature. We will focus on three of them: (a) the behaviorist approach, (b) the constructivist approach, and (c) the cognitive approach [22].

According to the behaviorist approach, the educational process is based on observable behavior that takes place through stimulus and response. The emphasis is on strengthening the desired response that improves the chances that the response will repeat itself when the appropriate stimulus appears [22].

Coping with social and moral dilemmas using a behaviorist approach includes practicing and repetition, creating a gradual sequence and immediate feedback. This way of handling dilemmas emphasizes adopting routine, automatic skills where the role of the school counselor focuses on training, transfer of information, and providing feedback [23].

In the process of coping with these dilemmas, no attempt is made to provide a given structure of knowledge to the students or to determine which mental processes are necessary for them. Students are characterized as respondents to environmental conditions and do not play an active role in creating the environment. The main factor is the organization of stimuli and results within the environment.

This description is consistent with the following dilemmas: in an episode in which the student ridiculed another student who mispronounced words or the student who was caught cheating on an exam. In these episodes, the school counselor responded with punishment without conducting any prior discussion. The school counselor did not give the students a chance to understand their mistake, which could result in the repetition of the mistake. Instead, the counselor used punishment following the inappropriate actions of the students [24].

According to the constructivist approach, the educational process is an active process in which the students' contributions are not less important than those of the teacher. The learning takes place in an active way, by building knowledge and responsibility of the learner for the knowledge. The ability of students in learning develops along with their cognitive

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development, and each stage is based on the previous stage through interaction with the environment in an active process [19].

According to the constructivist approach, knowledge is a function of the way students create reality through their experiences. Students sift through knowledge of the world to create a unique reality of their own. Experimenting directly with the environment is of utmost importance in building knowledge. Students construct knowledge; they do not acquire it. There is no single predetermined "correct" reality. The student does not transfer knowledge of the world from the outside to his mind, but constructs his own personal interpretation of the world based on personal experiences and interaction with the environment. Accordingly, the internal representation of knowledge is not static. There is no objective reality that the student must know [19].

In order to understand learning, genuine experiences must be examined. Factors related to the student and to the environment are important, and the interaction between them creates knowledge. Behavior is determined by the situation, and every act is perceived as an interpretation of the present situation based on a complete history of prior interactions. It is important for learning to take place in real situations and that they are relevant to the life of the student.

Ways of coping with social and moral dilemmas based on the constructivist approach include active, gradual, focused building from a social perspective with the idea that knowledge is not isolated from the individual. The focus is on creating cognitive tools that reflect the cultural contexts, the insights, and the experiences of the students. There is no need to acquire concepts or set details or abstract ideas. The counselor must use active practices, concepts (knowledge), and culture (context). Authentic tasks, based on real contexts, must be used [19].

The school counselor should identify incorrect, biased, or primary concepts that were acquired at an earlier stage and discuss these concepts when they arise. They should facilitate the examination of their environment and help them understand complex ideas that will enable them to think like experts. This type of knowledge is not abstract. It is directly related to the experiences of the students. The students should be encouraged to construct knowledge and to validate it through social discussions [15, 25].

This type of discussion is desirable for solving some of the dilemmas mentioned, such as the student who acted out as a class clown and constantly disturbed the class during lessons or the student who behaved aggressively in school. In both of these cases, the school counselor conducted discussions with the students and involved the teachers and the parents, in order for the students to internalize their mistakes, and the learning is constructed with a way that will be remembered. She solved problems in both cases by placing the emphasis on the problem and raising the seriousness of the issue to the students. Using the cognitive educational approach is based on complex mental cognitive processes, such as thinking, problem solving, language, creating concepts, and processing information. The emphasis is on acquiring knowledge as a mental process, which includes internal coding. The student is an active partner in the educational process.

Ways of handling social and moral dilemmas based on the cognitive approach include explaining, illustrating, practicing, and providing feedback. The emphasis is on mental activities of the learner who brings responses and mental planning, establishing goals and

organizing effective strategies of processing information. It is important to pay attention to the ways the learner codes, processes, practices, stores, and retrieves information. The focus is on the thoughts of the students, their beliefs, their perspectives, and their values as influential participants in the educational process. The goal is to change behavior by practicing appropriate strategies. The students' understanding is based on information such as laws, concepts, and distinctions. Because of the emphasis on mental constructs, the cognitive approach is suitable for explaining complex types of learning (thinking, problem solving, knowledge processing) [26].

According to the cognitive approach, the school counselor focuses on the pre-disposition of the student (how the student activates, preserves, and directs the learning process), will plan learning to include internalization based on the focus of mental structures of the learner, and will attempt to transform information to relevant knowledge for the student. The school counselor will help students organize new knowledge and relate it to existing knowledge already in their memory. The counselor will base mental structures or reviews and organize the information in such a way that the students will be able to relate the new information to existing information in a way that will make it personally relevant. According to the cognitive approach, the student will bring many learning experiences to an educational situation that can influence the results. The educational process determines the most effective way to organize new knowledge so that it interacts with previously acquired knowledge of the students, their abilities, and their experiences, and it will be absorbed in the cognitive structure of the learner (Lemmens et al., 2016).

These theories are consistent with some of the dilemmas presented in this research, such as the student who was unable to participate in a project because of serious financial problems or the student who used some of the money collected in class for a gift for a student who broke his leg. In both of these cases, the counselor used creative thinking based on creative mental processes, without upsetting the students in front of their peers [27].

The typology used in this research to distinguish between two conflicting pedagogical approaches (open, democratic approach versus a traditional conservative approach) presents the broadest ways of conceptualization in dealing with developments and changes in the field of education and includes three pedagogical approaches described above (behaviorist, constructivist, and cognitive). It is important to present these three approaches on a continuum—behaviorist, cognitive, and constructivist—when the focus changes along the continuum from passive transfer of facts and routine to active processing of ideas and problem solving. The principles of the constructivist approach and the cognitive approach are consistent with the open, democratic approach, and the principles of the behaviorist approach are consistent with the traditional, conservative approach [8, 28, 29].

The question is asked as to which of the pedagogical approaches to handling social and moral dilemmas are more effective. The educational process is dynamic and is influenced by many factors. It is a process of continuous change. One pedagogical approach is likely to be more effective for a new learner who encounters a complex body of knowledge for the first time, but not effective or more challenging for a learner who knows the content already. Furthermore, teaching facts is different from acquiring concepts or solving problems.

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12. Limitations of the current research and suggestions for future studies

This study used qualitative methods of research. The conclusions, therefore, are dependent on and based on subjective interpretation, which is the essence of this qualitative approach. Inclusion, validity, and reliability that serve as indicators of research quality are significant in qualitative research only in relation to the researcher's stated perspective [17].

In the present study, participants chose to reveal experiences and particular positions, and it is possible that there are other perspectives. Additionally, the researchers chose to focus on a particular type of analysis, and there may very well be other perspectives.

Future studies should use a quantitative approach to look at similar problems and should expand the population studied to confirm the link between methods of handling social and moral dilemmas with personal and professional characteristics of school counselors.

13. Recommendations and pedagogical implications

Based on the knowledge that we have, we can develop intervention programs that lead to the development of more effective ways of handling these dilemmas. We will be able to improve the training of school counselors and to expose them to a range of social and moral dilemmas that they are likely to experience in their professional life in schools. In the framework of their training, participants will be able to reconsider their earlier opinions through exposure to newer approaches and to develop new ideas for solving complex problems.

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