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## ***Career counselling in primary schools. The project of improving school counselling carried out by the Imago Foundation. August-December 2020***

The Imago Foundation is an organization operating since 2009, developing a network of partnerships with representatives of the local community, public administration institutions, non-governmental institutions, enterprises and research centres. The Foundation pursues projects focused on local development, job market, professional and social activation, primarily in the areas of: pro-employment services, social services (support for people with disabilities and their careers), staff development in job market institutions, education, social assistance and NGOs representing various sectors of the economy, as well as transnational cooperation and innovation. It finances projects thanks to the acquisition of national and EU grants, offering paid services, obtaining donations, as well as involving volunteers and friends. One of them was the project *Career counselling in primary schools* co-financed by the European Social Fund. The assumptions of the project, which was carried out by the Imago Foundation for the Educational Research Institute in Warsaw in August-December 2020, were inspired by an action research approach that combines diagnostic elements with research intervention. Its main goal was to improve the quality of counselling activities by analysing the support, organized by the Foundation, for 6 teachers from selected schools in Poland, who, in addition to the subject taught, run career counselling classes in the seventh and eighth grades. These were employees of 6 primary schools who met the qualification criteria (they were primary subject teachers in a given school; they were appointed to run career counselling classes in the 2019/2020 school year; they were qualified to hold the position of a teacher acting as a career counsellor or were in the process of obtaining such qualifications) and expressed their willingness to participate in research activities. Schools are located in 3 voivodeships: Silesian, Opole and Lower Silesian (2 schools from a large city, 2 schools from a medium-sized town and 2 schools from villages, with at least two divisions of grades 7 and 8).

The first model career counselling lessons were conducted by an external trainer, directed to the school by the Imago Foundation, and assisted by a teacher who

was the school counsellor. The next stage was the independent running of similar lessons-workshops by the teacher who critically reflected on the previously observed activities in the parallel class. The program of activities included 2 thematic blocks entitled: "own resources" and "job market" (classes in each block were scheduled for three 45 minutes' periods). In addition, students were invited to volunteer for "master practice", held between blocks of classes and consisting in the individual search for additional information in their social environment by involving significant others in the process of self-discovery and creating local job market maps. Participation in the classes was to strengthen self-reflection, creativity and responsibility of both the teachers and the students in an atmosphere of dialogue, respect, cooperation and mutual learning. As part of the project, the *Career Scenarios* – prepared by Dr. Anna Górka (consulted with the project team) with a view to conducting workshops with seventh and eighth grade students – were tested. Bearing in mind a multidimensional, holistic and contextual approach adopted in counselling, where the counsellor is a companion, and the student is an expert in his/her life and the author of his/her own career path, the workshop leaders tested a new counselling tool and encouraged students, as young experts, to engage and share feedback.

Thus, teachers-counsellors, as reflective researchers of their own practice, took steps to change and develop career counselling in schools. The diagnostic tools used in the project (tele-IDI interviews with school counsellors and an evaluation questionnaire for students – carried out after each model and independent classes) allowed for a detailed, qualitative assessment of the concept of the *Career Scenarios* as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the classes. The conclusions from the research are presented in greater detail in the summary report and are accompanied by quotes from the interviews, thanks to which the description of this unique experiment, carried out from the emic perspective, provides an in-depth view of the counselling community.

A very general assessment of the project results leads to the conclusion that a deep transformation of school counselling is needed, and the work in the supporting model and the constructivist approach to counselling may be the keys to the counselling of the future – open to wise accompaniment and strengthening soft skills, with a space for self-reflection, personal development, relationship building, cooperation, as well as conscious designing of career / life path. This means the necessity to strengthen the importance of counselling by, inter alia, increasing the number of school counselling hours or a modern education and training policy for counsellors. In their opinion, the *Career Scenarios* constitute a creative, substantial proposal of workshop activities, supporting pro-quality changes in counselling and a tool that inspires self-knowledge.

Detailed conclusions are presented in the summary report, which describes the course of research and the outcomes of the classes, as well as contains implementation recommendations regarding the tested tools and counselling exercises typical

for the supporting model of educational and vocational counselling in schools. The final report also presents an analysis of the counsellors' needs and outlines the competence profile of a career counsellor. It also discusses the issues of digital group counselling and reveals the challenges of remote education, which under the pressure of the epidemiological situation, forced the adaptation of the methods and tools of remote work and opened up new questions on how to build relationships and engage online learners. The report will be published at the beginning of January 2021 at [www.ibe.edu.pl](http://www.ibe.edu.pl) and [www.fundacjaimago.pl](http://www.fundacjaimago.pl). We invite teachers to creatively use the lesson scenarios tested during the project.

*Translated by Anna Ewa Górka*