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The 32nd Training Conference of the Association of School and Vocational Counsellors and Professional Advisors of the Republic of Poland

***Together We Can Do More: Networks in Counselling* Warsaw, 23–24 September 2022**

The 32nd Training Conference of the Association of School and Vocational Counsellors of the Republic of Poland (SDSiZ RP) titled *Together We Can Do More: Networks in Counselling* was held in Warsaw in September 2022. As usual, the conference consisted of two parts; the first part presented the current activities of the Association, and the second part featured presentations and workshops. Both parts were important for counsellors. The first part showed not only the activities undertaken by the Board of the SDSiZ RP, but also the grassroots actions it initiated, for example, the National Careers Week. Held for the fourteenth time, the latter sees counsellors across Poland organise various projects that promote educational and career counselling among children, adolescents and adults. Traditionally, prizes were awarded to the winners and distinguished institutions, including the winners of the “Niebanalnie o doradztwie 2022” competition. This year, counsellors had an opportunity to visit the Warsaw Centre for Educational and Social Innovation, a local government teacher training facility. Beata Grzelak, head of the Centre for the Development of Vocational Counselling, showed the guests around the facility and talked about its main goals, especially those relating to counselling practice.

The second part of the conference, which included plenary addresses and workshops, focused on the themes selected on the basis of the needs reported by counsellors. The thematic foci comprised access to up-to-date knowledge and solutions useful in the counselling work in today’s complex reality, characterised by

high volatility, fragility, non-linearity, often incomprehensible connections between events and the emergence of new phenomena (such as artificial intelligence) in our lives. These needs were addressed in talks and through workshops, where the participants could share good practices and solutions underpinned by methods and techniques which were effective in counselling. The novelty was showing the real power of networking among professional counsellors, which was the leitmotif of the conference as a whole, ultimately fostering a new quality in the mutual relationships within our community and improving our professional ethos.

The participants could listen to the presentation by Dr Ewa Dębska, Marta Koch-Kozioł, Dr Monika Mazur-Mitrowska and Dr Mirosław Żurek, who talked about the results of a pilot study on the training needs reported by professional counsellors in their respondent sample and assessed the implementation of professional counselling in schools and educational institutions.

The next theme taken up by the speakers was the importance of networking. Agnieszka Dobbek-Szuta argued that it was worthwhile to establish development groups for professionals. She shared her experience from running the Creative Career Counsellors network, which already has more than 1,000 members. The activities of this group could be explored during a workshop conducted by Ewa Rostańska-Ciach and Iwona Śródka, who continued the theme of networking, showing its benefits from the school perspective, as exemplified in collaborations of students, parents, graduates, other educational institutions and entrepreneurs from specific industries.

School-related themes were also brought up by methodology advisors Urszula Zblewska and Maria Eiselt, who showed how vocational counselling could be introduced in history and civics classrooms. They also discussed the goals of the activities and directions of development of the Sopot Vocational Counselling Network, assembling advisors eager to share knowledge and experience. The main principles of this network are: interdisciplinary cooperation, networking and openness to all individuals and organisations committed to the development of professional counselling. Zblewska and Eiselt presented the Sopot Model of career counselling, known as *Przystanek Praca*. It is an educational service which is now in the testing phase and is planned to be implemented in schools in Sopot.

Marta Wrzosek and Andrzej Pieńkowski from Katalyst Education talked about initiating change in education, based on the conclusions from meetings of the representatives of educational institutions, local governments, businesses and NGOs. Wrzosek and Pieńkowski depicted the school as a local hub of career counselling in line with PowerED recommendations. They focused on how the curriculum and teaching methods could be adapted to the requirements of the modern world. They also presented a publication on the importance of vocational counselling in ensuring equal educational opportunity, which contained recommendations for school heads, local governments, the private sector and non-governmental actors.

Cooperation was also addressed by Katarzyna Abramowicz and Agata Szmaja, who described the Gdynia Counselling Network, where relationships are based on information and cooperation rather than on hierarchy and subordination. The audience were invited to join the network, which is a space where participants can benefit from substantive and methodological support and receive individualised assistance. During the workshop, the presenters introduced the participants to the world of positive psychology. They argued that words shaped reality and that, therefore, it was necessary to turn obligation into willingness. Such a change in beliefs would lead to empowerment, the sense of agency and readiness to take responsibility for one's actions; it would also opening a space for talking about motivation. They proposed an exercise in which the counsellors followed the 'direction towards solutions' and identified external and internal obstacles hindering the achievement of their goal.

Anna Skrzydłowska talked about the projects launched by the Jaworzno Forum for Professional Counselling, such as the National Careers Week, brochures for eight-graders and their parents, the Report on the Educational and Professional Preferences of Eight-Graders Students at Jaworzno Elementary Schools, District Labour Office's job offers for school graduates, the Jaworzno Entrepreneurship Marathon, competitions for students and two seminars: The Career Ladder and The Career Primer. Skrzydłowska argued that today career planning should be supported by four pillars: 1) knowledge of one's own resources; 2) knowledge of the world of work, the labour market and the education market; 3) lifelong learning; and 4) children's and young adults' development planning and informed and autonomous educational and career decision-making. Relevant in this context are competencies such as construction of alternative career plans, change-management and reflexivity, which should be instilled and developed from an early age.

Magdalena Paluch, who talked about taking developmental measures in an unpredictable and rapidly changing world, invited everyone to take part in exercises designed to help people develop talents and realise their dreams.

Filip Tomaszewski a competence model called the *Competence Game*, consisting of 17 competencies in 5 areas: definition and achievement of goals, systems thinking, openness to customers, taking responsibility and cooperation in organisations. The *Competence Game* is an online recruitment tool through which the employers can learn about the actual competencies of candidates who apply for jobs in their organisations. Tomaszewski and Tobiasz Naryniecki presented the practical application of this tool in their workshop. The participants took part in the game in groups, and then the presenters discussed in detail the reports that the employer would receive after each game. Subsequently, the participants discussed how knowledge about competencies could be used in their work.

Bogna Frąszczak and Natalia Kaszkowiak talked about the Centre for Vocational Counselling for the Youth in Poznań. They outlined the activities of their institution, the projects carried out there and the cooperating institutions. In this context,

they shared their experience in working with students considering the choice of secondary school. In their view, the key factors in this situation are: awareness of one's own values, personality type and teenagers' ability to develop self-esteem based on the knowledge of their own strengths. Fąszczak and Kaszkowiak also mentioned collecting information about occupations, based on what could be known rather than, as they emphasised, on what one imagined about a particular occupation. They also said that when building strategies for success, they often invited graduates of secondary schools in the Poznan municipality to talk with younger students. In conclusion, they stated that a person's self-awareness was the key to development.

The impact of modern technologies on the labour market was examined by Magdalena Kamieniecka from the Institute of Educational Research. Rather than speculating whether chatbots would replace humans in the near future, she focused on *when* that would happen. She pointed out that digital technologies could be found in almost every area of individuals' lives. She gave examples of artificial intelligence taking over jobs done by humans, not only blue-collar jobs, but also white-collar ones. She presented a simulation of a job interview involving artificial intelligence. She argued that it made sense to prepare for it, because a breakthrough in technology was looming and artificial intelligence was soon going to be used in many services, beyond transportation, sales, HR, insurance, finance and development services. Dr Kamila Pawłowska and Irmina Sokulska talked about the theoretical assumptions and practical uses of the Integrated Register of Qualifications across people's lifespan and what that entailed for the development of careers counsellors' competencies.

Both plenary talks and workshops referred to current (existing) and future (anticipated) situations. The crucial message of the conference concerned the vital need for support networks and the urgency of developing competencies for the future and the present in a world of already existing and newly emerging technologies. But this is actually a preview of the next year's 33th SDSiZ RP Training Conference.

Translated by Małgorzata Matysik