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**The Thyme and the Teacher
or Stereotypes, Prejudices and Discrimination in the Education System**

‘Prejudices are what the fool calls mind’ Voltaire

Every person in his life has been influenced by various stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination, willingly or unwillingly. Sometimes we even build our own on the basis of personal experience. But of course nothing is constant. Over time, some stereotypes disappear, others change from one extreme to another, and others emerge according to new conditions and lifestyles. We must not forget the fact we live in a global world and through the Internet we have information that expands our worldview. This helps not only shortening the distance between us, but also to radically change our way of thinking and perceiving the world.

The Thyme/Thymus (from Greek) it means courage, strength, thought. That’s why I believe that it symbolizes the profession of the teacher. You must have the courage to choose it, the strength to endure it, to apply it with thought and to love it from the heart. Just as thyme grows in sandy and dry soils, teachers work in difficult conditions. Just as the thyme manages to survive and adapt to different altitude, teachers must be flexible and adaptable to society's ever-changing requirements and attitudes towards them.

Thyme has a fabulous fragrance and phenomenal properties. And teachers are expected to be phenomenal. We have to deal with all kinds of challenges - being psychologists, mediators, like parents in school, etc. and we finally have time to be teachers.

Thyme is also an important source of nectar for bees. And teachers are an important source of knowledge for students. The question is who notices this humble plant? Respectively, are teachers' professionalism and contribution to society evaluated through the performances and achievements of their students?

What are the stereotypes and prejudices about teachers and their profession today? What do (thyme) teachers have to overcome to continue spreading this fabulous fragrance, the essence of their work, love and dedication?

Stereotypes and prejudices should not limit us. If, instead of judging, we simply observe the world around us, we can limit them. Although they help our brain organize information, they are not always true. If we take a closer look at certain groups and individuals, we will find many differences between reality and stereotype.

From my personal life experience and professional career as a teacher, I have been the subject of many clichés, stereotypes and prejudices on the part of society. For 22 years in the education system I witnessed a change in the value system of students and society as a whole, which led to a change in the stereotype of this profession.

In the Revival era there was the following sentence "The most important people in the village are the priest, the teacher and the mayor." During socialism, the motto was "If you can't become a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer, at least become a teacher." Today, public attitudes are "What do teachers do - not only do they work until noon, they rest all summer and want an increase in salaries." Oh times, oh tempers!

This clearly speaks to the devaluation of the teaching profession in society. But no one realizes that this is a profession with purely mental, not physical labor. For sleepless nights spent preparing lessons and checking tests. For the huge amount of paperwork from which teachers can't do their routine. For the intervention of parents and various institutions in the learning process. And last but not least, the delegated budgets, which have ruined the quality of education and made teachers' work meaningless.

Another prejudice I have personally experienced is that rural teachers work less and of lower quality than urban teachers. First of all, I can say this is just the opposite. Due to the deteriorating economic situation in Bulgaria, especially in rural areas, many parents are forced to leave their children in the care of their grandparents and go to work abroad. This has a detrimental effect on the learning process. These elderly people are often unable to help their grandchildren. Their only concern is to keep them alive and healthy. Many of the children are bilingual and enter the first grade with difficulty speaking Bulgarian. Imagine the effort it takes for a primary school teacher to educate these children. While in big cities with a predominantly younger population

rather than an aging one, the situation is radically different. There are many more perspectives and activities for children. They enter the first grade already prepared. There is no place to compare how to work with urban and rural children. This also leads to the stereotype that urban children are smarter. The truth is that they have more opportunities and they put less effort in the learning process.

This, in turn, leads to another prejudice in society. Teachers at school do not do their job effectively and if you want your children to know, they have to go to language schools and private lessons. What is really happening? Because the parents pay for it, the children take this extra learning very seriously, because every minute is money. He takes the same material presented at school not seriously. Nevertheless many students going to language schools and private lessons fail because their parents force them but they don't want to learn. At the same time, there are students who rank for Olympiads and competitions without attending additional lessons. And the biggest paradox is that the teacher at the language schools and private lessons is the same teacher who teaches at the school. Therefore, the question is not how the work is done, but what is the attitude and understanding of society. In big cities, this is more of a fashion than a necessity.

Another stereotype, I would even say discrimination, is that this is a female profession and not for men. On the contrary. I have colleagues who are primary teachers, which is very rare, especially for young students. The effort a man spends on discipline is much less than it takes a woman. The voice itself, body posture and masculine appearance are advantages that women do not have physically. Moreover, with today's freedom given to students, the Ministry of Education and Science is even developing programs aimed at increasing the number of men in the system.

Another auto stereotype that I encountered in my first year as a teacher was that 'Young teachers know nothing and can do nothing.' The truth is that 22 years ago there were no teacher mentors who were obliged to provide methodological support to new teachers. Only if one of the 'Old Teachers' shows mercy to introduce you to a profession, you will be lucky to find your way quickly. They themselves said - you have to work for at least three years to understand what you really have to do. Now, however, the stereotype has changed completely. 'Old teachers' face great difficulties with digitalization in education. This is not their comfortable world with piece of chalk, sponge and paper diary. Some of them cannot adapt, do not withstand the attitude of

students and parents, and leave the system. Their working methods are inapplicable in the new conditions and often ask for help the 'Young Teachers'. This lack of continuity and unnecessary competition to satisfy the ego unfortunately still exists in teachers' circles.

From the standpoint of time and my experience in retrospect, I can write many more things, but all this causes me a lot of pain. I love my profession, although you have to have a Renaissance spirit to survive at this stage. And yet some students and parents appreciate the teaching effort. There is still gratitude and appreciation, which fills us with positivism and hope for the future. After all, this is the profession to start with all other professions. And instead of lightly condemning the teachers, let's think - what would we do without them!?!