

IVA ČERVENKOVÁ
ORCID: 0000-0002-5879-7345
University of Ostrava
ALENA VALIŠOVÁ
ORCID: 0000-0002-7320-750X
University of Ostrava
MAREK VÁCLAVÍK
ORCID: 0000-0002-9478-8841
University of Ostrava



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THE MOST COMMON MYTHS ABOUT THE IDEAL TEACHER – PREJUDICES AND REALITY

INTRODUCTION

No one is so good that they cannot be bad, and no one is so bad that they cannot be good (F.M. Dostoevsky).

What is and is not a myth? The term “myth” is mostly used in the context involving something traditional, maintained over time, something that helps to transmit values and maintain connections – but also something that is easily mistaken, that comes in where clear arguments run out, and where it is difficult to define exact rules or attributes of the role, possibly of its effective fulfilment. Narration and fiction prevail in it, objective and subjective, real and fictitious, reality and ideal often merge in it. It is interesting that certain professions, or rather ideas about them, are a remarkably frequent source of fiercely transmitted myths. Most often, these are the professions that each of us repeatedly encounters throughout the course of our lives. The professions of doctors and teachers, as well as other so-called helping professions, are especially often the “victims” of similar considerations. But what is particularly surprising is that, in addition to lay people, the professional public often “suffers” from a similar prejudice. Therefore, the current myths associated with the teaching profession have been

reflected herein, but in a more general or more specific form. The profession is all the more treacherous because it defies current efforts for a clear and simplistic quantitative evaluation of performance in the sense of good – better – the best.

THE SOCIAL ROLE OF A TEACHER, AND EXPECTED BEHAVIOUR IN DIFFERENT GROUPS

One of the variables that, to a large extent, undoubtedly influences the quality of the educational process is the *teacher's personality* – along with variables related to the pupils themselves, and the often diversified influences of the surrounding environment. *Even the view of the role of the teacher should not be based on false assumptions and distorted ideas* – the possibilities and scope of the teacher's influence on the pupil in many ways are limited, to a certain extent. From the point of view of the interaction model and the specificity of social roles (teachers and pupils, society and school, family and school, the principal and teachers, parents and children, teachers and their colleagues), the *importance of expected behaviour and situational behaviour* is often reflected in these relationships. We believe that *there is no unified and universal conception of the teacher's social role, as different groups* (parents, pupils, school management and administration, the public, the community) *expect different behaviour from the teacher* (the effort to fulfil or not fulfil these expectations can lead to role conflicts). By the way – the social role of a teacher is difficult *to describe without taking account of the role of the pupil*, as well as *the behaviour of both role holders*. And in the mentioned context, *the importance of the wider socio-cultural environment* is not considered in details – even though we are aware of the importance of this variable.

Lack of discipline, not always the most effective management of teaching, a difficulty in managing the classroom climate, the disruptive behaviour of pupils – these are facts that today, not only educators and pedagogues, are increasingly worrying about. Some innovators and radical reformers like to “ventilate the musty premises of the school” – however, they do not always respect the essential contexts, historical, social, and social and cultural contexts, and in a more concrete form, the material, physical, or psychological limits of their decisions, which at first glance are effective, and stem from the needs of practice. Young people today, for example, increasingly lose the solid home background. There are also increasing cases of seventeen-year-old, or slightly older, singles who leave the family and live outside it; many feel overloaded by the gaudy consumer society of pleasure and entertainment. On the one hand, they experience feelings of loneliness, and on the other, they behave egocentrically and antisocially. They clearly show their frustration at school. Constantly with headphones, mobile phones and tablets under the desks, and cigarettes in their mouths, they are less and less able to concentrate for longer periods of time. Many are used to constant stimulation of the senses; they require constant

changes and movement. In professional circles, there is a debate of increasing aggression in schools, the brutalization of relationships in class communities; teachers complain that the differences between the behaviour of pupils during breaks and during lessons are gradually disappearing. Even though many aspiring teachers choose this profession with enthusiasm and a desire to learn, to educate themselves and others, to work with children and young people, some leave education, and the reason is not always only the unsatisfactory financial evaluation of teaching work. These teachers tend to perceive children as inattentive, unmotivated, rude, arrogant, and disruptive. Constant fights with unruly pupils, a diligent effort to gain authority in the classroom and to create at least some semblance of order exhaust the teacher in the long term and permanently.

One of the demands placed on the teaching profession is *responsibility*. Teachers take it upon themselves, and it is also generally attributed to this profession. However, if responsibility is to have meaning, a teacher must ask himself/herself *what, and to whom, he/she is responsible – pupils, parents, school management, state authorities, the municipality...? What about self-responsibility?* In reality, however, teachers often cannot fulfil this responsibility for the pupils' lives, because what happens to a human being is not determined only by the school (this fact, among other things, results from a simple reflection on the teacher's time possibilities to directly influence the pupil). It is the inner uncertainty and indeterminacy of the results of the teacher's influence on the pupil that can sometimes lead to feelings of uselessness or emptiness in the teaching profession. *Awareness of one's own possibilities and limits of influence on the development of a young person's personality is necessary for the teacher* if he/she wants to avoid these negative feelings – even if he/she will probably never succeed (especially in cases of “wasted talents” or “wasted lives” of those about which he/she felt certain aspirations).

Another media-supported image of the possibilities of a teacher's influence on individuals follows from *the aforementioned myth about teacher's responsibility. Public formal complaints of the school are most often heard in cases connected with social and pathological manifestations of youth behaviour.* Currently, most educators already feel that the time has come to *move from didactic and scientific problems to questions of “motivation for self-education”.* In practice, however, this means studying a number of disciplines related to the genesis of socially undesirable phenomena – and also working on oneself.

Even if the teacher manages all of this in practice, there is one more myth, not only of the school, but of people in general – *the myth of interpersonal communication.* If teachers are believed to be equipped with the information they pass on to their pupils, it is necessary to realize at the same time that *this information does not only have an objective existence, but also has subjective connotations.* Teachers, and not only them, increasingly realize that pupils are not “vessels” into which information is transferred – they actually only offer pupils

certain “*solution options*” and their own “*selection*” or “*processing of what is offered*” remains largely up to the pupils themselves. Awareness of the limits of these basic influencing possibilities is necessary for teachers, with regard to the reflection of their educational activities, for setting realistic goals, and for reducing the likelihood of resignation in the field of pedagogical work.

CONTEMPORARY MYTHS ABOUT IDEAL TEACHERS

An attempt will be made to mention at least some of the *myths of the ideal teacher, formulate their essence, and explain their internal paradoxes*. Some prejudices are *demonized more by the lay public, others by colleagues from the “field”*.

- *Myth number one*: An ideal teacher can work with any number of children in a classroom. Do you agree? What about knowledge, for example, about the dynamics of small and large groups, about the problems of limited contact time, about the reduced possibility of individual work, about the economic perspective of “as many people as possible” versus “quality”? It is believed that this myth is relevant, among other things, with regard to specialized classes, teaching foreign languages, or working in remedial classes. What do you say to the consideration that, for example, a classroom of fifteen pupils (at least in the first grade) and with a capable teacher would not need new textbooks every now and then, investments in special equipment, and could better integrate certain groups of children?
- *Myth number two*: An ideal teacher has no problems in the classroom. Analogously, the myth can also be extended to senior staff, i.e. the ideal headmaster has no problems in his/her school. However, the non-existence of problems often means a lack of trust in the authority, which should solve them and not hide, ignore, or reject them, due to a number of reasons. What attitude would you take as a parent to a school that is presented as completely problem-free? In the position of parents, we can rather trust a school that we know has, for example, bullying or problems with drugs (see statistics), but that these problems are also discussed and solved together.
- *Myth number three*: An ideal teacher is completely impartial and objective. Whether we like it or not, even teachers are only human, and react to people in a certain way. They legitimately like some more and others less, but as professionals, they realise this, and correct it to some extent. Neither a parent to their own children nor a life partner can be completely objective and impartial!
- *Myth number four*: An ideal teacher manages everything perfectly – including himself/herself (he/she is active, flexible, adaptable to people and innovations in the field, tireless, 100% balanced). In this way, the “perfect” teacher also handicaps the self-concept model for the pupils. If I outwardly manage my mistakes, fatigue, and moods, I teach others to do the same.

As a result of social pressure for “perfection”, feelings of failure may ultimately occur more often in real-life situations that understandably fall short of these requirements.

- *Myth number five*: An ideal teacher is born, not made. So either I am a teacher “in the true sense of the word”, or I am not; working on myself or thinking about some personal development is not relevant, and there is no need to invest in this area. At most, courses focused on expertise are recognized – the others are self-explanatory. As a counter-statement, we want to state that maturing and searching is also part of the model that the teacher offers to his/her pupils.
- *Myth number six*: Being a teacher is a calling, not just a job. So, the desire and willingness to make a living by teaching is pointless; our conscience and pedagogical enthusiasm are strong, there are no cost inputs, everything is balanced by dedication to the profession. We think that few teachers desire millions – by the way, such wealth will not “threaten” him/her in education – but almost everyone desires at least an average standard of living. And we believe that he/she has a legitimate right to it, from the point of view of the pressure and difficulty of the teaching profession.

Of course, myths about teachers are related to, among other things, whether we “measure” or prefer material performance or interpersonal relationships in the classroom. *The problem often lies in overly crude, mostly dichotomous, classifications* (manipulative pedagogy versus communicative pedagogy, authoritarian versus liberal educational style, co-operation versus competitiveness, good versus bad teachers, etc.). Attempts to establish generalized, one-sided, and simplified dimensions in the behaviour of teachers and pupils, adults and children, are found incorrect and distorting. A contraindication to our basic conception of the myth of an ideal teacher is that there is no absolutely “correct” or “universal” behaviour for a particular situation. Even in pedagogical interaction, there is only behaviour that is more or less effective in relation to the goals that we consciously or unconsciously formulate for ourselves, or that are presented to us, and the fulfilment of which is expected of us. *The school as an institution, the school management, and the team of educators can develop a lot of positive things in the youth, but they cannot guarantee one thing – replacement of the family and the influence of society.*

WHAT CAN WE SAY IN THE CONCLUSION?

In order to not be too pessimistic – with a number of teachers, even today, pupils co-operate and devote themselves to learning with minimal disruptions and a negligible number of disciplinary offences. Whether a teacher is enriched by his/her profession or, on the contrary, depressed by the sense of futility of “tilting at windmills” depends a lot on the skill with which he/she uses proven classroom management strategies. Recommended and proven procedures, together

with an individual concept of teaching, help teachers to successfully manage their basic duties, and to create a stimulating and developing learning and educational environment for pupils, which supports the achievement of good results, and in which pupils are not disturbed and distracted, nor is their safety threatened. It is emphasized that nonsensical myths about teachers should be overcome, and that a teacher should be understood as a professional, but also as an ordinary person – with all his/her joys, trials and tribulations, expectations, losses, successes, and perspectives. We do not want to make definitive judgments and unequivocally answer a host of questionnaires. On the contrary – our aim is to inspire the search for experience, energy, and the potential to maintain the teacher's mental balance – such important factors for his/her personal and professional life satisfaction.

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Annotation:

The professionally popular article reflects on the issue of prejudice in general. However, it analyzes the most common myths related to the teaching profession

in more detail. It points to the danger of myths in the context of current efforts for a clear and often simplistic quantitative evaluation of professional performance in the sense of good – better – the best.

The text is based on the content analysis of publications and strategic educational documents.

Keywords: The teacher as a professional, myth, prejudice, ideal teacher, school as an institution, pupil, parent, values, discipline, motivation, objectivity, subjectivity, social pressure.