

Outlining a new agenda for teacher training

Beyond training and functionality



by Antonio Bernal Guerrero

When we limit our reflection to the school system, there will be little disagreement if I assert that the quality of education is linked to the help we offer students for their full development. This statement, repeated so often and in so many ways over time, is often nothing more than a cliché among the myriad commonplaces in which our existence unfolds. If you think about it, it is nothing more than an abstraction. In reality, it is all about helping the education of each student, a unique being, someone unrepeatable who is not mass-produced. Circumstances change, obviously, and we are going through times of

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enormous uncertainty. Yet there is an equally latent truth: each person claims recognition of his or her dignity, claims their place in the world, whether they know it or not. We cannot approach this noble goal if we give up the search for meaning, the attainment of knowledge that can lead to wisdom. Avoiding the limitations of functionality means opening up to a broader, more substantive and deeper learning agenda.

I cannot hide my discouragement when I read, hear or see, more often than I wish, opinions that instrumentalise education for different purposes, turning it into a multicoloured dance of small miseries; or that propose partial or simple solutions to the problem of educational quality; or that allow themselves to be carried away by a nostalgic idealisation of the past; or even worse, that draw apocalyptic scenarios where teachers and schools will be superfluous. If we have learned anything in recent decades, it is that analysing and understanding education



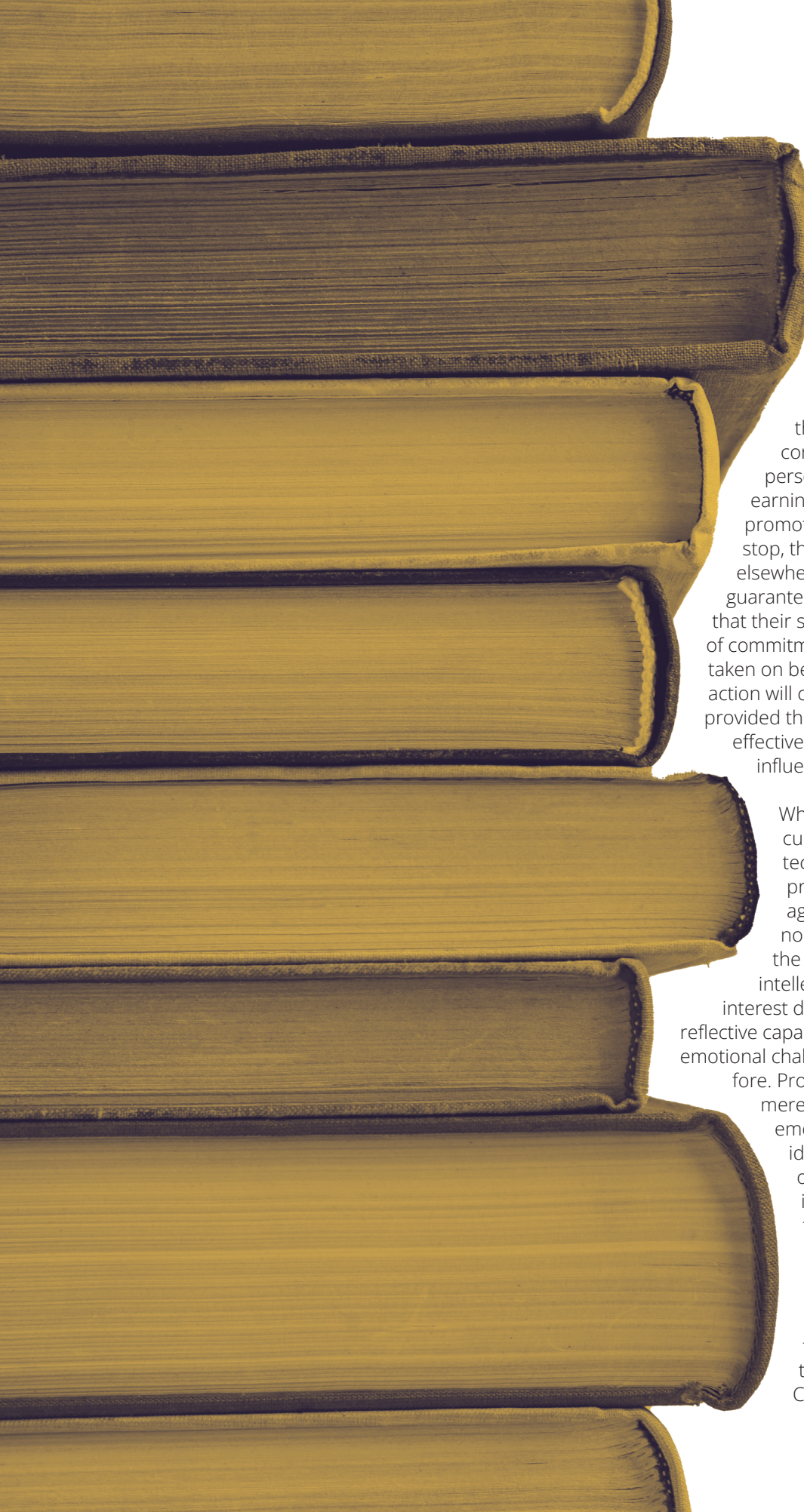
Analysing and understanding education is a very complex undertaking. It cannot be remedied with short-term solutions

is a very complex undertaking. It cannot be remedied with overly simple ideological approaches or short-term solutions (those hasty solutions often adopted by the latest political agenda). Here, we intend to not outline this complexity but to assert that the problem of educational quality cannot be solved simply by common sense, by providing sound reasons. Today, this problem requires a renewed agenda that reassesses education and raises its status in society. And the most significant agents of change in it are teachers and researchers. Not only does

teaching change and fill one's own life, it also changes others' lives. Referring to the letter Albert Camus sent to his beloved childhood teacher in Algiers, Germain Louis, practically one month after receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, is paradigmatic.¹

A great deal of research has shown the importance of teachers in students' education. The best learning opportunities certainly depend on which teachers are responsible for providing them. And we thus enter the fraught terrain of teacher training. We should not approach it as if the world had not been transformed and as if the research performed to date has taught us nothing.

George Steiner used to say that there is no craft more privileged than teaching, that the "libido sciendi" is engraved in the best men and women: "To awaken in another human being powers, dreams beyond one's own; to induce in others a love for that which one loves; to



make of one's inward present their future; that is a threefold adventure like no other".² This passionate commitment through which you perceive that your work surpasses you, that it contributes to the common good, that it gives you fulfilment, is nothing other than a "vocation". Some teachers feel this vocation. However, not all do. There are those who consider teaching merely a "job", a way of earning a living. And, continuing with the third "work orientation" within the types pointed out by Seligman,³ others consider it a "career", which has a deeper personal implication, since in addition to earning a salary they are also satisfied through promotion. However, when the promotions stop, they look for compensation and meaning elsewhere. Although being either type does not guarantee that a teacher is better,⁴ we can assume that their sense of professional identity and level of commitment will differ in each.⁵ All the decisions taken on behalf of a commitment to educational action will contribute to improving educational quality provided they imply a solid sense of moral purpose, effectiveness and a capacity for initiative and influence.

What to do in the midst of socially and culturally changing contexts, in the face of technological challenges, in the face of the pressures of an increasingly "performative" agenda? The profiles of the past are no longer useful. Obviously, training in the curricular fields is still required, but intellectual challenges are gaining renewed interest due to the need to cultivate a critical sense, reflective capacity and creative thinking. Relational and emotional challenges are particularly coming to the fore. Professional identity cannot be described as merely a rational process but is also inevitably emotional.⁶ In this sense, professional identities are subject to the same processes of change and resistance as personal identities, which means considering the teacher a person, not an employee. Likewise, as many studies have shown, the teacher's connections with other teachers and with the organisational culture, with the institutional ethos, favour the individual and collective well-being that has a positive impact on students. Continuing to view teacher training as a

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linear continuum is simplistic and impractical.

Becoming aware of what teaching entails means accepting that one is constantly having a singular, unrepeatable experience. Even if we pursue it, teaching excellence is never achieved. We live in a process of permanent rediscovery about who we are and what influence we have through continuous study and reflection on what education and the teaching profession themselves consist of and how they develop, which is not restricted to merely instructional processes. The richness and vigour of our reflection should enlighten teacher training, especially focused on a willingness and on all the qualities that invite us to enthusiastically offer our very best.

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References

- ¹ "...I have just been given far too great an honour, one I neither sought nor solicited. But when I heard the news, my first thought, after my mother, was of you. Without you, without the affectionate hand you extended to the small poor child that I was, without your teaching and example, none of all this would have happened" (p. 53). Cfr: Camus, A. (2022). "Cartas a mi maestro". Barcelona: Editorial Platform.
- ² Steiner, G. (2016). "Lecciones de los maestros". Madrid: Siruela, p. 173.
- ³ Seligman, M.E.P. (2003). "La auténtica felicidad". Barcelona: Ediciones B.
- ⁴ Teacher hiring is an unresolved issue. It has been debated and different proposals have been made. One possible way to strengthen the teaching profession is to improve initial hiring. In this sense, for example, a formula analogous to the MIR for the specialised medical profession has been proposed for secondary school teachers. Whether this or another formula is used, there is a need to improve teacher hiring (see: F.L. Rupérez (2014). "Fortalecer la profesión docente". Madrid: Narcea). Nevertheless, the social recognition of teachers and the improvement of working and organisational conditions are necessary but insufficient.
- ⁵ Day, C. (2014). "Pasión por enseñar. La identidad personal y profesional del docente y sus valores". Madrid: Narcea (5th ed.)
- ⁶ Teaching is a very complex process that requires intellectual and emotional energy. Passionate communication of knowledge is the best antidote to any attempt to supplant the teacher. On the other hand, the diversity of students and training contexts, in increasing progression, require a huge emotional effort.