

# The price to pay for being an educator today

## A profession for long-distance runners



by Javier Bahón Gómez

**H**ow should someone be trained to practise one of the most complex professions in the world? Who would be capable of earning sufficient qualifications, in addition to technical skills (hard skills) in pedagogy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, didactics in different fields, emotional intelligence, rigorous thinking, cooperative learning, effective communication, digital competencies, special educational needs, social skills, competency design and everything else that could be added?

The problem is that nothing on this list is optional. It encompasses everything a teacher has to have in their toolkit in order to educate in the classroom and not die trying. I have intentionally not listed the soft skills, and after adding them we can imagine a superhero loaded with “talent” and the right “temperament”. Without lifelong learning, the development of these qualifications would be unthinkable. However, every moment must be taken advantage of because time flies, and so does the evolution of the world in which our students have to develop. So, with no time to lose, we need teachers who were born with genetics that enhance some of these essential qualities. Teachers need to be teachers by vocation; this

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is a bad job for people who say, “Well, since I don't know what to do, I guess I'll become a teacher”. We need their emotional balance to be bombproof and their virtues to include the desire to serve others.

If their educational and service vocation and emotional management fail, it is only a matter of time before they feel burned out and disillusioned, and what is worse, before they start having a negative effect on colleagues and students. If, however, they possess these qualities, the next challenge will be their pre-service training. To put it bluntly, many universities offer a sadly deficient teaching degree. They show signs of stagnation in their teaching and, paradoxically, even in the methods they use to teach future teachers. Thus, it is up to schools themselves to provide good continuous learning, and then each professional has to contribute their own personal interest in continuing education through reading, courses or experience on their own or with colleagues.

The competency-based laws of recent legislatures have sometimes helped to activate this ongoing training and the need for constant professional development. However, for schools and teachers who have reacted slowly and inadequately to change, what has ensued is a growing gap between their teaching reality and what the world needs.

There is a host of causes for any educator to find themselves becoming disgruntled, tired and disconnected from their school's vision or purpose over time. It is no different from other professions, where factors such as work-life balance, the changing demands of the



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environment, direct dealings with people, the increase in the number of functions each person has to carry, the sense of little recognition, and other such burdens take their toll.

Is there a vaccine for this? We cannot expect a magic potion that will cure everything, but there are clearly very important factors that can help when faced with these more or less objective obstacles. This is how I would explain them to anyone interested:

- Close your eyes and analyse your situation using your personal coherence. If teaching is not the profession that fulfils you, then you're not in the right place. Don't try to make the world change and adapt to you. Be brave and step aside.
- Get trained. The more tools you have in your teaching toolkit, the more fronts you will be able to face and succeed in.
- Give it a try. Fail. Try again. If you stop doing it, only one thing will be certain: every day you will be further from the needs of the profession.
- Rely on your team. Difficult goals, such as carrying out a complete educational project, can only be achieved by a well led team. On our own, we all burn out;

together, we pool knowledge, skills and attitudes.

- Rehearse your smile. Good humour is a must. A teacher who is "a little mad" succeeds in the classroom more than a "stiff" person with loads of qualifications.
- And as I said, this profession requires us to have our emotions well balanced like no other. Day after day, disruptive students, educational needs that we do not know how to or cannot meet, overprotective families, legal changes, some administrative teams without clear ideas or uncooperative colleagues, among many other reasons, can generate extraordinary instability. But don't forget that everyone reacts differently to the same situation. Emotional flexibility and flexibility of thought are helpful. Therefore, rigidity in either sphere is fatal, and this rigidity/flexibility duet does not depend on anything outside you; we forge this vision throughout our lives by deciding how we want to be and how we refuse to be.

In short, as my dear friend Eugenio Ibarzabal would say: "It's worth it, but there's grief". The toll we pay is more than made up for by that student you manage to help succeed despite their background; a smile on your students' faces; a fleeting "thank you" from the student from whom you least expected. Remember, it's worth it.

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