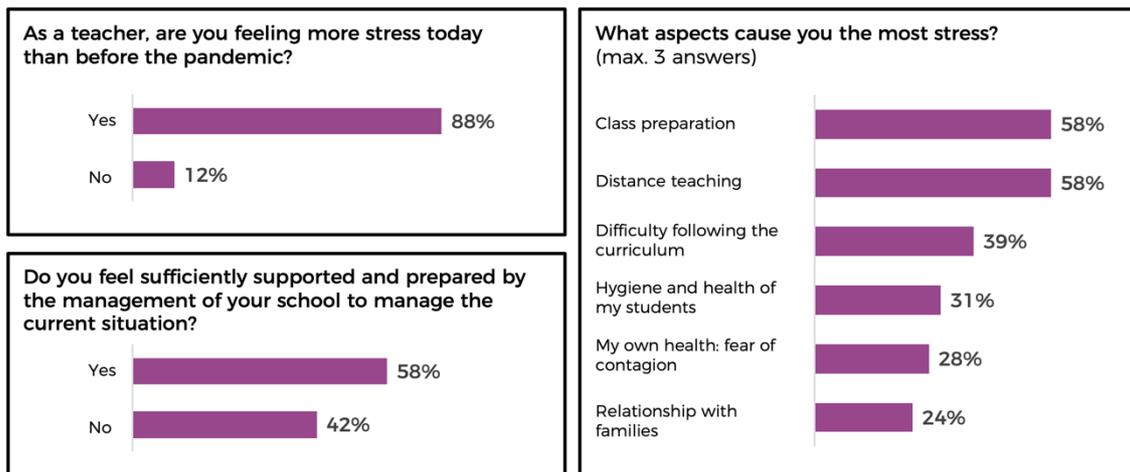


The teacher: an elite athlete. Emotional and organisational support in times of uncertainty.

88% of teachers who attended the symposium *The teacher: an elite athlete*, admitted that they currently feel more stress than before the pandemic, and almost half considered that they did not have sufficient support from the management of their school. Among the factors analysed, class preparation and distance learning are the aspects that cause teachers most stress.



Source: RE.SCHOOL Bite "The teacher: an elite athlete"
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Speakers:

Xesco Espar. Coach, university professor and inspirational high-performance coach. Author of the bestselling *Play with your heart (Jugar con el corazón)*. "To reach the maximum performance, you need talent and emotion. Maintaining it over time is a matter of habit."

Fidelma Murphy. Director of Education for Cognita Schools. With a strong international background in Education, Fidelma leads the academic area seeking educational excellence in its centres. For Cognita, teacher support is one of the backbones on which the academic success of its students is based.

Julia Merino. Teacher, Olympic athlete in 1992, responsible for the Reading Plan of the General Directorate of Innovation and Teacher Training of the Ministry of Education of the Junta de Castilla y León (Spain), the Autonomous Community that beats the country's records year after year in PISA results.

The emotional cost of the past year, together with the current uncertainty, is taking a toll on teachers' emotional health and their capacity for reaction and organisation. Faced with this situation, the first RE.SCHOOL monthly symposium looks for tools and best practices for the emotional and organisational management of teachers.

Conclusions:

Can we compare the role of the teacher with that of an elite athlete? In what ways are they similar? What can we learn from high-performing experts, and how do we translate it into Education?

According to Xesco Espar, the main point of connection between these two professionals is that both face a situation of permanent change with no prospect of returning to the previous condition.

Some aspects to consider:

Preparation

"The elite athlete's ability consists in managing their backpack of ready-made solutions to make a quick response at that moment," explains Espar, pointing out that such preparation usually assists in up to 90% of stressful situations.

Athlete: In elite sport, the athlete studies the rival thoroughly to anticipate their actions; even so, 50% of the time, situations arise which are out of their control. Having information and having studied the opponent exhaustively gives you the tools to face any eventuality.

Teacher: Today, we cannot predict how we will teach in the following week. Knowing the tools that we could use and having support content prepared if necessary, may provide some of the solutions.

Responsibility

"From my point of view, we must take responsibility for this and go to play the Champions League final, or whichever game we play, with pride," says Espar, adding, "The only way to give the maximum is when everyone gives their maximum: each of the educational levels must assume full responsibility."

Athlete: (S)he assumes absolute responsibility that (s)he is the one who is going to change the situation: (s)he does not expect anyone's help and steps forward to do so.

Teacher: Although current circumstances are not those desired by teachers, teachers must take up this challenge as their own and make their contribution to society. We must give them the confidence that they can do it, with their knowledge and attitude, they are perfectly capable of dealing with this situation.

Avoid internal dialogue

Athlete: You feel stress before the game or when, during the game, you lose concentration and focus on the result and its consequences. To avoid it, you have to learn to be in the present, focus on the here and now, avoiding anticipating a future you do not know.

Teacher: Similarly, the teacher should not be concerned about what will happen. You've prepared for it, you have the tools, and you know what to do. To reduce anxiety, you need to focus on what you can do: teach classes and help your students learn. That is the best recipe to eliminate negative thoughts and stay in a positive state regardless of the environment.

Group support

Athlete: If you do not control stress, the consequences are dire in every way, inattention harms the outcome of the match, and you stop performing at the highest level. But the athlete is not alone; the support of the team is essential to drag her/him back into the game.

Teacher: If you do not control stress, you lose concentration, and the result of the class is not the same, the student perceives it and stops paying attention. That is why the support of the rest of the colleagues is critical, emotions are contagious, and we can all face this situation with calm and positivity.

Motion and emotion

According to experts, other basic recommendations that support emotional health are "emotion, movement and motivation: the three words have the same root and are very connected."

Athlete: keeps the body in shape, not only with physical activity but also with food and rest when necessary.

Teacher: it is vital to stay in shape, find leisure spaces and take care of yourself. "If I don't take care of myself and my closest environment, I will project these problems later," they warn.

Training

Athlete: regularly trains, looking for ways to perform longer and better while minimising the physical load on the body. Studies how to reach the highest level.

Teacher: You should not stop learning, through school programmes or independently. This complementary and extra training, which sets you apart from the rest, will help you in the search for more creative solutions to existing problems.

Prevention

Athlete: In professional sports, there are teams of psychologists who listen and provide tools so that you can manage stress autonomously and do not affect the team's result.

Teacher: As heads of schools, it is interesting to study the figure or function of the Wellness Coordinator, a professional who takes the responsibility of helping teachers to exercise their function without emotional interference. Although it may seem like a distant privilege, there are many ways to organise this essential function without resulting in additional costs for schools.

In Cognita Schools, a group of 78 schools located around the world, the figure of the Wellness Coordinator was incorporated in October 2018 to ensure the health of the entire Educational community. "As educators, we believe that we are committed to caring for all the people who are part of our community. We decided that well-being would be our journey, not a destination, and would be part of the culture of our schools", says Fidelma Murphy.

With the arrival of the pandemic, what once seemed like an innovative initiative became a necessity, and what until now was an annual celebration, has become a

weekly activity: #BeWellWednesday. "We have learned to have a global commitment and a unified passion, with well-defined objectives that we constantly measure and evaluate," explains Fidelma.

Easy-to-implement ideas to prevent problems

Conversations: We should ask teachers and non-teachers if they are not feeling well and if they need help; give them the space to talk about their problems. "Everyone should have a person within the team with whom to talk, support themselves, share concerns, difficulties, ..." they explain.

Surveys: They can be of great help to obtain information from large groups, particularly for those people who find it difficult to speak face to face. They are asked about their physical well-being, what the school can do to support them, and the balance between work and personal life. "We have never been so far apart and so close together at the same time. The screens have allowed us to be very connected, establish very close relationships and monitor the entire community," they comment.

Quality time: Share time with colleagues, inside or outside school hours, in which other activities can be carried out that allow you to relax your mind and think about other things.

Organisational support

Athletes: As a team and individually, they have access to a group of people who support them: coach, psychologist, physical trainer, nutritionist ...

Teachers: The organisation of time, workspaces and equipment is also key to reducing stress and ensuring well-being. There are three levels: personal time management, teamwork and the management of said teams. "The teacher or the school must be clear about who to turn to when there is a problem," they explain.

Although the teachers work as a team within the teaching staff, once they enter the classroom, they work individually. In fact, at this moment, they stop being athletes to become elite coaches and lead the group of students towards the goal of that day or week. Today, changes in the educational environment have generated a new workload outside the usual routine.

This situation requires a new skill: that of personal time management. In this sense, teachers must be given space for personal, emotional and organisational preparation. "Waste a minute structuring your work, and you will win an hour. Lose an hour, and you win a day. Lose a day, and you will win the month," they argue.

Another critical element of organisation and communication within the teaching body: cohesive groups are more resistant to emotional stress and pressure, and their values have profound roots that go beyond the difficulties of any given moment. What values do cohesive groups exhibit?

- Generosity in delivery Within the team, each individual must give more than is expected.
- Humility People must recognise when they need help and allow themselves to be helped.
- Collective trust Like health workers, teachers have set an extraordinary example of adaptation to adversity. You have to trust your partner, the team, the school and the educational mission in general.

- Enthusiasm We can never lose it – even across the screen, we must be able to transmit it. Just as enthusiasm is contagious, the absence of it is also contagious.
- Commitment Teachers are a group with tremendous commitment to their work. The current situation has shown that when the fun is over, what remains is the commitment to work and to support colleagues.

Finally, team management, not only within the school but also on a larger scale (provincial or group). They speak of a "cascade organisation" to manage large groups of teachers.

New needs

Athlete: Confinement has been like an injury. (S)he controls her/his body, the workouts ... but one day (s)he gets injured, everything changes overnight and (s)he has to learn again. You have prior knowledge that helps you, but you have to start over.

Teacher: The teacher in their day-to-day, with their experience, strategies and resources, progresses and adapts; but confinement arrives and everything changes. We must provide teachers with the necessary tools and training so that they can get started. "We help the teacher to train in a series of tools that perhaps were not so necessary before; but that today are essential. It is not enough to launch a new resource; they have to know how it is used and what possibilities it offers," they point out.

Curriculum

We must adapt the curriculum to the new circumstances. "The curriculum was written and designed in times of calm. If today we were to write the curriculum, the management of adversity would appear as a basic element," they emphasise. The teacher should not have any qualms about equating the teaching of the curriculum to that of the tools to promote autonomy and self-learning.

"Each challenge asks for a different me. We have to let the pandemic transform us and acquire new tools: demand ourselves to be different because this challenge is new and does not resemble what we had before," concludes Espar.

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