

## Teaching violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict in Colombian schools: Are history textbooks deficient?

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The objective of this article is to analyse the teaching of three topics that are decisive in the contemporary history of Colombia: violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict. It is of fundamental interest to define the incorporation of the development of historical thought in the classrooms through the analysis of textbooks, the material most widely used by social science teachers in the country. Emphasis was placed on content analysis, cognitive level, concepts and historical thinking skills in three textbooks published by important publishing houses in the country, and currently being used in Colombian classrooms. A mixed methodology that combined both qualitative and quantitative information was used. An *Access* database was built and information was exported to the *Stata* or *Nvivo* programs. The analysis of the textbooks reviewed revealed an impoverishment of historical discourse and a cognitive model of deficient learning, in which higher intellectual capacities such as analysis, synthesis, conceptualisation, information management, systemic and critical thinking, research and metacognition, were not promoted. Most of the proposed activities required from the students only actions with a minimum level of complexity such as transcription, repetition and memorisation of information.

### Introduction

This article analyses the teaching of three processes, decisive in the contemporary history of Colombia: violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict. It is of fundamental interest to define the incorporation of the development of historical thought in the classrooms through the analysis of textbooks, the material most widely used by social science teachers in the country. Emphasis was placed on the contents, the cognitive level of the learning activities performed by the students, and the pedagogical use made of the resources (maps, images, primary sources) in the textbooks.

This article is one of several studies about the teaching of social sciences in Colombian schools. It is part of the field of history teaching, where ample reflection on the development of skills and the building of knowledge of interest to historians, has taken place. This perspective of investigation arises in contrast to the one inherited from the “liberal states” which are states that were constituted and consolidated as a republic after having achieved their independence. Their perspective privileged the promotion of a national identity and the exaltation of great heroes, whereas the perspective in this investigation advocates the learning of history derived from methods used by historians, and the teaching of useful history that can guide personal behaviours ethically and politically (Clark, 2011; Gómez, Ortuño & Molina, 2014; Lévesque, 2008; VanSledright, 2008, 2011; Carretero, Rosa & González, 2006; Rösen, 2005; Gómez & Chapman, 2017).

Likewise, the article follows a pattern of critical investigation of history textbooks that studies the contents of books, considering them as instruments of cultural mediation and

identity building (Fuchs, 2011; Repoussi & Tutiaux-Guillon, 2010; Sáiz 2017). Thus, this work is part of the field of research aimed at investigating the following: What do students know about history? What history have they assimilated at the end of each school year? How did they learn that history and how do they use what they learned in order to function in this world? (Pagés, 2009). From Lee's (2005) perspective, this type of work is useful because it allows us to understand the ideas that give structure to the relationships that students have with the past and the types of past to which they have access.

## **Theoretical foundation**

### **The study of textbooks and the teaching of history**

Textbooks continue to play a central role in how teachers plan their courses, the methodology they implement in the classrooms, the learning activities and the evaluation of students (Martínez & Gómez, 2008; Valls, 2008, 2011; Sáiz, 2011, 2013, 2017; Prats, 2012; Gómez, 2013, 2014; Gómez, Cozar & Miralles, 2014; Gómez & Miralles, 2015). In recent decades, the analysis of this pedagogical tool has been focused on its content, its internal characteristics and the context in which teachers and students use it.

The works on trends in textbooks have shown that interests have shifted in different perspectives: the life cycle of the text, the book as a cultural production, schooling and textbooks (Weinbrenner, 1992), the relationship between the contents of the books and academic knowledge, the didactic perspectives, the objective of the teaching of history, the relevance in the use of texts (Valls, 2007), the legislative and normative aspect, the editorial production, and the use of books (Choppin, 2001).

An analysis of studies regarding the contents of these books reveals that the topics most widely addressed by researchers (Foulds, 2013; Ghosh, 2014; Hong, 2009; Percy, 2014; Potapova, 2015; Rohde, 2013; Williams, 2014; Von Hau, 2009) have been national narratives with exaltation of historical figures, romantic and essentialist visions, the study of groups considered as minorities or invisibilised (Indigenous, Afro-descendants, migrants, Gypsies, Muslims, women, children), the approach of specific historical periods and topics considered relevant, the exaltation of the elements that provide identity, the specific characteristics of society, and finally, citizen and civic education.

The most recent line of work, to which this article belongs, points to the analysis of the formation of historical thought in textbooks; hence, the emphasis on cognitive abilities and on the work with historical procedures and the progression of learning (Escribano & Gudín, 2018; Sáiz & Colomer, 2014).

The results of the investigations of this approach indicate that, although some innovations have been introduced, especially regarding the design, image and inclusion of some digital resources, the structural changes in the contents of the textbooks are not significant. Activities with a more passive participation of low cognitive level persist. The supremacy of a nationalist and essentialist historiographic canon is still present, with an emphasis on

the teaching of facts and concepts of easy memorisation and comprehension (De Pro & Miralles, 2009; Sáiz, 2017; Mora & Ortiz, 2013; Gómez, Rodríguez & Mirete, 2017).

These results indicate that neither the new approaches in the didactics of history, nor the curricular changes are having an effect on the pedagogical practices that are implemented in the classrooms (Sáiz, 2017; Bernhard, 2018). The persistence of very extensive use of textbooks, despite the limitations that for some time have been made evident, may be due to the lack of reflection and critical attitude of teachers to use this resource, or to the weak initial and permanent training of faculty in the pedagogy and didactics of history.

Additionally, studies on how violence and armed conflict are presented in Colombian textbooks have emphasised the absence of political education of students in general, and particularly in political culture. These studies have also focused on the analysis of the structure and content of the narratives, on the way in which the armed confrontation has been exposed, hidden, minimised, problematised or denied, and on the incidence of ways how it has been represented (González, 2014; Herrera, 2003; Bastida, Lugo & Rocasalbas, 2008; Bermúdez, 2012).

In another study dealing with Colombian history textbooks, González (2014) affirmed that although victims are mentioned in the latest generation of texts, at least from the perspective of human rights introduced as the axis of social sciences, they have no face, no name, no particular condition, and no context.

González (2014) also concluded that except for some 1980s textbooks, narratives oriented in favor of maintaining a particular social or political order ignored, marginalised or decontextualised conflict and violence, as if teaching this knowledge to schoolchildren could represent a threat to the stability of the democratic system or a threat to the national identity. Democratic attitudes or values that guide historical education then seem to be incompatible with recognising the flaws that are present in its implementation throughout the country, or at most, include abstract problematisations, that is, with no references to specific realities. As aforementioned, this article enriches the field of research in question in one aspect that has been subjected to little analysis: the development of knowledge, skills and the progression of learning based on books.

### **The development of historical thought**

Theoretically, this article focuses on the development of historical thought, defined either as a set of skills typical of historical work, useful for students to build knowledge autonomously (Martineau, 1999; Wineburg, 2001; Pagès, 2009), or as the significance of the past, through strategies that allow going from basic levels to a much more elaborate thought (Lee & Ashby, 2000; Plá, 2005; Levesque, 2008; Santisteban, 2010; Plá & Pérez, 2013).

To think historically implies the understanding of a network of connections between the past, the present and the future, and the associations that take place throughout different temporal concepts and cognitive processes. It involves learning based on a series of skills

that allow students to interpret the past beyond a factual or conceptual knowledge centered on memorising dates, historical figures and events (VanSledright, 2004, 2014; Wineburg, 2001, 2007; Ortega & Rodríguez, 2017; Barca, 2005).

Studies on the progression of historical thinking have stemmed from a need for a new educational paradigm of history, in which constructivism and some valid postulates of cognitive and sociocultural theory have taken effect. Researchers into this new approach to the teaching of history agree on the need to advance the contents of the first order, to the second order. The first are those that have traditionally been used and include chronologies and concepts. The second are strategic content that organises and explains those of the first order that are related to the historians' practice and ability to think historically. This implies historical relevance, working with primary sources, change and continuity, causal explanations, historical perspectives and ethical dimensions (Gómez & Miralles, 2015; VanSledright, 2011; Clark, 2011, Sáiz & Gómez, 2016; Carretero & López, 2009; Domínguez, 2015; López et al., 2011; VanSledright & Limón, 2006; Prats & Santacana, 2011; Stearns, 2010; Lee, 2005).

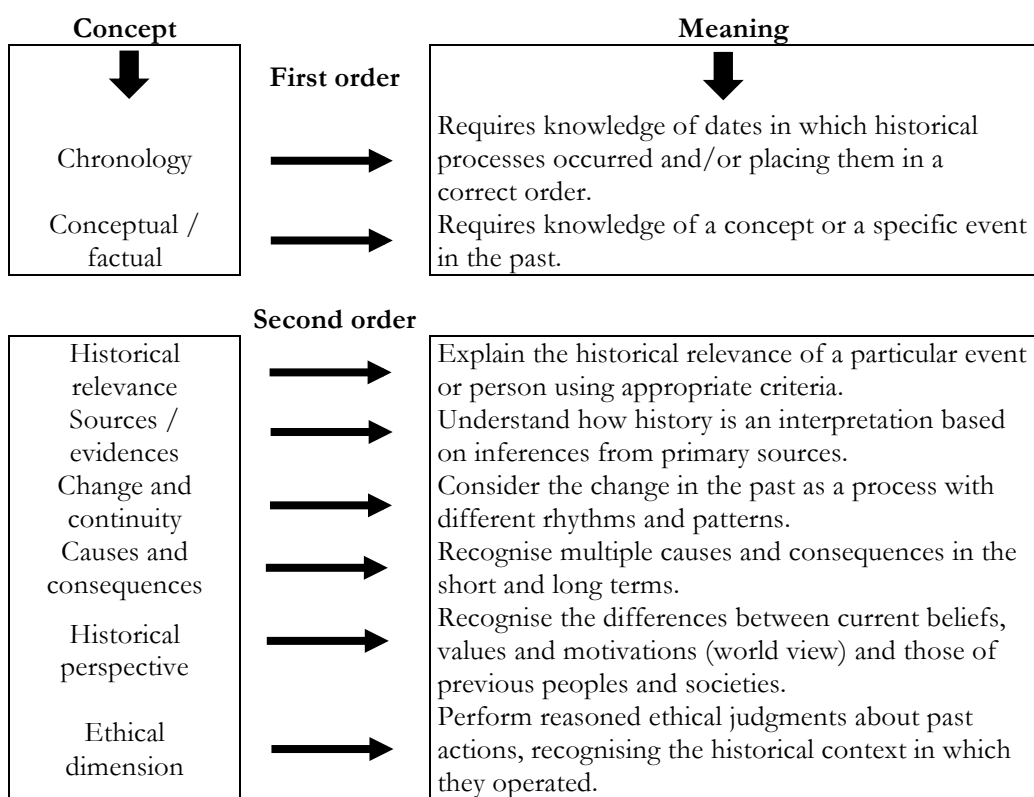


Figure 1: Concepts of historical thinking of the first and second order (VanSledright, 2014)

These authors maintain that, although the objective in primary and secondary education is not to train historians, in order to overcome minimal, incomplete and insignificant

learning, it is pertinent for students to pass from the concepts of the first order, which lead them to answer what, when, who, and how questions to meta-concepts that allow them to learn how to learn and that are related to relevance, change and permanence, empathy, causality, and historical evidence. Figure 1 summarises.

Authors such as Cooper (2015), López Facal (2014), and Escribano and Gudín (2018) have stressed that the teaching of history should help students develop skills to interpret the environment in which they interact, and offer alternative solutions to problems. In order to accomplish this, they need to know how society functions, how human relationships have been formed and modified over time, and what the consequences have been and still are for individuals and groups of people.

The concern for textbook teaching of sensitive historical processes in Colombian history lies in the importance of giving serious consideration to the ruptures of certain social and cultural patterns developed in previous societies, and on aspects that continue to be part of our present (Escribano & Gudín, 2018).

In addition to developing historical thinking, other studies on the teaching of history (Éthier, Demers & Lefrançois, 2010; Thorp, 2014; González & Garate, 2014) have emphasised the need to create historical awareness in students, understood as the ability to interrelate phenomena of the past and the present.

### **Need to teach history of Colombia from a critical and comprehensive approach**

The period studied in this article is the second half of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century, but according to authors like Arias (2015) it begins in the 1920s and has lasted until the present. It is important to investigate what and how the three historical topics during this period: violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict, are being taught in Colombian schools because this knowledge is essential to understand this traumatic and violent historical process.

“Violence” is understood as the period between 1946 and 1959 in which one of the most dramatic conflicts of national history took place. The confrontations that had existed for years were intensified by the death of the liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, “El Bogotazo”, unleashing a climate of devastating violence, an outbreak of popular anger in several regions of the country, and an implacable repression by conservative governments. The crisis was general and profound. The rule of law endured innumerable attacks and modifications, and all efforts to modernise culture were interrupted by homicides that reached inconceivable numbers (Arias, 2015).

Drug trafficking is a phenomenon that since the late 1960s marked an escalation in the country’s armed conflict, as its added value originated not just in the production of drugs as a commodity, but more from the production of power as a means to reduce the implicit risks of the business. Besides favouring the financing of guerrilla and paramilitary groups, and penetrating all political, economic and social spheres in the country, drug trafficking introduced abominable forms of violence, weakened the justice system, increased

corruption, caused the displacement of the rural population, and flooded the country with the bloodshed by influential personalities and presidential candidates (Moncayo, 2015; Duncan, 2015; Fajardo, 2015).

The armed conflict refers to the confrontations that have taken place since the 1940s until today, as a result of the intimate relationship between social conflict and political violence. According to Torrijos (2015), it is an irregular conflict, a non-conventional confrontation between several states that occurs asymmetrically between actors, the Colombian State, the guerrillas, and the paramilitary groups. The concern over the Colombian armed conflict has been largely motivated not only by the magnitude of human casualties, but also by the conflicts regarding the national economic and social projects (Fajardo, 2015; Pizarro, 2015).

These three topics were chosen because, although ruptures within them have been identified, such as marked changes in the main figures, the contexts, dynamics, and continuities have also been acknowledged. One of these is the prevalence of the agrarian issue in the violence that the country has experienced. It is based on the antagonism between two trends of agrarian development in the formation of capitalism: one founded on large estates and the other on smallholdings, both as expressions of projects drawn by different societies (Pizarro, 2015; Fajardo, 2015).

On the other hand, one of the great expectations in the peace agreement signed in Colombia is that of non-repetition. This hope can only be materialised if the new generations of Colombians become citizens who reject any expression of violence in all of their daily contexts. The experiences of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Guatemala, Japan, Northern Ireland, or Rwanda have revealed that education, and more specifically, the teaching of a history that promotes reflections that delegitimise violence play a fundamental role in post-conflict processes, such as the present one in Colombia (Padilla & Bermúdez, 2016; Freedman, Weinstein, Murphy & Longman, 2008; Cole & Barsalou, 2006; Mcfee, 2016; Montgomery, 2005; Rodríguez, Foulds & Sayed, 2016).

For Padilla and Bermúdez (2016), “in order to uproot from Colombian culture the association between conflict and violence, the following questions must be addressed: How is the armed conflict being taught and how should it be taught? And, which is the most favorable way of telling this story for peace to be achieved?” (p. 222). This is based on the idea that people adopt available narratives in their sociocultural contexts as frames of reference to build their understanding of social issues.

Bermúdez (2015), Bajaj (2008), Bajaj and Brantmeier (2011) and Wenden (2007) agreed with the aforementioned, that there is a need for a teaching of history that allows students to understand, in a more sophisticated way, the causes, dynamics and consequences of social conflicts, to recognise the experience of different actors, and to build independent positions about options to deal with conflicts. A new approach in the teaching of history is crucial for children and teenagers who attend school in Colombia so they can also become involved in the collective effort to create a more profound democracy that contributes to the eradication of violence (Sanchez, 2018; Pecaut, 2017).

The study of textbooks and their content is useful to understand how historical, traumatic, and violent processes, and the very experience of war are being explained. It is important to know what is being taught about violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict. As Arias (2015) highlighted, in order to achieve justice so that crimes and victims are never forgotten, it is necessary to learn what happened: Who was responsible? Why did they do it? What were the circumstances?

In this order of ideas, investigating the teaching of history and textbooks helps to determine what and how teaching and learning is conducted into all that has happened in Colombia in the past 50 years. More specifically, are central issues such as those taken into account by the twelve experts of the Historical Commission of the Conflict and Its Victims (2015) being addressed in history classes? These issues include the origins and the multiple causes of the conflict, the main factors and conditions that have contributed to the persistence of the conflict, and the most notorious effects and impacts of the conflict on the population.

Part of the population's indifference or near oblivion regarding the horrors produced by war, violence, armed conflict and drug trafficking (Sánchez, 2018; Pecaut, 2017) is an indication, as Wills (2015) stated, that society has also been hurt, and that during these years of war, the road to democracy has been weakened. Consequently, there is concern about the teaching of history because we believe that schools must be part of the joint purpose of institutional and social forces to detangle the knots that have accompanied the war, and to strengthen, as a country, democratic and interpretative frameworks that classify the opponent as an adversary and not as an enemy that must be eliminated.

## **Method**

The main objective of this article is to analyse textbooks for cognitive level, and the developing of concepts and skills of historical thinking, regarding three momentous processes in Colombian contemporary history: violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict. A mixed methods design was used, combining both qualitative and quantitative information found in the textbooks.

## **The sample**

Chapters addressing the issues of violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict in the history of Colombia from 1940 to the present were selected from three textbooks (Table 1). Data were collected from the most recent editions (2016-2017) of the three textbooks, which are currently in classroom use for 9th and 10th grade (age 13-16 years) secondary school students in Colombia (Table 1). These textbooks have embraced the curricular guidelines set by the Ministry of National Education (MEN), and were published by important publishing houses such as SM, Norma and Santillana.

In addition to reviewing the general contents and exposition of each topic, learning activities in the parts of the books that require tasks and actions based on its contents, were also studied. In all three books, the activities are present at the beginning of each

topic, in topic development sections, and at the topic or chapter conclusion. The latter are generally referred to as “work with competencies” or “development of competencies”.

Table 1: Sample of activities by books and by subjects

Number of activities	Armed conflict	Drug trafficking	Violence
Book 1 (Castellanos, 2016)	8	20	17
Book 2 (Melo, 2016)	22	9	10
Book 3 (Ospina, 2016)	7	12	63
Total observations	37	41	90

### Collection and analysis of data

The collection and systematisation of information followed a set of analytical questions designed to examine historical issues: What content is taught about violence, drug trafficking and armed conflict in Colombia? What is the cognitive level of the activities proposed to the students? What concepts and historical thinking skills do they develop in the textbooks? What resources do books include, and what pedagogical role do they fulfil?

The analysis of the learning activities and the resources included in the books required developing of two scales: a nominal one, to identify resources and contents and to determine the historical thinking skills attained, and an ordinal scale, to classify the activities according to the cognitive level. To design these scales, a Microsoft *Access* database (Microsoft, undated) was created. Each of the variables was coded, taking into account two elements: the historical process and the textbook to which they belonged.

For the systematisation of the information, the Access database was exported to the *Stata* or *Nvivo* programs, according to what was needed. In *Stata*, graph boxes were created (*Stata*, undated). These graphs represent the distribution of activities that appear in the textbooks, having as variables the cognitive level, the knowledge about the development of historical thinking and the type of resources found in the mentioned textbooks. In *NVivo*, a word cloud was created from the contents of the three topics addressed in each of the books (QSR International, undated). The analysis of the contents also took into account the approach that should be given to armed conflict and violence according to the Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims (Comisión de Historia del Conflicto y sus Víctimas, 2015), in the document *Contribution to the Understanding of the Armed Conflict in Colombia* composed of 12 reports and the two rapporteurships.

### Results

The analysis of the contents of the books regarding the three topics revealed that violence was studied more extensively, followed by drug trafficking, and finally, by armed conflict. Regarding the latter, we identified that all three textbooks go as far as the signing of the peace agreement between the governments and the FARC guerrillas, and the polarisation that this agreement has entailed in Colombian society.





Figure 2: Subtopics and NVivo word cloud of most frequently used terms

The density of the terms in the word cloud in Figure 2 indicates that those most widely used in the textbooks are: violence, conflict, war, paramilitaries, guerrilla, peace, bipartisanship, drug trafficking, democracy, demobilisation, posters, and policies. Both the density of the terms and the revision of the subtitles indicate that the textbooks have focused on the general issues of the conflict and the actions taken by the government, without reaching any level of profoundness.

As shown in Figure 3, these topics are generally presented in an expository manner that do not give the students the opportunity to contrast different positions on a given concept or event. Instead of presenting the students with several texts and different perspectives on the origin of the paramilitary groups, a description is made without specifying the author and the sources consulted.

The advances in the didactics of history warn about the inconvenience of presenting the concepts of history in a flat superficial way, as absolute truths, and from a single perspective. For this reason, as the Historical Commission of the Conflict and its Victims (Comisión de Historia del Conflicto y sus Víctimas, 2015) has pointed out, the contents of these topics must be presented without superficialities; it is not enough to simply describe the origin of the events, their causes their consequences and their actors. It is necessary to study the armed conflict by pausing in the most controversial thematic axes and in areas in

which there have been consensus and disagreements, analysing in depth both continuities and ruptures.

**4.6 El origen de los grupos paramilitares**  
 El paramilitarismo surgió a comienzos de la década de 1980, como reacción de los propietarios rurales al auge de las guerrillas. Con antecedentes en el decreto 3398 de 1965 y la ley 48 de 1968, que permitían al ejército organizar a civiles armados, este fenómeno se expandió con la participación de terratenientes, políticos, militares, narcotraficantes y empresas nacionales e incluso extranjeras.

Figure 3: Example of how topics are presented in the textbooks.  
 (with translation below)

**4.6 The origin of the paramilitary groups**  
 Paramilitarism arose at the beginning of the 1980s as a reaction of the rural landowners to the guerrillas boom. Having as background, Decree 3398 of 1965 and Law 48 of 1968 that allowed the army to organise armed civilians, this phenomenon expanded with the participation of landowners, politicians, the military, drug-traffickers, and national and even foreign companies.

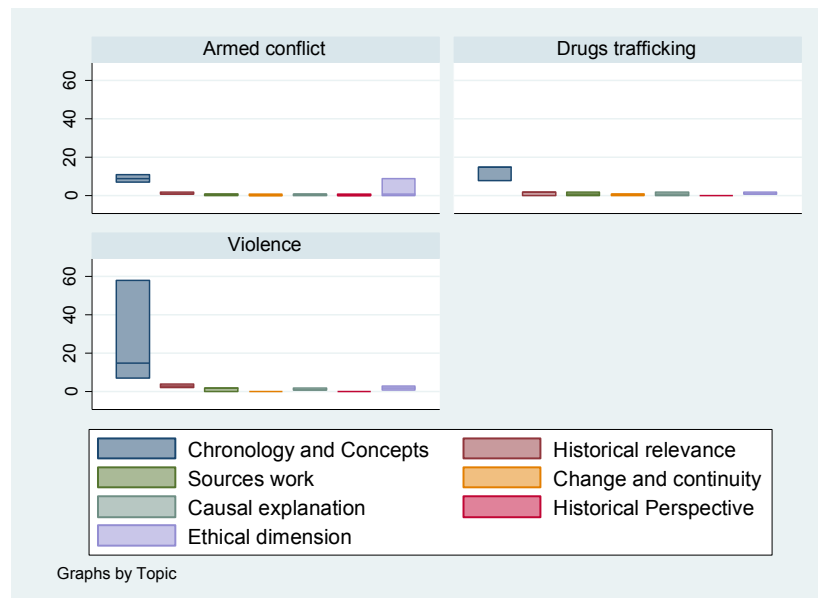


Figure 4: Knowledge required to develop historical thinking by topic  
 (based on Seixas and Morton, 2013)

Regarding the knowledge required to develop historical thinking (Figure 4), the analyses of the books show that knowledge of a low cognitive level or first order prevails over second order knowledge of high conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal rigorosness.

The data in Figure 4 indicate that 107 activities are focused on chronological and conceptual knowledge in which students are usually asked to perform tasks such as “elaborating timelines”, “explaining a concept” or “identifying characteristics of a fact”, according to what the book says. Twenty activities involving the ethical dimension occupy the second place, and 17 of historical relevance the third. Only nine activities were identified in which students worked with sources and determined connections between causes and consequences of the three historical topics studied. In another three, they worked on knowledge of change and continuity, and one dealt with historical perspective.

Figure 5 shows the cognitive level required for the activities, according to Sáiz (2013).

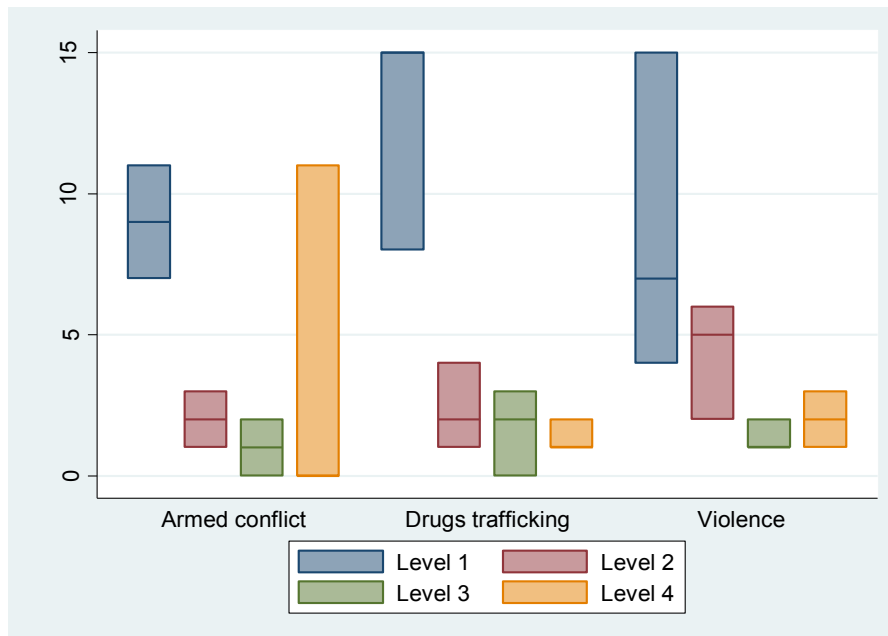


Figure 5. Cognitive level required for the activities according to Sáiz, 2013.

In all three topics, the highest number of activities corresponds to the lowest cognitive level (1). 109 Level 1 activities were identified in which students are asked to locate and reproduce information from the textbook or from resources such as newspapers, other books or web pages and contextualise it. 26 were in Level 2, in which students are required to contextualise information, locate ideas and explain them in a descriptive way. 12 were in Level 3, in which they are required to understand information, summarize it, and make simple inferences. Finally, 21 were in Level 4, in which they are asked to analyse, evaluate, apply, and use information to create something new. It is important to note that most of the activities of the highest cognitive level (4) belonged to the topic of armed conflict.

The data on the development of skills coincide with data dealing with both knowledge of the second order and of the cognitive level, in which the teaching of history presented in

the textbooks is superficial, with a low level of thoroughness for the students. As shown in Figure 6, in most of these abilities, the development of elementary skills is promoted. These include: remembrance of facts (50), understanding facts (34), assessment of facts (30), and application of procedures (21). In the latter, most of the procedures requested of the students are related to changing information from one format to another. For example: “With the information given in the text, draw a conceptual map about drug cartels”, or “Based on the reading, create a comparative table between the guerrilla actions and the paramilitary actions”.

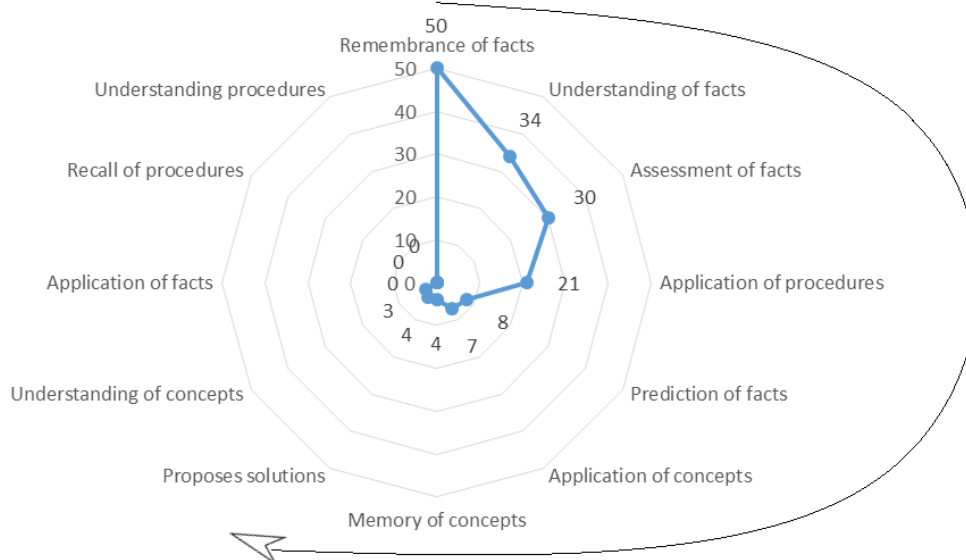


Figure 6: Skills required for the development of historical thinking according to Villa (2007). Ability to solve problems was included by the author of this article.

The skills with an intermediate level of thoroughness are developed in a small number of activities: prediction of facts (8), application of concepts (7), memory of concepts (4), proposition of solutions to problems (4), and understanding of concepts (3). It is striking that there were no activities with a high level of thoroughness, such as the application of facts, or recalling and understanding procedures.

Finally, the pedagogical use of resources was investigated in the three textbooks, following the Sáiz (2013) classification: iconic, (photographs, maps, graphs and statistical tables, cartoons), external (working with materials or tools other than the textbooks), and combined (combination of texts and icons).

The data obtained accorded with that of other studies which have found that a greater amount of resources included in the books does not ensure greater progress in learning. As shown in Figure 7, 54 activities were identified in which icons are used, 24 with external resources such as Web pages, newspapers, magazines, books, films and 12 that

combine icons and texts, in total there were 90 activities in which some type of additional resource was used.

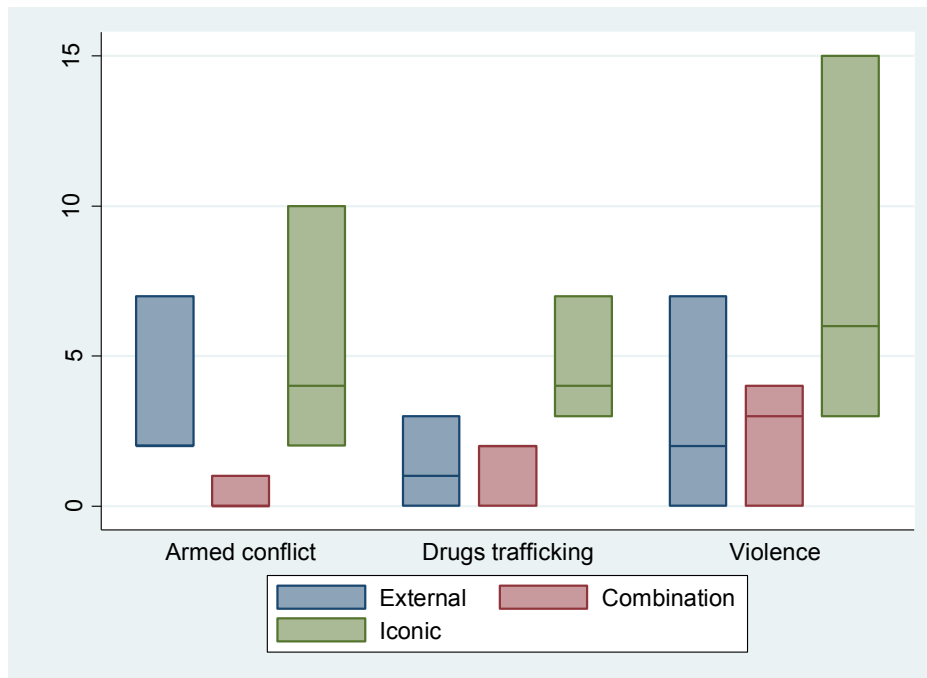


Figure 7: Resources used in textbooks

A detailed reading of the resources indicates that, in pedagogical terms, their contribution to the books is unimportant. The examples shown in Figure 8 reflect the use given to resources, with some exceptions. Most resources are not duly exploited in building learning and developmental skills.

Regarding iconic resources, there is an absence of questions that could lead students to make inferences, to debate issues or, to write texts. They mostly have an ornamental function and are accompanied by a footnote, which refers to an image, a drawing or a map. Usually, the texts included in the resources are not complemented by questions that require a more profound discernment; instead, as shown in the example, they serve as a prelude to request students to perform an activity in which they have to reproduce information such as: “draw a picture”, “write a summary”, or “create a poster”. Resources in which students are encouraged to use other tools, such as newspapers, web pages, or other books, often simply end up asking students to observe them, explore them, become acquainted with them, or to transcribe their contents.



Las bacrim han tomado el espacio dejado por los grupos paramilitares. En muchos casos, sus miembros provienen de esos grupos.

#### En la red

[www.e-sm.net/11scs13](http://www.e-sm.net/11scs13)

Explora y conoce la página web de la Mesa de Negociaciones de la Habana.

#### Primer plano

##### Los crímenes de los grupos armados



Según el estudio dado a conocer en 2013 por el Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, entre 1980 y 2012 hubo 1982 masacres, de las cuales 1166 fueron cometidas por paramilitares, 343 por grupos guerrilleros, 295 por grupos no determinados y 158, que fueron atribuidas a agentes del Estado. Unas 20 habrían sido responsabilidad compartida de grupos paramilitares y miembros de la fuerza pública. En el mismo lapso, se cometieron unos 23161 asesinatos selectivos, de los cuales 8903 se atribuyen a paramilitares, 6000 a grupos no identificados, 3899 a las guerrillas y 2399 a agentes estatales.

- En un párrafo, explica el impacto de los paramilitares y el narcotráfico en la intensificación de la violencia indiscriminada en el conflicto colombiano.

Figure 8: Example of some resources included in the textbooks

## Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the contents, knowledge and skills of the activities presented in the textbooks (Figures 4, 5, and 6), indicates a prevalence of exercises that only reproduce information. This becomes evident by the repetitive presence of verbs such as *copying*, *highlighting*, *consulting*, *writing*, *listing*, *finding out*, *completing*, *naming*, *defining*, *explaining*, *ordering*, and *identifying* when performing the different activities. These verbs usually involve the transcription, repetition and memorisation of information and, to a lesser extent, the comprehension or application of knowledge.

The information from the figures and examples indicates that the activities used to teach fundamental issues in the history of Colombia such as violence, drug trafficking, and armed conflict are usually presented in a descriptive and encyclopedic way, as an assumed notion. Thus, students lack opportunities to build their own conceptualisations and to study divergent positions. This implies that, instead of a valid knowledge to encourage the formation of active and critical citizens of the history of their country, what we have now is a mechanical transmission of content, and except for some concepts, the rest of the knowledge is based on the memorisation of unconnected facts, dates and situations (Laville, 2003; Rodríguez, Gómez & Simón, 2014; VanSledright, 2011; Hervas & Miralles, 2004).

As the work of Hervas and Miralles (2004) pointed out for Spain, similarly in the Colombian textbooks the impoverishment of historical discourse and the foundations of a cognitive model of deficient learning becomes evident, where higher level intellectual capacities such as analysis, synthesis, conceptualisation, information management, systemic and critical thinking, research and metacognition are not encouraged.

In all of the textbooks analysed, spaces were set aside for “activities and development of competences”. However, these do not imply an inclusion of cognitive abilities linked to historical knowledge, such as the evaluation of evidence, sources of historical information, reasoning and the solution of problems, the creation of historical narratives, or the formulation of problem posing questions regarding the historical past in connection with the current situation (Sáiz, 2013; Ortega & Rodríguez, 2016; Rodríguez, Simón & Molina, 2017).

Innovations in the textbooks are reduced to the inclusion of more colour and images and a smaller amount of activities in which historical thinking is developed, and information processing exercises and digital competences are carried out. Also noteworthy is the absence of historical empathy activities aimed at acquiring fundamental historical procedures and skills, which according to Lee and Ashby (2001) serve to understand the connections between the past and the present, and to develop critical thinking skills on the historical facts and processes.

The outlook is discouraging. The data analysed reveal not only a difficulty in transforming the teaching methods and didactic resource tools, but also the existence of a gap between the current trends in learning models and the reality in Colombian classrooms. Consequently, our results coincide with other studies from Colombia, Spain, Brazil, Chile and Mexico, where conceptual and chronological learning predominate. The procedural activities are few and marginal. The scarce presence of activities that require a new elaboration of what has been learned, of processes of causality, and of extrapolation to other places and times (Figures 4, 5, 6) is proof of a very limited education by competencies since the know-how is hardly included (Rodríguez, Simón & Molina, 2017).

The topics in the books, the way they are exhibited (Figures 2 and 3), and the insufficient real time for the teaching of history – since in Colombia, social sciences also include geography and political constitution and democracy – make it difficult for teachers to engage in a reflection on the impact of violence, armed conflict and drug trafficking in the immediate environment of students. It is also hard for them to develop a political and ethical training that could help new generations of Colombians reject all forms of violence in their daily lives, which, as was previously stated, is an indispensable requirement for the realization of one of the axes of our Peace Agreement, that of non-repetition.

As we have evidenced in this article, the desire for a new generation of Colombians to choose to coexist and solve problems through dialogue without resorting to violence, demands a very different teaching of history from the one we have today. It requires other pedagogical proposals in which the topics are addressed in depth, through strategies of inquiry and cooperative work on problems that are of interest to students and that allow

them to learn from their questions, their concerns and from previous knowledge originated from past experiences.

The purpose of these strategies of inquiry is to leave behind the planning of simple and disjointed classes and to establish more complex ones focused on projects, problems and didactic sequences. This way, the teachers can encourage the students to acquire knowledge and skills to develop a more critical and formal thinking, based on concrete cases and questions posed by the students themselves, about topics and/or problems in their communities. These changes in the pedagogical strategies of work in class can be accompanied by curricular adaptations. Teachers can introduce changes in the official curriculum, modifying the traditional and inflexible approach. These adaptations can then contribute to promote in the students a more significant learning (Rodwell, 2017; Yazicilar & Bumen, 2019).

The limitations in the teaching of the contemporary history of Colombia, illustrated in this article, highlight the importance of this subject in the formation of critical and participative citizens involved in the world in which they live (Barton & Levstik, 2004). The results presented are useful as they contribute to broaden reflections derived from other works about the educational potential of history in the formation of children and teenagers. These reflections are to be carried out through reasoning processes about past and present social events, in a context in which there is consensus in the majority of the Colombian people regarding the urgency to build a peace process based on values of respect for human life, democracy and social justice.

Finally, it should be added that the results presented in this article support the importance of a rigorous initial and permanent orientation for social science and history teachers in Colombia. The research by González and Santisteban (2016) indicated that social science teachers in Colombia receive initial training with an emphasis on teaching the most relevant content and procedures of geography and history, to the detriment of a didactic approach aimed at training to teach, learn and develop social thinking. González and Santisteban (2016) also pointed out that representations, lesson plans and teaching practices tend to move in an interesting tension between the desire, possibility and ability to overcome traditional models and their transformation. Since the success of implementing this change depends to a large extent on the concepts held by the teachers, it is important to intervene initially and permanently in these types of concepts.

A final reflection implies the relevance of further investigations to evaluate whether the curricular references published by the Colombian State for social sciences in primary and secondary schools contemplate the teaching of topics analysed in this article, and if they offer recommendations or pedagogical and didactic suggestions to better conduct the task of teaching in the classrooms. Research is also needed to help determine whether the primary and secondary school social science curricula contemplate discussing controversial issues and recent history and, if so, from what perspective. Other interesting investigations on this topic could deal in making concrete pedagogical experiences on violence, armed conflict and drug trafficking visible, allowing the teachers to discuss the



contents, strategies, materials and learning results of students in both primary and secondary school levels.

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