

# Challenges for *Peacebuilding and Citizenship Learning* in Colombia

Retos para la construcción de la paz y el aprendizaje de la ciudadanía en Colombia

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## Abstract

Some education practices can impede learning democratic citizenship agency by reinforcing injustices or omitting dissenting perspectives. Other practices may help address conflict issues through problem-posing inquiry activities. This literature review explores the ways social sciences' curriculum practices can select knowledges that enhance peace or exacerbate violence. Considering peace and conflict theories, I highlight the limitations and possibilities for peacebuilding of Colombia's citizenship and social sciences' curricula. Also, I discuss the ways certain social studies curriculum decisions (selections and omissions) may reproduce violence, injustice and passivity. Finally, I discuss how certain practices may develop critical citizenship capacities to handle conflicts.

## Keywords

Social studies; history education; peacebuilding; citizenship education; Colombia

## Resumen

Ciertas prácticas de la educación pueden impedir el aprendizaje de la agencia de una ciudadanía democrática al reforzar las injusticias u omitir las perspectivas de disenso. Otras prácticas pueden ayudar a abordar los asuntos conflictivos a través de actividades de indagación con formulación de problemas. Esta reseña de la literatura explora las formas en que las prácticas curriculares de las ciencias sociales pueden seleccionar conocimientos que mejoran la paz o exacerbaban la violencia. Considerando las teorías de la paz y del conflicto, resalto las limitaciones y las posibilidades para la construcción de la paz en la ciudadanía colombiana y en sus programas curriculares de ciencias sociales. Discuto también las maneras en que ciertas decisiones sobre los currículos de estudios sociales (selecciones y omisiones) pueden reproducir la violencia, la injusticia y la pasividad. Finalmente, discuto cómo ciertas prácticas pueden desarrollar capacidades críticas en la ciudadanía para el manejo de los conflictos.

## Palabras clave

Estudios sociales; enseñanza de la historia; consolidación de la paz; educación ciudadana; Colombia

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## Introduction

Colombia is undergoing multiple challenges regarding violence and democracy. Some education practices can contribute to that violence, and/or impede students' democratic citizenship learning and agency. Curriculum content is always a selection, and some of such selections may reinforce injustices, endorse violence, or omit dissenting perspectives. On the other hand, some education practices may support peace-building and democratic transformation. For example, problem-posing inquiry activities and discussion of conflictual issues offer opportunities to practice democratic peace-building skills and encourage pluralism (Bickmore, 2008; Bickmore & Parker, 2014; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Freire, 1970). Colombia needs comprehensive democratic peacebuilding at the grassroots. Therefore, this paper will examine the kinds of history and social sciences curriculum that help to guide Colombian young citizens toward (or, to impede) constructive democratic and peacebuilding engagement.

This paper has two sections. First, I briefly introduce the Colombian context and, based on peace and conflict theories, I highlight the limitations (and possibilities) for peacebuilding of Colombia's current official citizenship and social sciences education curriculum. Considering curriculum theories, I discuss the ways certain history and social studies curriculum decisions (selections and omissions), as an instance of curriculum practices, may reproduce violence, injustice and passivity. In contrast, in the second section, I discuss how certain education practices may help to develop critical citizenship capacities and abilities to transformatively handle current conflicts. Accordingly, I highlight ways of teaching these subjects that may facilitate or impede learning of peace, justice and democratic engagement. I consider the applicability of this scholarship to Colombia. I locate my arguments in citizenship education, peace building, history education and critical pedagogy theories.

## Context

Colombia has experienced more than five decades of armed conflict involving various actors: paramilitary, guerrillas, drug traffickers, victims, national army, local and national governments. As a result, the country has the second-largest displaced population in the world—over 6 million people (NRC, 2015). In addition, Colombia faces high rates of homicides (30,33 per 100,000 population) associated with organized crime, domestic violence, delinquency, interpersonal conflicts, and political insurgency (De La Hoz Bohórquez, 2013; Diaz-Granados & Noonan, 2015).

This *direct violence* (use of physical force) is exacerbated by—and increases—*social-structural violence* (indirect harms, such as inadequate housing, scarce education and employment opportunities, extreme poverty, marginalisation, unfair land distribution, unequal access to justice and public services) endured by certain individuals and groups. Both kinds of violence are exacerbated by *cultural violence* (beliefs and narratives that validate the use of violence, such as discrimination or misogyny (sexism) (CEPAL, 2010; Galtung, 1969; NRC, 2015).

National and international studies show that, growing up within violent contexts, young people's levels of aggression can be exacerbated or reduced, depending on the ways conflict is handled in their lived experience, in and beyond schools (Gladden, 2002; Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). For instance, in Bogotá, Colombia, children exposed to high levels of direct violence, whether as witnesses or victims, demonstrate a higher

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### Article description | Descripción del artículo

This review stemmed from the project *Peace-Building Citizenship: Colombian Students' Opportunities to Learn in History-Social Studies, Education and Lived Experiences*. The author carries out a bibliographic review intended to underline the limitations (o affordances) when educating the citizens in order to build the long-lasting peace in Colombia. Based on theories of curricular studies, the author discusses the ways how the teaching in social sciences and history could either make easier or hinder the development of skills to contribute to the peace, justice and democratic participation in Colombia.

likelihood of using reactive and proactive aggression among their peers (Chaux, Arboleda & Rincón, 2012). Children's culture in these kinds of environments tends to legitimate the use of aggression to reach individual goals, compared to those not exposed to such high levels of community violence (Chaux, Arboleda & Rincón, 2012). Also, media, social contexts and peer interactions have made acceptable the use of violence (Chaux & Velásquez, 2009). Thus, direct violence in Colombia is a culturally *learned* cycle (Chaux, 2009).

Such escalated violence puts at risk the opportunities to learn to use (non-violent) democratic mechanisms of citizen participation. These include how to voice people's needs using constructive dialogue, how to join decision-making procedures to address issues that affect communities, how to participate in examining structural justice dynamics, and to imagine potential solutions to the problems of the country (Bickmore, 2012; Diazgranados & Noonan, 2015; Restrepo & Aponte, 2009). As such, it is problematic that, in addition to its violent atmosphere, Colombia faces high levels of civic and political disengagement.

In this paper, I focus on the youth population. Academic and government studies suggest that many young people under 25 are not civically and politically engaged (CEDAE, 2013). This youth disengagement can be a result of several factors, such as: 1) lack of knowledge about ways to participate in public matters and collective decisions, 2) alienation, apathy, and indifference towards civic and political issues, 3) lack of trust towards governmental and political institutions, and 4) perception that voter turnout makes no difference in the improvement of their society (Valencia, Peláez, Rua & Awad, 2010).

Young citizens from low-income groups are the ones who most commonly lack civic knowledge and trust, and who less frequently access democratic decision-making procedures (Cox, 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Marien, Hooghe & Quintelier, 2010). This is related to the insufficiency of educational opportunities to develop the critical thinking needed for understanding democracy and participating in collective decision-making procedures (Quaynor, 2012; Reimers & Cárdenas, 2010). As a result, many young people are unable (or discouraged) to constructively voice and defend their own interests, concerns and needs, which increases patterns of structural, cultural, and direct violence in their society.

To tackle this problem, scholars and policy makers agree that democratic citizenship education *can* help young citizens to develop the knowledge they need to question and participate actively in their societies (Carretero, Haste & Bermúdez, 2016; Cox, Jaramillo & Reimers, 2005; Levinson, 2004; Molina-Girón, 2012). For instance, citizenship education *may* help students to: know what are government structures, societal functions and processes (Berti, 2005), including civic rights and duties (Evans, 2006); to know what are the most controversial issues and viewpoints of their society (Hess, 2009), and to know what may cause the social injustices and power imbalances existing in their context (Bickmore, 2008).

Equally important, citizenship education *may* foster the skills needed to participate actively in handling the society's current dilemmas. For instance, citizenship education may help students to learn how to analyze and synthesize information and arguments (Carretero, Haste & Bermúdez, 2016), to learn how to organize with other people to address structural issues of inequity and social injustice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and to know how to imagine, discuss, and experiment with alternative perspectives that may solve and transform local and global injustices (Bickmore, 2014b; Dewey, 1902).

Accordingly, theorists argue that young people with such critical educational experiences may develop a *critical consciousness* towards issues and democratic decision points that surround them (Freire, 1970; Harber & Sakade, 2009). In contrast, students denied adequate opportunities to learn and discuss, in open classroom climates, issues of power, injustice, structural and cultural violence are less likely to question and to participate in social and political transformation (Bickmore, 2014a; Hakvoort & Olsson, 2014; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011; Quaynor, 2012).

However, particularly in countries such as Peru, Colombia and Guatemala, explicit *democratic* citizenship education (in the above senses) has not been widely implemented, resulting in young students' minimal civic knowledge and development of skills (Bascopé, Bonhomme, Cox, Castillo & Miranda, 2013; Schulz & González, 2011). Moreover, when existing civic education gets implemented, it usually involves passive (transmissive) teaching approaches that cover large amounts of information, do not include links to students' experiences or backgrounds, and promote a hegemonic affluent class vision of citizenship (Quaynor, 2012; Reimers & Villegas-Reimers, 2006).

## Research Method

My survey of the literature began with a search of ERIC and JSTOR databases. I looked for studies from countries that had experienced conflicts, including Colombia, using combinations of the country name and the terms *history education*, *civic education*, *citizenship education*, *peace education* and *critical pedagogy*. This research strategy allowed me to identify 12 'post-conflict' countries. I also identified studies from relevant books. I selected the readings making sure that I had a diverse sample of case studies from different geographical places in order to compare and contrast results. My selection criteria included an emphasis on finding cases where history and citizenship education was implemented (or not) as a learning space to teach about conflict issues. Once the sources were selected, I summarized these readings, and as a strategy of analysis and synthesis, I categorized and used some of its examples as evidence of the ways in certain contexts a *selective view* and/or *omission* of historical conflict issues have *contributed* (or not) to peace and violence. In other words, I analyzed the readings by finding evidence that portrayed cases where conflict issues were omitted/silenced from the implemented curriculum or were studied by using a selective view that could have contributed to address the studied conflict or could have exacerbated it.

Also, I analyzed the Colombian Citizenship Competencies program by using peace and conflict theories to argue that Colombia's Citizenship curriculum needs to move from educative practices that infuse a 'gentle' form of peacekeeping activities to more analytical peace building ones. Then, I briefly analyzed the social sciences curriculum guideline of the Ministry of Education of Colombia by using the lens of curriculum theories. This curriculum guideline is not compulsory, it isn't very detailed, it presents prevailing goals for schools, but schools have autonomy to apply these guidelines. As analytical and synthesis strategies, I did rounds of interpretation of the social sciences guideline (as in Charmaz, 2000) and followed a rubric initially derived from the literature that highlighted few examples of 'selections' and 'omissions' of the curriculum when referring specifically about the Colombian armed conflict.



There are three types of approaches to achieving peace, as shown in figure 2, linked to the above continuum between negative and positive peace (Galtung, 1983): *peacekeeping* (control-based interventions —including self-regulation— to stop or eliminate direct violence), *peacemaking* (negotiation of disagreements through dialogue to reach solutions that satisfy the parties involved) and *peacebuilding* (a long-term process to overcome structural and cultural violence through democracy, equity and inclusion). Considering the above types of approaches to achieving peace, the Colombian citizenship program ranges between a *gentle* form of *peacekeeping* (educative opportunities that guide students to self-control and manage their anger— Bickmore, 2005a; Bickmore, 2011; Bickmore & MacDonald, 2010) and *peacemaking education* (facilitating learning and practice of constructive communication to voice students’ needs and handle conflicts), with very little attention to *peacebuilding* or *peacebuilding education* (curricular and/or school structure learning opportunities to achieve or teach toward equity, mutual understanding across social identity groups, and inclusive democracy).

Figure 2  
Three approaches to managing conflict



Source: Kathy Bickmore (2011)

Although both peacemaking and even some peacekeeping are necessary partial ingredients of peacebuilding, Colombia’s Citizenship Competencies program misses opportunities for facilitating peacebuilding learning. For instance, it does not include learning opportunities that encourage students to interrogate, assess, disagree, or question the cultural beliefs and narratives that legitimate violence and hatred (Ross, 1993; Tawil & Harley, 2004). Moreover, although there is space for encouraging constructive communication —such as listening to other’s points of view— the program does not encourage critical inquiry or dialogue concerning conflictual social and political issues, as part of a more comprehensive peacebuilding education. As argued, this absence limits the possibility for young citizens, especially those with least privilege, to learn to challenge social injustices, to enhance democratic dialogue, and to transform Colombian violence into *positive peace*.

This missing element in the Citizenship Competencies education program represents a challenge and an opportunity for formal education in Colombia. In the remainder of this essay, I argue that Colombia’s social sciences curriculum, in addition to the citizenship competencies, can (but often does not) contribute to education for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. I will first discuss the ways curriculum mandates and implemented curriculum may contribute to peace or to violence.

## History and social sciences' education viewed through key concepts of curriculum studies: spaces & obstacles for peacebuilding and citizenship learning

Curriculum is a socially, historically constructed and organized set of knowledge, skills, and pedagogies. Mandated curricula define what is to be taught and how that content should be taught at each grade level (Egan, 2003). Mandated curricula are one key influence on “lived” curriculum practice (Aoki, 2012).

When curriculum materials and pedagogies reinforce injustice or other violence through the reproduction of elite discourses, instead of encouraging critical questioning of societal problems that threaten democracy and peace, they impede students' opportunities to understand local needs and the effects of structural and cultural violence, thus potentially encouraging passivity or enmity among citizens (Ginsburg & Kamat, 2009). In contrast, when curriculum addresses from multiple perspectives the causes of conflicts and inequities that persist in a society, and engages students in the process of interpreting the world they live in through “problem-posing” and critical consciousness pedagogies (Freire, 1970), they can contribute to developing students' capacities to transform unjust and violent societies (Greene, 1975). Thus, a democratized lived (implemented and experienced) curriculum can contribute to tackling destructive social conflicts (Bickmore, 2008; Pinar, 1999).

History and Social studies education can (but often does not) offer a space to study past and recent social conflicts, as well as violent and citizenship issues at local and global levels. For instance, interpreting contextualized past events in curriculum materials the direct, structural and cultural violence lived by various groups in the past is an opportunity for young citizens to understand realities of people whose histories have been silenced, or of people whose basic human rights have been denied based on others' economic and political power (Bellino, 2014). Such learning opportunities can foster the development of a more inclusive (plural) narrative(s) that assign equal respect to all members of society (Ross, 2007). As such, particularly in Chile, where escalated direct violence took place in the recent past, a new history course requires teachers to present contrasting interpretations of Pinochet's dictatorship—including divergent (conflicting) memories of actors and witnesses regarding human rights violations—to enlarge the scope of the narrative, contribute to the analysis of unjust episodes from the past, and to foster dialogue about conflictual recent history (Magendzo & Toledo, 2009).

### *Curriculum for violence or curriculum toward democratic peace*

Michael W. Apple (1993) argues that any curriculum is the result of what specific people in power ‘legitimate’ as the appropriate version of ‘knowledge’ to narrate, which in turn teachers are required to teach. Curriculum theorists explain this powerful activity as selective and null curriculum.

Selective curriculum means that the viewpoints of curriculum writers (usually social or political elites) are reinforced; they are presented as ‘truth’, while conflicting or dissenting viewpoints are disregarded or disrespected (Apple, 1979; Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). For instance, Lynn Davies (2005) shows that Arab social studies and history curriculum materials blame Israelis for the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Israelis materials blame the Arabs. As a result, this selective, one-sided narrative impedes neutrality and may foster polarisation, enmity and hatred among social groups.

As such, a major risk to peacebuilding learning is when history (and social studies) curricula (including instruction) promote a selective narrative that infuses a 'hate' discourse. For instance, content analysis of Colombian curriculum materials and literature from the so-called 'Violence' period (1946-1964) revealed that when members of the liberal party were in power, textbooks highlighted one-sided and 'hate' narratives about conservatives; the same (against liberals) occurred when conservatives were in power (see Rueda, 2008). Thus, depending on the author's political identity, history literature regarding that period highlighted the actions and crimes of the opposite group as 'barbaric', but defended and justified their parties' own actions (Rueda, 2008). Accordingly, textbooks and instruction that encourage these selective viewpoints limit exposure to both (all) sides of a conflict, and raise negative emotions towards the 'other'; thus, impeding opportunities to come to understand conflicting viewpoints on complex realities, which may consequently aggravate an existing conflict (Bekerman, Zembylas & McGlynn, 2009).

In contemporary Colombia, tenth and eleventh grades history content, within the social studies curriculum, offer such a selective viewpoint regarding actors and events surrounding recent history events, such as the armed conflict. For instance, students are required to "explain the emergence of guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug traffickers in Colombia" (MEN, 2006, p. 130), and to "explain the changes and continuities of guerrilla groups in Colombia from their emergence to the present day" (MEN, 2006, p. 131), implicitly blaming these groups for escalating the violence. Accordingly, teachers are required to teach a selective viewpoint on the conflict, in which the role of the national army or the social injustices enacted by the government are not addressed. This selective viewpoint represents a missed learning opportunity for students to question the structural causes that have threatened democracy and peace in Colombia.

Colombia's current social studies curriculum is influenced by the government's security policy that blamed certain groups as solely responsible for the violent conflict. In school contexts, this policy was translated into curriculum materials that reinforced the viewpoints of the government. For instance, Colombia's 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades students are required to "assume a critical position towards the violent actions of the armed groups of the country" (MEN, 2006, p. 131). However, students miss learning opportunities to interrogate, assess or question the government's responsibility in the conflict, and to challenge the effects of structural inequities and cultural violence that have prompted direct violence in the first place. This selective vision could encourage distrust, passivity, indifference or enmity among citizens (Ginsburg & Kamat, 2009).

In some instances in Latin America, a selection of events regarding direct violent issues has legitimized a growing state militarization. For instance, history curricula and textbooks in Guatemala portrayed a state that was 'forced' to act violently due to the indigenous insurgent movements that affected the stability of the nation (Bellino, 2014). In Colombia, predominant historical narratives have justified state militarization in relation to the rise, since the 1960's, of leftists' guerrilla movements (Schuster, 2009). Accordingly, selective curriculum narratives limit students' opportunities to analyze structural issues embedded in violent events and contribute to legitimizing and normalizing violence as a means to protect 'democracy' and 'peace', without considering the needs or interests of the parties/actors involved.

As such, a selective viewpoint within social studies curricula regarding recent history events impede peacebuilding, by promoting cultural

violence that uncritically accepts violence as a means to defend the status quo (Chaux, 2009; Galtung, 1990). Teaching war as routine and legitimizing violence is anti-democratic because it encourages oppression, injustices and exclusion (structural and cultural violence), leading society to handle conflicts in destructive ways, in which hierarchies are reinforced.

Despite the above, Lynn Davies (2005, 2014) argues that formal education can provide spaces of “interruptive democracy” —in which participants challenge dominant viewpoints and injustices— by, for example, implementing curricula that encourage citizens to “hold the state responsible for its actions” (p. 32). A practical suggestion that could contribute to transforming those situations, and could be applicable in the education system in Colombia, is having spaces for inquiry and pedagogy within social studies and history classes that allow students to examine social and community issues that concern them, as well as encouraging them to apply civic mechanisms to demand policy remedies.

Table 1  
*Selective curriculum*

Infuses a 'hate' discourse, raising negative emotions towards the 'other'
Encourages stereotypes
Teaches war as routine - Legitimizing militarization

Source: author and Lynn Davies (2005)

*Null curriculum* is a kind of curriculum selection. It is defined as “what schools do not teach” (Flinders, Noddings & Thornton, 1986, p. 33). Elliot W. Eisner (1970) coined the term to refer to the topics, concepts or skills that are left out of curriculum mandates and materials. Particularly, Lynn Davies (2005) argues that in some conflict-ridden areas history and social studies curriculum content, and implemented curriculum (teaching and learning activities in school) tend to omit political, historical or current conflictual issues in order to prevent confrontations. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the interest of students to understand the reasons of their war, teachers excluded from their instruction the history of the conflict. Similarly, Lebanon’s official history textbooks and history classes silence controversial episodes and perspectives regarding their civil war to avoid discord in classrooms (van Ommering, 2015; Tawil & Harley, 2004). Particularly in Colombia, official social studies guidelines from grades 6-9<sup>th</sup> omit the study of Colombian recent violent history (MEN, 2006). As a consequence, most young students from those grades fail to understand or assess their recent history (Toro, 2015).

Curriculum materials, as well as teachers’ fear and/or reluctance to teach recent conflictual events (such as direct violence, social injustices, interests of actors involved in conflicts), causes, and parties that triggered and escalated violence is a form of repression or “alienating violence” (“violence by omission”) (Salmi, 2000): students are denied with opportunities to understand their own reality and to develop capacities to express their own points of view towards issues that surround them, and that in many cases concern them. For instance, the above-mentioned study conducted by Erik van Ommering (2015) in Lebanon, demonstrates selected young students’ difficulty (despite frequent willingness) to understand and critically evaluate the current problematic social and political conditions in their country, and their possibilities to overcome one-sided narratives and actions of the conflict.

Additionally, omission of content knowledge and skills (*i.e.*, how to assess dissenting perspectives) may reproduce destructive social conflicts because, on the one hand, young citizens are not equipped to critically evaluate, question and/or discuss the interests of each stakeholder behind a conflict (Williams, 2004). On the other hand, missing learning opportunities to engage in thoughtful discussions about conflictual issues may reinforce stereotypes and prejudices that feed cultural (and structural) violence, and may escalate conflicts (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009; Barton & McCully, 2012).

Further, omission of conflictual recent history events and explicit learning opportunities to discuss them, limit students' opportunities to engage in finding possibilities to positively transform conflicts (Davies, 2014). Specifically, Colombia's social studies curriculum (MEN, 2006) does not leave space for students to imagine possible alternatives for the resolution of Colombia's conflict. This curtailed space to imagine alternate possibilities can be reflected through feelings of hopelessness or powerlessness among young citizens in Latin America (Magendzo & Toledo, 2009). As a consequence, young students' civic involvement is limited and, in its place, they may develop passivity or apparent apathy.

Without cognitive and imaginative understanding of issues, it is difficult to develop voice or power to transform situations, as there is no space to interpret or reflect the world young students inhabit, and to understand the various perspectives of that social reality. In consequence, injustices tend to be uncritically accepted and violence tends to be normalized, instead of being questioned and/or transformed (Apple, 1979; Galtung, 1990; Greene, 1975). For instance, in Saskatchewan, Canada, students in one study evidenced little understanding of colonial treaties of First Nations (indigenous groups), and by extension, those students uncritically accepted inequity and exploitation in their context (Tupper & Cappello, 2008). In contrast, the study of conflicting perspectives (narratives) can help young citizens to question hegemonic knowledge and beliefs (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).

Accordingly, curriculum and instruction keeping silent on difficult issues (*i.e.*, diversity, oppression, exclusion, human rights violations), or not envisioning possibilities for conflict resolution, impedes students' opportunities to develop democratic understandings of peace and conflict. This is a challenge in Colombia's social studies and history education implementation. Including conflict-related discussions and problem-posing activities that consider various stakeholders and their viewpoints, and the ways they responded to those conflicts (with what consequences) in specific moments, offers democratic peacebuilding learning opportunities (Bickmore, 2007).

In the following section I highlight pedagogies that may facilitate learning of peace, justice and democratic engagement. I consider the applicability of this scholarship to Colombian education system.

### **Pedagogy for (or impeding) democratic peace building**

Teacher's pedagogical style also shapes curriculum implementation (Werner, 1991). When teachers believe that young citizens are passive recipients, rather than active creators, and promote memorisation of contents, they may limit students' opportunities to assess problems and invent solutions. Thus, memorisation of historical or other information without critical reflection may limit students' commitment towards democratizing society (Apple, 1979; Freire, 1970). In contrast, when students are given opportunities to participate in creating their own knowledge, by inquiring and interpreting the multiple realities of their lived experiences, they can raise awareness of the power relations that silence them, of the injustices of their society, and consequently can develop an interest and engagement on present citizenship issues (Cook-Sather, 2002).

Therefore, a pedagogy that guides students' inquiry may encourage them to question the interpretations of official mandates and textbooks, and their own realities (Werner, 1991). Student-centered dialogic and problem-posing pedagogies are based on the belief that students are not empty vessels to be filled; instead, knowledge is based in students' experiences (Freire, 1970). For instance, John Dewey (1938) believed that in order to achieve democratic education, curriculum needed to include students' voices and viewpoints. As such, he believed that students' lived experiences contributed, in the short and long term, to the enlargement of narratives and discourses, as well as to challenge destructive hegemonic knowledge.

Later, Paulo Freire (1970) proposed problem-posing education, in opposition to memorisation methods that he called banking education, which impede a critical understanding of concepts and events surrounding people. By encouraging learning activities based on discussion or argumentation that facilitate joint search for the roots and potential solutions of problems that concern learners, he believed that they were able to question, reflect and act towards the transformation of their own society (*praxis*). As such, promoting educational experiences in which students' involvement is pivotal encourages the development of a *critical consciousness* that could open a space for democratic dialogue, denunciation of dehumanizing structures and question power dynamics (Cook-Sather, 2002; Freire, 1970).

Accordingly, in problem-posing education teachers and students are viewed as active subjects who co-investigate to create new knowledge (Freire, 1970). By focusing on students' perceptions and feelings linked to particular societal issues (*i.e.*, human rights violations) around them, problem-posing education can help to raise awareness of class inequities, impunity, social injustices and may open a space for visions of a more just and democratic society (Hess, 2009). This pedagogy requires encouraging dialogue, discussion, and a humanistic view of the world, as well as to avoid mere compliance.

#### *Teachers facilitating dialogue on controversial issues and multiple narratives*

Democratic peacebuilding learning requires engaging young citizens in cooperative difficult dialogues about issues that impede peace. For instance, in Colombia it would be relevant to engage students in dialogue about structural issues that have challenged power balance and social justice.

However, research in Chile and Argentina describe the challenges and dilemmas that teachers face when teaching conflictual issues and events from recent history (González, 2008; Magendzo & Toledo, 2009). For instance, teaching some issues (*i.e.*, human rights violations under Pinochet's regime) would raise painful memories. Additionally, in many of the studied cases, teachers are not prepared to handle these discussions because they do not have effective professional development support for teaching them or because they don't know if they should allow their positions to be known (Barton & McCully, 2007; Bickmore, 2005a). Thus, some factors include teacher's lack of training or reluctance to deal with sensitive issues. In other cases, teachers' own values, cultural restraints and biographies may become a challenge for teachers to discuss sensitive issues (Evans, Avery & Pederson, 2000).

Teachers facilitating constructive dialogue about conflictual issues require having cooperative, open-minded and safe classroom environments (Hess & Avery, 2008; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). As such, students may be encouraged to discuss their own experiences and personal standpoints. History and social studies are subject areas that deal with conflicts at local and global levels. Thus, they serve as spaces to encourage dialogue about conflictual issues. Facilitating these constructive dialogues can be done through small-group discussions, pair sharing, talking circles or assigned roles that require applying research skills (collect, summarize and analyze data) as a way to invite students to voice their viewpoints, listen and/or challenge peers' claims, as well as to propose alternatives to solve conflicts (Bickmore, 2014a). These spaces for facilitating constructive dialogues can be applicable in the education system of Colombia and, particularly, in teachers' training programs.

Dialogue on difficult issues involves discussing divergent perspectives. As such, examining multiple narratives on various parties' perspectives concerning an issue may help students' understand the causes (human wants, feelings and needs) that have triggered or escalated certain social conflicts (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Accordingly, conflicts involving racism, sexism, or exclusion can include narratives of women, children, elderly and indigenous groups, particularly because such opportunities may help young students understand how violent and non-violent responses to actions in conflicts have affected, affect and will keep affecting social, political and economic conditions of people, groups, communities or societies (Bajaj & Valera Acosta, 2009; Funk & Said, 2004). The use of different sources that describe one same event through different views can help

contextualize those historical perspectives (Barton & Levstik, 2008; McCully, 2012). As such, Colombia's social science curriculum (that includes history) needs to implement this kind of learning spaces for students to learn to examine multiple perspectives of social conflicts that may concern them.

Constructive peacebuilding dialogue about conflictual issues requires teachers to provide learning opportunities for students to communicate their own perspectives and standpoints about unresolved social issues that may concern them (Carretero, Haste & Bermúdez, 2016). It also requires encouraging students to listen (and respond) to their peers' contrasting viewpoints (Hahn, 2010); to reflect and learn to solve issues non-violently; and to increase young citizens' interest in engaging in public life for mitigating those issues that concern them (Hess & Avery, 2008; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Accordingly, facilitating dialogue about conflictual issues may help transform social injustices and challenge students' mere compliance and passivity.

### **To Conclude**

After more than 50 years of conflict in Colombia, peacebuilding citizenship education in areas such as social studies and history can offer spaces for Colombian students to learn to question their reality, to challenge social injustices and to find non-violent ways to transform conflicts.

The literature review evidences that curriculum practices can select knowledges, contents and skills in ways that enhance peace or exacerbates violence. Accordingly, history and social studies curriculum practices can foster (or narrow) opportunities for democratic peacebuilding citizenship learning. Nevertheless, active, problem-posing and multi-perspective pedagogies may help equip young citizens with critical citizenship capacities and understandings that contribute to peacebuilding and citizenship engagement in 'post conflict' societies, such as Colombia. This paper provides some reflections about the need of including the discussed elements in the Colombian social studies curriculum. However, the paper does not address specific questions about ways of implementing these elements. For instance, will it be necessary to redesign the educative policies? Which elements of peace building education need to be included in Colombia's teacher training? Further research needs to be done regarding these aspects.

Also, to analyze how some of these peace-building opportunities may have been implemented to Colombian youth, qualitative inquiry is needed. This qualitative data may help understand and/or challenge peacebuilding citizenship learning opportunities in Colombian school contexts.

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