

The *Zócalos* of the municipality of Guatapé, Colombia: a didactic element in the teaching of social science¹

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Abstract: Any element used in a pedagogical work is important as long as it points towards innovating and improving educational practices, as well as motivating children and young adults in their academic formation. This paper shows the scope of a pedagogical experience with the secondary and middle school students of the “Nuestra Señora del Pilar” School of the municipality of Guatapé, Colombia, which used the *zócalo*, a representative element of its culture, as a didactic tool in the teaching of social science that can motivate learning and generate in students an interest in investigative thought.

Key words: social sciences, educational practice, teaching and learning, oral history, *zócalos* of Guatapé.

Introduction

Colombia's General Education Law (*Ley General de Educación - 115 de 1994*) opened up the possibility of changing the panorama that prevailed in the teaching of social science in the twentieth century. After it was passed, the main orientation in the area of social science has underscored the importance of going beyond the transmission and description of contents from teachers to students, beyond limited spaces like the classroom and totally linear curricula featuring mostly world events, wars, and characters, disregarding the study of the regional and the local. The General Education Law has allowed educational institutions to make their curricula more flexible and to have the autonomy to make their teaching more contextualized and inclusive, responsive to the needs, interests and capabilities of the students, to improve the quality of education throughout the country.

According to what the law established, it was deemed viable to reform the social science curricula by incorporating local history into it, in harmony with the educational project of the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School, which aims to foster classroom research, creativity, scientific knowledge, critical comprehension, education for citizenship, recognition of the local and national identity, as well as greater interest in learning about and valuing the students' own culture.

¹ This article is the result of further reflection on the thesis “Guatapé, zócalos e historia oral: contexto educativo”, written towards a Master's degree in History at the National University of Colombia in Medellín.

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Since the educational system does not yet provide the means to materialize the pedagogical practice, studying the *zócalos* is an option to make social science classes more dynamic and enjoyable, helping to achieve the educational aims by having the students participate in the construction of their own learning, which becomes an alternative to traditional ways of teaching. Learning about a particular element such as the *zócalo* allows students to contextualize local educational processes with a view to regional, departmental and national relevance, which becomes evident in the children's and young adults' academic achievement in secondary and high school, as well as to attain a better understanding and critical analysis of the phenomena studied.

Guatapé's reputation as a "town of *Zócalos*" due to the ubiquity of this architectural element in public and private spaces made it especially interesting to conduct research on them and to link this research with teaching in order to propitiate the strengthening of the students' sense of identity and leadership.

Image 1. *Zócalos* on the houses of Calle del Recuerdo



Source: Archivo del Comité Ético Cultural, 2016.

The *zócalo* is the most outstanding architectural element that attracts the interest of national and foreign tourists who visit Guatapé, allowing many of its inhabitants to make tourism an important source of earning. A great strength of the municipality is the knowledge of the history of the *zócalos* as such, as well as the stories told about them and retold by the townspeople, who participate as tourist guides.

By providing students with the tools that enabled their learning, it became evident that they developed research and scientific skills, as well as skills to explore facts related to the local history of Guatapé: they analyzed problems, applied methods to obtain information, examined results, and offered solutions to the problems they detected.

The fact that the students show these competences after the teaching and learning of social science in secondary and high school is clear evidence that school education can be meaningful, relevant, and in agreement with reality and with the guidelines of the Ministry of National Education, the institution's educational project, and the curricula.

Objectives and methodology

Our objectives were:

- To develop a didactic proposal through oral history that contributes to improving the teaching and learning practices of social science, strengthening the research competences of students in the municipality of Guatapé.
- To propose a re-structuring of the social science curricula at the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School of Guatapé that includes and motivates the students' investigative thought.
- To reconstruct with the students the history of the zócalos of Guatapé – the community's most representative symbols – using micro-history as a tool.

Our work relied on participative action-research, taking into account the technique of qualitative research, with the aim of increasing the quality of teaching and transforming learning processes by allowing students to participate in the construction of knowledge and to generate changes, as well as establish links between theory and practice in the teaching of social science.

The method chosen was oral history, with interviews as a fundamental tool through which we were able to obtain stories, chronicles, anecdotes, descriptions and interpretations of the images in the *zócalos*. We were also able to reconstruct stories of the municipality, since every image registers how people in Guatapé are and feel, as part of their collective memory.

The information obtained was compared against documentary sources such as texts from local writers, magazines, newspapers, family photo albums, church records, municipal archives, the school's own archive, and other documents related to the *zócalos*. Among the most important results were the reconstruction of a large number of stories about the *zócalos* and their relationship with the history of Guatapé, the written production generated by the students themselves, and the fact that they were able to handle and do research from different sources of information.

We were also able to have a more direct approach to everyday situations in Guatapé and their relationship with the *zócalos*. This motivated the students' research as part of a renewed

social science pedagogical practice, contributing to solving academic and community problems and establishing co-relationships between different scenarios: the classroom, the school, and the community.

In order to find out about the origin and the histories of the *zócalos* of Guatapé and their specific meaning we conducted interviews with different actors in the community: teachers, owners of houses with *zócalos*, community leaders, shopkeepers, construction workers, students, and tourists (see Chart 1).

Chart 1. Some questions asked in the interviews

What is your opinion of the *zócalos*?

Do you think the *zócalos* are important for the people of Guatapé? Why?

Should the people of Guatapé know the origin and the history of each one of the *zócalos*? Why?

What strategies should be implemented for the divulgation of the history of the *zócalos* among the people and the visitors of Guatapé?

What can you tell us about the *zócalo* in front of your house?

Does the *zócalo* in front of your house have any personal or family meaning, or a meaning for Guatapé?

Why did you choose the motif or the figure featured in your house's *zócalo*? Where did the idea arise?

Do you remember the name of the person who made your house's *zócalo*? Were there other people working in that craft?

Do you know which technique was used in creating your house's *zócalo*? Which materials were used?

How can the school get involved in the divulgation of the history of Guatapé and its *zócalos*?

The images and iconography used in this work were fundamental, since they allowed us to understand, complement, contextualize, and recreate the information obtained through interviews and documentary sources. They also became an instrument that made the teaching of history more attractive and varied for children and young adults.

Photography supports historical research, and it was used as a valuable instrument to collect information. Both the photographic archives taken from family albums and those created by the students in their field trips tell the story of memories, stories, recollections and experiences directly linked to the *zócalos* of Guatapé. By analyzing the photographs, the students were able to identify cultural, socio-economic and political changes and, most of all, an urbanistic transformation revolving around the *zócalo* as an element in the identity of a whole community.

Other documentary sources used were papers and research on the history of the municipality of Guatapé, including the archives of the church of Nuestra Señora del Carmen de Guatapé, bibliographical material from the Municipal Library, flyers published by the Office of Tourism, the Municipal Council's archive, the local newspaper *El Zócalo*, curricula and field diaries of the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School, municipal, departmental and national development plans, recordings of the Peñón de Guatapé Cultural radio station, and videos of the Corpagua TV local television channel,² among others.

Our research question was "How does the use of classroom research based on micro-history as a didactic tool influence the teaching and learning of social science?"

The zócalos of Guatapé

The word *zócalo* has been used for generations in several regions of Colombia to refer to the lower part of a wall of a house. Its main features are that it stands out slightly from the rest of the building, it is painted in a different color from the rest of the wall, and it is made with cement because this material is resistant to humidity, which means that its main purpose is to protect the building.

Starting in 1919, the *zócalo* acquired a special significance for the community of Guatapé, whose people wanted to highlight this element as a particular feature in the architecture of the town, combining it with other elements typical of colonial buildings.

The idea was born from the desire of a person or a family to depict on the outside wall of their house an image or a scene that reflected their everyday life, perhaps with the aim of immortalizing that event. For almost a century, this idea has enjoyed great acceptance among the people of the town, gaining importance and evolving according to the characteristics and historical experiences of the community. It has become an element that recreates in its images the town's events, customs, feelings, landscapes, tastes, projects, or productive activities.

That is why for some years now Guatapé has been known as the "Town of the Zócalos":³ because the façades of the houses of the municipal capital, and some in its rural area, are colorful and decorated with the traditional *zócalos* that show the town's history.

The people of Guatapé regard this element as a sign of originality that makes their town unique. Idárraga (2008) defines Guatapé's *zócalo* as the most significant element in the town's identity, memory and collective construction, and the way in which people communicate their love of their history and territory through meaningful pictorial language.

For the people of Guatapé, the *zócalo* and its significance go beyond a mere image or artistic symbol placed on a wall as part of its architecture: for almost a century, it has represented their identity and contributed to the construction of their historic and cultural memory.

² Corporación Antena Parabólica de Guatapé.

³ In Resolution 23671 of July 31 2007, the Superintendence of Industry and Commerce granted the registered mark "Guatapé, Pueblo de Zócalos" for a period of ten years.

Nowadays, Guatapé is one of the most appealing and frequently visited municipalities in Colombia,⁴ famous for its colorful houses – walls and *zócalos* – that harmonize with its cobblestone streets, its dam and its beautiful natural landscapes.

Around the *zócalos*, veritable works of folk art, are countless traces of the town's distant past, but also of its recent history. Finding the true meaning and explanation of the images in the *zócalos* requires a willingness to learn, a critical eye, and most of all a sense of belonging and the ability to value people's traditions and culture.

Image 2. House on Giraldo Street



Figures that depict the territory's indigenous past and pre-Hispanic archaeological discoveries, kept in Guatapé's History Museum.



Source: Photograph taken by the author, 2016.

The contents and shapes of the *zócalos* represent clearly moments in the history and the evolution of the municipality and its culture, economy, ancestral features, as well as its social and political transformations. Some of their images recreate important local activities such as cattle farming, agriculture, mining, commerce and tourism (see Image 3).

⁴ According to the Spanish newspaper El País of March 29 2016, in its section "El Viajero", Guatapé is one of the 21 most beautiful towns in Colombia. The article mentions, among other things, its stone-paved streets, its colorful *zócalos*, the Peñón de Guatapé mountain and its dam. Retrieved from <<http://www.asenred.com/guatape-entre-los-21-pueblos-mas-bonitos-de-colombia-el-pais/>>

Image 3. Economic activities featured in the zócalos of Guatapé



Source: Photographs taken by the author, 2016.

The *zócalos* also show representations of the townspeople's everyday life, tastes, preferences, family histories, life anecdotes, places with great sentimental, cultural or historical value in the municipality, projects, significant characters, crafts cultural activities, landscapes, flora and fauna of the region, as well as the interculturality resulting from a mix of cultures due to the development of tourism and advertising (see Image 4).

Image 4. Zócalo on the house of Hernando de Jesús Gómez



“Our house’s *zócalo* has a very special meaning for our family because it represents what my father did for more than thirty years in the Holy Week. Everyone in town knows that there, in that *zócalo*, is the person who played Jesus in the Holy Week reenactments for many years” (Sergio Gómez, 2016).

Source: Photograph taken by the autor at Nueva Urbanización, Guatapé, 2016.

The feeling of appropriation of *zócalos* as elements of the townspeople’s identity was strengthened after it was made official, leading to more than 80% of the houses having *zócalos*. The empowering that this cultural manifestation gave the townspeople is reflected in the decoration of the streets and façades of their houses.

The townspeople are aware of and underscore the urgent need of the municipality to acknowledge and appropriate the history of the *zócalos* and the many stories told about them. For this reason, the *zócalo* has become a dynamic tool for both townspeople and tourists to learn about the history of the municipality and its particular features.

Many people in town feel upset when they hear erroneous stories about the *zócalos* told by outsiders who work as tourist guides and are unaware of the true meaning, value and purpose of this element that has strengthened local identity.

Some of the people’s customs that have become part of their cultural roots tend to be forgotten, so they must be transmitted to younger generations to counter the effects of the transformation and adoption of the modern world’s new ways of life, and to adapt their cultural heritage as a resource for their development.

The *zócalos* as a dynamic element in the teaching of social science

Our proposal took into account the fact that the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School serves almost all of the children and teenagers of Guatapé. Thus, the project allows us to link all the cultural processes aimed at reinforcing the concept of identity, such as the knowledge and appropriation of the *zócalo* and other elements that are part of it. For this reason, we suggest using the *zócalos* from now on as a didactic element in the school’s curricula.

As an architectural element and a manifestation of folk art, *zócalos* are a source of identity for the people of Guatapé, and they provide valuable historic contents that can be used to increase knowledge about the local, making social science teaching more dynamic.

After studying the *zócalos*, students can better understand the reality and the life of the municipality, its history, economy, culture, geography and population dynamics, as well as its relationship with the regional and the national. The proposal followed the guidelines of the Ministry of National Education, taking into account the characteristics of the school as well as the students' needs and learning rhythms.

The mission and vision of the school are oriented towards the comprehensive education of children and teenagers, and towards promoting learning according to the characteristics and values of the citizens of Guatapé, aiming for a municipal, departmental and national projection. The institution's educational project also incorporates some components aimed at strengthening of the students' identity.

In turn, the municipality of Guatapé asked the school to become involved in the strengthening of the citizens of Guatapé and the retrieval of its historical memory, arguing that students lacked a sense of belonging towards the community and the elements that are part of it.

Image 5. Zócalo on the house of Luz Anís Díaz



"All my family played musical instruments. This was very special for me, and also for my father-in-law, my sisters-in-law and my husband, because they all played in the band" (Luz Anís Díaz, 2016).

Source: Photograph taken by the author, 2016.

On the other hand, faced with the social science teaching and learning problems, found in most of the country's educational institutions, and specifically the lack of interest shown by secondary school students towards this area of knowledge, it was suggested to incorporate local history as a dynamic strategy in the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School.

The strategy was supported by the curricular guidelines and basic standards of competences of the Ministry of National Education, the basic rights in the learning of social science, the

components of the institution's educational project, the need to strengthen the municipality's youth identity, and the contributions of some authors.

Viewing the school from a transformative perspective implies, first of all, rediscovering aspects that have yielded positive results, and then assessing those that may need to be modified in order to free education from traditionalist models previously established that make students lose interest and have little impact on society.⁵

Incorporating local history in the classroom is important because it allows students to develop communicative competences. For this reason, students were involved in acknowledging key actors in their community, as well as significant places and buildings in the history of the municipality.

Responding to the proposal of the teaching of social science through the research and knowledge of local history required making adjustments in the curricula, reorganizing the minimal compulsory contents. The proposal does not intend, at any time, to overstep the guidelines established by the Ministry of National Education, but rather to rely on them in search of a more dynamic teaching.

Our proposal took into account the contributions of the school's students. An institutional format of area plans was applied in each group, including conceptual areas related to the history of the municipality that motivate students to do research. The aim is to include the proposal as a didactic unit in grades 1 to 11, in each of the four terms of a school year.

This socio-cultural vision of social science leads us to see teaching and learning processes in a framework of true learning, built on meaningful, contextualized experiences, and accompanied by genuine understanding that enable a critical position in the actors of education (MEN, 1998).

Pagés (2009: 4) points out that, despite having every possible tool available, the teaching of social science today is making little impact on young people. This situation demands learning what the task of schools really is in the 21st century, and trying to bring it closer to children and teenagers today.

A common practice in teaching is the magisterial class, which translates literally into "dictating class" or "communicating knowledge", and where the teacher's work consists of presenting contents following textbook guidelines, while students merely adopt a passive attitude in the classroom, without any room for their contributions or interpretations (Vera, 1984: 70). Thus, students lose interest and tend to miss classes.

Considering other practices that orient students to acquire a critical position towards what they are studying requires teachers who are committed to the quality of education, who motivate students to do research, who bolster their skills of "observing and describing social phenomena, classifying, recognizing problems, searching for information, identifying central facts

⁵ See: <<https://bpinformatica.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/la-c3a9tica-del-cuidado.doc>>

and assumptions, formulating hypotheses, developing theoretical models, and applying the theory to other cases" (Álvarez, quoted by Vera, 1984: 70).

Although all methodological strategies applied in the classroom have been significant in each moment in history, working with students today demands a renewal of such practices using, to a greater extent, the tools available to young people to obtain more meaningful, useful, and relevant knowledge.

This work does not intend to minimize the value of traditional teaching and learning methods, but rather to highlight the importance of research methodology as an alternative through which students can be active in the construction of their own knowledge and the solution of problems in their environment and their community.

Several research papers and papers related to social science teaching and learning show the many difficulties still faced by secondary school students. There is an insistence on responding to the needs and expectations of the students within the process of knowledge and development of thought. For this reason, it is important to underscore the contributions of research methodology as a part of class dynamics in search of better quality of education.

In order to foster a pedagogical practice that uses research as its methodology, it is necessary to propose reforms in the contents and ways of teaching that unify the criteria of what should be taught, how it should be taught, and the results intended, by analyzing the students' educational needs in regard to their local and national environment and, therefore, to the globalizing dynamics, since it is clear that education is judged by the results it yields.

Restrepo (2009) refers to classroom research as any educational environment – not necessarily limited to the classroom – where students can learn autonomously. "Students do not receive knowledge processed by the teacher, but search for it in a collaborative atmosphere, getting practice in independent studying, teamwork, and research methods".

Merchán and García (1987) believe that the students' involvement must begin at the design of the project in order to generate a genuine interest in research, since the phenomena studied are continuously present in their lives and they already possess some knowledge when they make their proposals, which can be combined with the ones made by the teacher. Thus, they agree with Restrepo (2009), who believes that the teacher must encourage students to propose research problems or questions.

From these viewpoints we can see that teaching based on research methodology is not an imposition of the teacher on the student to work on a project, but an approach associated with freedom in learning and active participation in its construction.

Based on Merchán and García's methodological proposal, an alternative considered for the development of experience in research in students of the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School was the inclusion of the Operative Plan of Local History, through these aspects:

Presenting the topic. Students are shown the topic to be researched, through any activity, in such a way as to establish a link between previous knowledge and what the research is intended to teach.

Description of the research question or problem. As concisely as possible, students formulate questions that they would be interested in researching. Oriented by the teacher in the presentation, questions considered relevant for the study of the topic are chosen.

Formulation of hypotheses. Based on the idea that students – like any individual – already have ideas about issues related to the research subject, the aim here is to express their own answers to the questions asked, what they know about the topic to be explored.

Resource inventory. In this stage, the students' participation in the design of the research process can be especially active, since they can be creative in defining the route of research, suggesting information sources to obtain data, deciding who or what places are worth visiting, setting timetables for work and establishing data collection modes, among others.

Obtaining data and analyzing documents. Getting the information required from different sources, analyzing its contents in an attempt to find answers to the questions formulated.

Helping students get started in their research work is the teacher's task, and it requires great responsibility, commitment, and dedication. Through the teachers' own actions, a plan must be structured to conduct methodologically organized research work (Monroy, 2013).

Having been offered the opportunity to work on an approach to research with 8th grade students, we first conducted a diagnosis that allowed us to identify the main problems in the municipality. The students were asked to:

1. Speaking with their classmates, identify the main problems in the municipality in regard to culture, economy, population, education, and politics, among others, that would allow them to do an exercise in research and learning about the local.
2. Suggest strategies, methodological tools and sources that might be used to obtain information on the problems detected.
3. Identify actors and/or institutions in the community that could be helpful to collect information on the situation to be researched.
4. Describe the impact that solving such problems would have on the community and school.

Explain how social science classes would be influenced by this kind of practices.

The students' answers to these questions provided us with a first approach and motivation to the research exercise. Among the problems detected were pollution from tourists' garbage,

lack of public parking lots, the need to speak a second language, lack of knowledge about the *zócalos*, and the excessive noise caused by tourists.

Most of the problems detected required budget availability and the interest of public and private institutions in solving them. Therefore, the students chose as a research problem the lack of knowledge about the *zócalos*, after considering that the solution was within their reach, and they made a commitment to finding a solution.

The problem was discussed and analyzed in class, and students concluded that, given Guatapé's position as the "town of the *zócalos*", it was the duty of its inhabitants to learn about their history and to try to reconstruct the stories told about each one of them.

As for the research topic in the area of social science, we want to "learn to do research by doing research" within the classroom, as a classroom-workshop or construction space where the theoretical approach is complemented by a number of problems to be studied and analyzed in sessions or different kinds of practices that lead to establishing pedagogical strategies to approach social knowledge and support meaningful learning (Monroy, 2013).

This kind of proposals to work with students connect pedagogical theory with practice, promoting collaborative work because students perform concrete activities to achieve the goals proposed, and propitiate comprehensive learning that involves – almost without noticing it – different disciplines and areas of knowledge. They also enable continuous interaction between teacher and students through dialogical exchange of knowledge and the use of different sources⁶ and environments of learning and creativity.⁷

In a second moment, students conducted interviews with people in the community who had more knowledge about the *zócalos*. The objective of this activity was to motivate them towards reflecting on the exercise of doing research about what the *zócalos* represent for each person in town and for the municipality in general. The students learned that behind every figure in the *zócalos* of each house there was a story to be discovered.

⁶ The knowledge about the characterization of sources and how to use them is studied in the theory of social science, and later applied in the practice of the research exercise.

⁷ <<http://es.slideshare.net/floras07/proyecto-de-aula-2478829>>

Image 6. Interview with Elkin Darío García



Source: Photograph of the video recorded by eighth grade students, 2015.

A third moment was planned to do research on the stories that could be reconstructed. The exercise was based on oral tradition, using a questionnaire made by the students themselves to obtain specific information about the *zócalos* and their histories.

Teaching the history of the municipality, its characters, important events, changes in architecture, cultural and economic characteristics of its population, thinking and projection, or the *zócalo* and its histories, among many other topics, can be done in the classroom or outside it. The difference lies in the students' participation in the construction of their knowledge, as well as the interest and pleasure with which they approach it.

The characteristics of Guatapé and its *zócalos* allowed us to organize field trips in which the students interacted directly with the sources. Working outside the classroom reinforces historical research, and through their observations the students confronted theories and previous knowledge about the research topic. They were accompanied by a *zocalero*, a *zócalo* designer and builder who guided them and answered their questions.

Image 7. Field trip through Guatapé with students and zocalero



Source: Photographs taken by the author, 2016.

Designing a didactic model based on Guatapé's *zócalos* goes beyond the frontiers of the construction of knowledge through the interpretation of these symbolic elements. The history of cultures has shown that leaving traces of everyday activities may be one their most important legacies to future generations.

The historical contents of Guatapé's *zócalos* allowed us to evaluate the students' ways of acquiring knowledge and competencies through different activities like drawing, photography, poetry, interviews, surveys and group dynamics, among others, that allow for the inclusion of all the students in the teaching and learning process, even those with cognitive or physical disabilities, as was the case of a blind student who participated actively in all the activities, with a high level of interpretation and conceptual analysis.

Seeing the students' interest in learning about the *zócalos*, Nigdan Suárez, one of the town's *zocaleros*, proposed to have workshops with the students of 11th grade on the identity, design and construction of *zócalos*. These workshops were directed by professor Efraín Bonilla in the area of education in the arts, together with the area of social science. The students made sketches and built *zócalos* according to what they learned (see Image 8).

Image 8. Students design and build zócalos

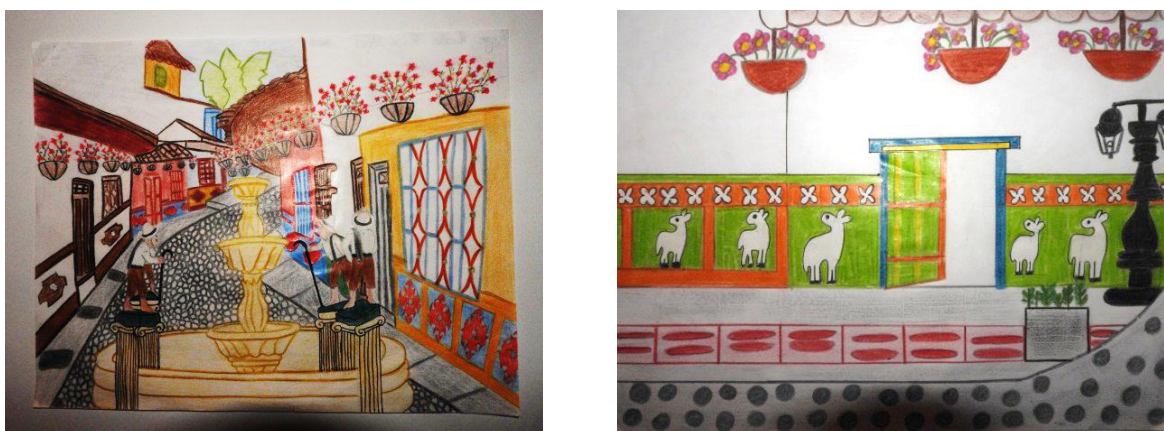


Source: Photographs taken by Efraín Bonilla, 2016.

The alternative of teaching and learning through the *zócalos* allows us to explore the students' creativity and ways of free expression, based on mutual respect and collaborative work. Besides increasing their knowledge about the local, it allows for connections with other areas and interaction with other learning environments.

Drawing is one of the most beautiful and appealing expressions for young people in the municipality. When working with colors in the *zócalos*, a proposal was made to have a drawing contest among the 8th grade students in which they would depict urban landscapes of the municipality, highlighting the colors in its architecture (see Image 9).

Image 9. Colors in the *zócalo* of Nuestra Señora del Pilar School



Left: Drawing by Angie Marcela Morán; Right: drawing by Karol Michel López, 2016.

Conclusions

The research work conducted with the students of the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School of the municipality of Guatapé, department of Antioquia, Colombia, is open to future research proposals, since many of the aspects addressed here could be a starting point for further research from any approach.

Making the research practice part of the teaching of social science made it possible not only to approach existing stories, but also to produce new knowledge by reconstructing through oral history those narratives still unknown, as well as writings about the *zócalos*, regarded as an element of the identity of the people of Guatapé. The exercise enabled a clear, coherent and truthful divulcation of the history of *zócalos*, told by the townspeople themselves.

More than an innovative strategy, reconstructing the history of the municipality and the histories of the *zócalos* through the work with the students became a meaningful experience, because the research objectives pointed towards one of the municipality's most urgent needs, while the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School became an important scenario for young people to start their involvement in the cultural and historical affairs of Guatapé.

Improving the social science teaching and learning process has been a contribution to the aims of this area, which seeks to educate children and teenagers in the competences required to succeed in today's world, with critical awareness and the clear conviction that it is they who must understand and transform their own realities. This work also allowed us to generate pro-

found studies that lead to true experiences of reflective participation, achieving autonomous learning through discovery, which strives to forge and structure active members of the community.

Through dynamic teaching processes based on research and problem solving, a contribution has been made to strengthening social and cultural identity, as well as the creation of values, customs and beliefs, to foster the development of critical judgement, the ability and the liking for the historical exploration of their immediate environment.

What is really complex is not to achieve the aims proposed by the teaching of social science, but to articulate in the same direction all the processes and actors involved in education: students, teachers, school administrators, parents and Ministry of National Education officials, to achieve the impact desired on the educational community.

It is true that students show little interest in studying and spend a lot of time using electronic devices such as tablets and cellphones, but this is just part of the cultural and economic processes of the world in which they live. This is why, through the activities proposed, a more dynamic teaching is oriented towards making better use of these elements as a tool at their disposal for research exercises, since they can be used to record interviews, take photographs, read documents, consult online sources, download files and save the information they themselves create.

Making changes in the social science curricula and including research based on local history projected onto other themes is a way of reinforcing the interest in the improvement of the quality of education. This type of research also allows us to work not only in social science but also to engage other areas of knowledge, as well as their teachers, in search of collaborative work aimed at the same educational goals.

Implementing research motivated by the knowledge of the local in the classroom is one of the most pertinent strategies to strengthen the learning of social science, propitiating in students a true appreciation of their immediate history, because "those who do not know their people have no identity, and those who have no identity do not love their people"⁸

The lack of contextualization often found in educational projects and curricula can be overcome with proposals that orient students towards the knowledge and appreciation of the history of the municipality, and to strengthen their leadership capabilities to participate in solving their own community's problems.

The technique of the interview enabled a closer approach to information, especially through the experiences of the people of Guatapé and the proximity to their house's *zócalos*. It also became a pedagogical element that helped in the construction of knowledge from and out of the classroom, motivating the students' written production.

⁸ Words of professor María Mercedes Molina in her Oral History Seminar.

This work allowed us to observe not only that pedagogical practices are facing a very real change in their theoretical and methodological perspectives, but also that social science can be applied in a broader sense, in which academic discourse, teaching and learning converge harmonically.

A significant part of the results of this work is the systematization of the information collected through interviews, surveys and photographic archives, with the aim of creating a pedagogical instrument – under construction – that can help the community, visitors and students of the Nuestra Señora del Pilar School to learn about the history of the municipality and the particular histories of each one of its *zócalos*. Also, by including local history in the social science curricula, there will be continuity in academic research exercises, as well as an education of students in the knowledge of their geographic environment, so they can be disseminators of their history in scenarios such as El Zócalo Educational Park, Guatapé's History Museum and El Zócalo Square, among others.

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