



“I ask different questions to my students now”: An inquiry into the role of textbooks for the teaching of historical thinking in Basque secondary schools

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ABSTRACT

Starting from an analysis of the Basque competence-based secondary school history textbook *EKI* and the perceptions of teachers using it, these pages aim at investigating how history teachers relate to the textbooks they use in the classroom and the role these teaching materials play in the promotion of deeper historical understanding of their students. The Basque case offers a good opportunity to see how competence-based teaching materials are used to teach historical competences and how they may have affected the teaching of history in Basque secondary schools. Two main research questions are addressed: how this competence-based textbook integrates historical thinking skills and how it affects teachers' understanding of history and teaching practice. The results suggest that theoretical reflections on historical thinking and epistemic questions have not permeated school teaching practices yet; however, the textbook does introduce students into historical thinking concepts and has produced changes in teachers' practices. Besides, this research has detected the interest of further investigating how we deal with historical thinking in the everyday practice of increasingly diverse classrooms.

KEYWORDS

History education, Historical thinking, Historical competencies, Textbooks, Teaching Practices

CITATION

Lamikiz Jauregiendo, A. (2024). “I ask different questions to my students now”: An inquiry into the role of textbooks for the teaching of historical thinking in Basque secondary schools, *Historical Encounters*, 11(2), 23-35. <https://doi.org/10.52289/hej11.203>

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Introduction

The quote in the title comes from one of the teachers interviewed for this research and refers to the effect that using certain textbooks has had on her way of teaching history. Instead of asking simple questions that did not require much more than memorisation and repetition, she started designing activities and asking questions that made students reflect and mobilise their knowledge and skills to solve problems. If the questions we ask our students are an indicator of how and what we teach, we could conclude that the new textbook influenced her teaching. The following article is an attempt to shed light on how history teachers relate to the textbooks they use in the classroom and the role these teaching materials play in the promotion of deeper historical understanding of their students. For this purpose, a case study based on the analysis of a competence-based history textbook used in Basque secondary schools will be presented here.

Parallel to the introduction of competence-based education, consensus about the need to promote more active teaching and learning methods in history - thereby moving beyond memorization of thematic contents to enhance students understanding of history - is growing among the teaching community in Spain. Although probably with a certain delay compared to other countries, studies on epistemic cognition and beliefs are emerging (Miguel-Revilla and Fernández Portela, 2017) and research about historical thinking has thrived in the field of history education (Chaparro Sainz, Felices de la Fuente and Triviño Cabrera, 2020). In contrast to this increasing interest in epistemological questions within the field of history didactics, however, several authors underline the absence of such reflection in the everyday practice of school history (Gómez Carrasco and Rodríguez Pérez, 2017; Miguel-Revilla, Carril and Sánchez-Agustí, 2017). Taking this apparent absence of reflection in everyday school practice as the point of departure, a further aim of the research presented here is to investigate teachers' views and the use they make of textbooks in order to see to what extent they introduce epistemic questions and the promotion of historical thinking in their classrooms.

The latest Education Law in Spain, LOMLOE, was approved in 2020 and, in accordance with the decentralized Spanish education system, it has been completed by a Basque decree in 2023, defining a new legal framework that has gone a step further towards the introduction of competence-based learning. The Basque case has been chosen here because it provides an example of competence-based educational materials (*EKI project*) that were first implemented in 2013 and offer a good opportunity to see how such materials are used to teach historical competences and how they may have affected the teaching of history in Basque secondary schools. This empirical case study, based on the analysis of the *EKI* competence-based textbook and interviews with teachers who use it in their classrooms, poses two main research questions: how this competence-based textbook integrates historical thinking skills and how it affects teachers' understanding of history and teaching practice. Answering these questions will help us clarify to what extent these teaching materials offer the necessary resources to overcome traditional history teaching based mainly on the reception of information and its memorization and are thus capable of developing a type of teaching that promotes a deeper understanding of history and students' skills to build their own representations of the past.

Historical competences, historical thinking and the promotion of students' deeper understanding of history

In an article about students' learning strategies in history, Ioannou and Iordanou (2020) mention that students do not hold mature epistemic beliefs in history and therefore tend to memorise historical facts instead of engaging in critical thinking. In the case of Spanish schools, the popular belief that identifies knowing history with memorizing facts, concepts and dates is widely spread, and consequently Spanish textbooks and teaching practices do not seem to promote a deeper understanding of this discipline (Miralles, Molina and Ortuño, 2011; Sáiz, 2013; Gómez Carrasco and Miralles, 2015). The evolution of research in history education in recent decades does not seem to have had a significant effect on the way history is taught and learnt in schools; learners

have gone from memorizing political content and data to memorizing historical interpretations, but school history does not seem to promote autonomous thinking among students (Gómez Carrasco and Rodríguez Pérez, 2017). There seems to be little room in school history for reflection on epistemological questions and how historical knowledge is achieved.

Epistemic cognition and epistemic beliefs about history are not widely-used terms in the context of history teaching in Spain. Terms such as *pensar la historia* or *pensar históricamente* (think historically), however, are quite common when reflecting about what history is and how we know what we know about the past. As mentioned earlier, interest about historical thinking in the field of history education research in Spain is growing and there is increasing awareness of the need to promote a model of history teaching that takes epistemological conceptions into account and introduces the methods of the historian and the complexity of historical time into the classroom, making students aware of the construction of historical discourse (Gómez Carrasco and Rodríguez Pérez, 2017).

But these historical thinking skills need to be taught and learnt (Wineburg, 2001). When confronted with the need to improve students' historical knowledge, several authors describe developmental models of epistemic cognition in history and refer to the idea of progression, showing that students can be trained to achieve a deeper understanding of history. These developmental models describe a progression from the naïve identification of history with a fixed past to the more nuanced epistemological ideas of a knower that acknowledges the possibility of multiple interpretations of the past and which uses the methods of the discipline to evaluate historical accounts (Maggioni, 2010; Stoel et al. 2017). Previously, Lee and Shemilt (2003) had distinguished 'progression' from 'aggregation' to show that progress in history is more than an increase in the amount of information students remember. According to their research, as children grow their ideas about the past change and their understanding of history and the past becomes more complex, hand in hand with the work on second-order concepts. In this sense, Shemilt's research in the early 1980s about the implementation of *School History Project* suggested that students who had worked with teaching materials that introduced training in what would be later called 'second-order concepts' understood better the nature of history than those who had used other materials (Domínguez Castillo, 2015). Using materials that introduce students into the historical thinking concepts described by Seixas and Morton (2013) or the historical competences described by Domínguez Castillo (2015) would thus contribute to the progression of students' historical understanding. Turning Ioannou and Iordanou's above-mentioned argument around, it could be argued that promoting activities that train students' historical thinking helps them engage with epistemological questions and acquire more advanced epistemic beliefs about history. As Domínguez Castillo (2015) affirms, thinking historically requires having knowledge of the past, but also understanding of how this knowledge is built: working with second-order concepts or historical thinking concepts requires reflection on the way knowledge is acquired as well as the development of cognitive skills that involve a certain degree of meta-cognitive reflection. Hence the interest in training historical thinking skills to enhance students' epistemic beliefs about history.

In fact, the case study presented here hints at incipient changes in this direction, partly at least related to the implementation of competence-based curricula and the creation of new teaching materials. In the new history curriculum, traditional thematic contents have become less common, and the teaching of history is committed to training the strategies and tools specific to the discipline (LOMLOE, 2020; Basque decree 77/2023). In line with this, both Sáiz (2013) and Domínguez Castillo (2015) insist that the main contribution that history can make to the new competence-based framework lies in the development of historical competences, which are directly connected to historical thinking concepts. According to Domínguez Castillo, historical competences include aspects linked to substantive knowledge, such as explaining historically the events of the past, but they also incorporate more methodological knowledge directly connected to the ability to think historically, such as the use of historical evidence and the understanding of the logic of historical knowledge.

When it comes to defining historical thinking, Seixas and Morton are the main references in the Spanish context (Chaparro Sainz, Felices de la Fuente and Triviño Cabrera, 2020). According to them, the development of historical-thinking competences is connected to the progression of students' ability to think about how historians transform the past into history so that they can begin to construct history themselves. The aim is not just to memorise facts, but to approach history critically, understanding how historians research and use data to write historical accounts and interpretations (Seixas and Morton, 2013). Along these lines, Sáiz and López Facal (2015) affirm that school history should integrate, in a balanced way, knowledge *of* history and *about* history: learning history does not only consist of knowing substantive content, but above all it should involve being familiar with and knowing how to use second-order concepts, which are specific to the production of historical knowledge. The expression *pensar históricamente* (thinking historically) emphasizes the acquisition of cognitive skills typical of the discipline which are necessary to adequately understand the information we have about the past; that is, it refers both to knowing what happened and how we know what happened (Gómez Carrasco and Rodríguez Pérez, 2017).

In addition to this, both VanSledright (2004) and Santisteban (2010) identify similar abilities related to historical thinking skills, which point to the knowledge of the process through which historical interpretations of the past are built. For these authors, to advance in their historical knowledge students should understand that the development of their historical competence involves their investigating and answering historical questions based on sources. Working with sources becomes central in this process: evaluating them and contrasting those that may suggest different or even opposing perspectives to draw conclusions and build interpretations based on evidence. Students should understand that the result of this work is an account that tries to explain the past in a narrative form. This is work that requires critical thinking skills, as well as understanding that historians reconstruct the past based on the questions they have in the present, and then find answers to build their own interpretations.

If the aim of school history is that students obtain a more nuanced and sophisticated perspective about what we know about the past and how we know it, then it is fundamental to train students in historical thinking. This can serve to overcome their passive role as mere recipients of historical data, enabling them to build their own interpretations starting from source work (VanSledright 2004). By doing this work, students will have the opportunity to reflect on the fact that historical knowledge is not a fixed set of explanations but rather the product of evidence-based interpretations that change according to the different perspectives and the new questions we pose.

It is worth looking, therefore, at the extent to which teaching materials incorporate work on historical competences and historical thinking concepts and whether they help teachers promote students' progress towards more developed epistemological ideas about history. Nowadays, textbooks continue to be the main teaching materials in our history classrooms and should be taken into consideration if we want to explain to what extent deeper historical understanding is trained in history lessons. Martínez, Valls and Pineda (2009) stress the traditional role of textbooks as mediators of teaching and their presence in the everyday work of both teachers and students, which by itself justifies our interest in studying them. But these authors also insist on the need to better understand how teachers relate to and use them in their everyday practice. In our case, the structure and activities of the textbook analysed may provide strategies and tools to train historical competences, but whether this happens will depend on teachers' intentions and the use they make of the textbook.

Contribution of competence-based textbooks and teachers' practice to the promotion of historical thinking in Basque secondary schools

Sources and methodology

This enquiry is centred both on the extent to which textbooks have integrated teaching methodologies that support the promotion of historical thinking skills -thus contributing to training students to adopt more advanced epistemic beliefs-, as well as on whether and how these textbooks affect teachers' everyday work in the classroom. For this purpose, the Basque history textbook *EKI*, used for the second year of compulsory secondary education with 13–14-year-old students, and teachers' views will be analysed.

After completing a comparative analysis of Spanish and English history schoolbooks, Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco (2018) concluded that Spanish textbooks generally demand very little, asking simple questions that can be answered with a term, a date, or a very short text; the clue is usually in the text itself, very close to the question. The uncritical repetition of facts prevails over developing more complex cognitive operations; more creative and challenging activities that might guide students to formulate their thinking and build their own knowledge are less common.

This is somewhat surprising considering that competence-based education was introduced into Spain a decade ago, and at least in the Basque autonomous community teaching materials and training have long been available for teachers working in competence-based methodologies. This is why I decided to investigate the situation in the Basque context, and after analysing and comparing several textbook series, one officially approved textbook has been chosen here to see the extent to which the situation described by Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco applies to the Basque context. This book was chosen because, following the new curriculum, it claims to take competence-based education as a framework and is one of the most widely used in Basque schools. It is part of the wider competence-based educational project '*EKI*', developed by the association of Basque schools (*Ikastolen Elkarte*), and it is used by most member schools as well as some other schools in the Basque provinces. Furthermore, it is probably the most innovative textbook in the sense that unlike other materials which are still predominantly content based and whose structure renders prominence to the informative text, *EKI* textbooks are characterised by a completely different arrangement of information and activities.

An analysis of the structure of the book was carried out, followed by an analysis of the teaching activities. The model used by Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco (2018), which defined a classification of the type of activities, the cognitive level they require and the presence of first and second order concepts, was adapted to complete this analysis. Moreover, as shown in the tables, the results obtained were compared to Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco's results, since both studies deal with textbooks designed for the first years of compulsory secondary education.

In addition to this, semi-structured interviews were carried out with five teachers using the analysed textbook and one teacher trainer involved in its creation. Interviewees work in four different schools and were selected according to their experience and academic degrees. Four of them are experienced and have been teaching for more than 9 years, having used different teaching materials; the two less experienced teachers have been teaching for less than 3 years and do not have experience working with different textbooks. Three of the interviewees are trained historians whereas the rest have degrees in other areas of social science. Transcripts were analysed following a thematic analysis approach, identifying and defining specific key themes. This research has followed the ethical standards of the Ethics Committee for Research Related to Human Beings (CEISH) of the University of the Basque Country.

Discussion of results

How does the EKI competence-based textbook integrate historical thinking skills?

The structure of the textbook is the first innovation worth commenting on here. In this textbook, informative texts are rather scarce and not too long. Instead, the book is organized following a succession of longer activities centred on different historical thinking abilities. If there is a need for further information, the book sends students to search elsewhere, usually in previously identified digital sources. The thematic and conceptual content is not structured around chronologically organized information texts that students must read, summarize and memorise, but rather focuses on the procedures of history as a discipline and is structured following the procedures needed to develop project-based learning. In the specific *EKI* unit analysed here, the complexity of cause-consequence relationships and multi-perspectivity constitute the axis around which contents are presented. There is an 'initial phase' with some activities to delve into previous knowledge where students are presented with a challenge, a 'development phase' where they acquire the necessary contents to face it, and a 'final phase' where students apply what they have learnt. Memorizing a ready-made interpretation is clearly insufficient with this kind of approach; students are expected to develop their critical thinking skills, learn to think historically and create their own explanations. Besides, activities dealing with planning, teamwork strategies, metacognition and self-assessment are always inserted in-between activities.

Regarding the type of activities (see table 1), compared to the results obtained by Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco (2018) in their comparative analysis of Spanish and English textbooks, the low percentage of short questions in the *EKI* textbook is quite significant. This is probably due to the scarcity of informative and explanatory texts to focus on. The number of questions that require objective information also stands out: in many activities students are asked to find objective information about historical events, processes and their protagonists, thus confirming the importance given to substantive knowledge – the knowing *of* history. But unlike in the other textbooks, students are required to search for the information, select it and work on it, instead of just reading it in the textbook. Furthermore, these activities are often combined with others where students are asked to create texts, even short ones. This is connected to the structure of the book, which has prioritised the active role of students finding, assessing and commenting on information in order to create new information, rather than simply reading long informative texts. Working with images and commenting on short texts, both activities that require developing an active role and critical thinking skills of students, are quite present in this textbook. The lack of essay type activities compared to the textbooks analysed by Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco is also worthy of note.

Table 1

Type of activities

Type of activity	Spain (%)	England (%)	EKI textbook (%)
Short question	50.9	31.8	1.9
Exercises with figures/images	20.7	19.1	15
Questions requiring objective information	6.8	1.6	26.4
Commentary of text/images	4.5	9	15
Essay	5.5	26.9	1.9
Creation	5.4	10.4	26.4
Searching for information	6.2	1.4	13.2

(* data for Spain and England comes from Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco (2018))

As for the cognitive level required to complete the activities (see table 2), even if the *EKI* textbook does not reach the number of activities included in levels 2 and 3 of the English textbooks analysed by Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco, it is clearly closer to them than the traditional Spanish textbooks. There are still many activities requiring a lower cognitive engagement, but the weight of level 3 activities is remarkably higher compared to the other Spanish textbooks. Activities in *EKI* are longer and more challenging; although some shorter questions that merely require identifying and repeating information may be found within the activities, most of them require comprehension, comparison, establishing connections, making hypotheses, and building critical opinion regarding the interpretation of events.

Table 2

Cognitive level

Cognitive level required	Skills	Spain (%)	England (%)	<i>EKI</i> textbook (%)
1	locate, repeat, memorise	61	4.9	20.8
2	Define, relate, summarise	34.8	45.8	41.6
3	Analyse, evaluate, apply, create	4.2	49.3	37.5

(*) data for Spain and England comes from Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco (2018)

Finally, regarding the presence of first and second-order concepts (see table 3), the weight of first-order concepts is still considerable in the case of the *EKI* textbook and seems to be coherent with the number of questions requiring objective information. However, more than half of the activities proposed (57.6 %) deal with second order or historical thinking concepts, and among them cause-and-effect relationships and historical perspectives seem to predominate. In both cases the percentages are higher than in the Spanish and English textbooks studied by Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco. Historical relevance and the ethical dimension, on the contrary, are not sufficiently trained in any of the textbooks. The relatively low weight of source work (10.1%) is noteworthy considering the relevance given to this kind of activities by teachers using the *EKI* textbook.

Table 3

First and Second Order Concepts

Concept		Spain (%)	England (%)	<i>EKI</i> textbook (%)
First order	Chronology	5.3	2.5	3.4
	Conceptual/factual	72.4	17.3	39
Second order	Historical relevance	2.2	5.5	3.4
	Sources/historical evidence	9.8	31.7	10.1
	Change and continuity	1.3	14.6	8.5
	Cause and effect	4.3	12.1	15.3
	Historical perspective	1.8	13.4	18.6
	Ethical dimension	2.8	2.8	1.7

(*) data for Spain and England comes from Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco (2018)

We can conclude that the textbook analysed here offers the opportunity for students to work on historical-thinking concepts and to deepen their understanding of history. The degree to which these will be trained, however, depends very much on the priorities and choices of the teachers.

Teachers' views about this textbook and how it affects their understanding of history and their teaching practice.

As we have seen so far, teachers' views are fundamental in understanding how the rest of the pieces of our puzzle fit together; their beliefs about history have implications for how they will teach in the future (Maggioni, VanSledright and Alexander, 2009; Maggioni, 2010), as well as how they will use the books when they teach. The following paragraphs present some tentative ideas drawn from my ongoing research on Basque teachers' views about their teaching practice.

Regarding their conception of history, all teachers rejected the idea of history as identified with a fixed past and defined it as the scientific knowledge of past events. They agreed that the aim of history is to explain the evolution of societies over time and insisted on its interpretative character, based on evidence obtained through scientific methods. A definition that, even if simplified, reminds us of the nuanced or sophisticated epistemological beliefs about history proposed by scholars such as Stoel et al. (2017). Accordingly, teachers declared that they wanted pupils to understand the complexity of past societies and that they become aware of the existence of multiple perspectives, and above all, that students learn to interpret sources critically. Teachers tended to prioritize goals connected to the methods of history - critical thinking, reasoning and building their own opinions, working with information, dealing with causes and consequences, identifying past and present connections - as well as attitudes such as respecting diversity and developing sensitivity and responsibility to social problems.

Teachers did not explicitly refer to epistemological questions about history, neither did they discuss historical thinking concepts; they do not seem to have a comprehensive theoretical knowledge about them. Only the teachers with training as historians identified the presence of historical thinking concepts or second-order concepts in the textbook, even if they did not specifically refer to them as such. The textbook introduces historical thinking concepts in the activities and teachers acknowledged their importance in practice when they valued positively activities dealing with cause and effect, multiple perspectives, source work or connections between past events and present society. Even if historical thinking was not expressly mentioned, their answers suggest an awareness of the main historical thinking abilities identified by research in history didactics.

Regarding competence-based education, all interviewees underlined the active role of students when mobilizing their knowledge and abilities to face everyday challenges they encounter, and three of them were able to give a fairly accurate definition of what they understand as competences and to identify the contribution of competence-based education to the *EKI* textbooks. However, teachers were not able to identify specific historical competences: four teachers connected historical competences to what Domínguez Castillo (2015) calls *substantive knowledge* about history, that is, giving historical explanations of the past; another teacher connected historical competences with civic and intercultural competences; and only one of the teachers with a degree in history was able to give a more accurate answer, connecting historical competences to historical thinking concepts such as the critical interpretation of sources, establishing cause-effect relationships, past and present connections.

Regarding the use they make of the textbook, all teachers confirmed that they follow the methodology and guidelines proposed in the textbook when they use it in the classroom. However, they also declared that they often need to make adaptations. These adaptations consisted of providing extra information about the context to give students a red thread around which to organize and articulate the contents they were learning. Teachers have commented that the structure of the book makes it difficult for students to understand what they are learning, probably because it does not match their expectations of a book organized around long

chronologically ordered explanatory texts. Two teachers mentioned that in the particular case of the students who work with the digital version of the book, they perceive the activities as separate compartments and need help to make connections and see the whole image. Teachers also mentioned how they tried to complete the information given by the textbook, making mind-maps and timelines with their students to help them understand notions of historical time (sequencing, cause-effect, past-present connections). In other cases, the adaptations were an answer to the need to deal with diversity in the classroom, sometimes by providing materials which students could understand better - graphic and visual sources, short videos, summaries- or simplifying the information and activities from the textbook. Dealing with diversity and the lack of an inclusive approach of textbooks was quite present in the answers of the more experienced teachers, and two of them mentioned that they receive training to introduce the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in their teaching. One of the more experienced teachers commented that she tries to adapt the materials and bring different proposals into the classroom, adapting the tasks to the different cognitive levels of students, in an attempt to offer scaffolding for all of them to improve their abilities.

As we saw in the first part of this article, sourcework is one of the main historical thinking skills and the key to understanding the interpretative nature of history, but it is also one of the most difficult to teach and learn. However, all interviewed teachers have agreed that this is one of the main contributions of this textbook and a skill they insist on training. Even if in the analysed unit sourcework was not so significant, teachers have shown their appreciation for the inclusion of numerous and varied sources in the *EKI* textbooks, especially the attempt to challenge students with sources representing different perspectives. Two teachers have also commented on the difficulties that this implies for students in the lower levels of secondary education: they struggle with primary sources due to the language used in them and sometimes get confused if sources contradict each other.

"The textbook presents many primary sources, but this is quite challenging for students. As I mentioned earlier, the multiple perspectives presented about a battle, describing it from one or the other perspective, or what the process of colonization implied for the different people, who won, who lost... I mean, to see this polyhedric image, it is quite difficult for them" (T5 experienced teacher)

Regarding the impact of this textbook in their teaching, especially the three more experienced teachers were able to give more accurate information, probably because they have previously used other more traditional textbooks. They mentioned two of the Spanish textbooks analysed by Martínez Hita and Gómez Carrasco (2018), Santillana and Vicens Vives, and explained that those books had too many description and explanatory texts, and that it was clear that they aimed at transmission of knowledge rather than at the creation of new knowledge by students. The *EKI* textbook, on the contrary, reduces the incidence of rote learning and promotes their active role. According to the teachers, the activities aim at training different competences and students are required to search for information, interpret it critically, comment, argue and create their own interpretations. Students are slowly building the contents they are supposed to learn, and the book does not provide them with a ready-made explanation from the beginning. Moreover, focus is rather on the skills they acquire, not so much on the number of facts they are able to memorise.

"Well, as I mentioned earlier, they used to memorise data or theory. But now, they learn by doing, by drawing up diagrams, by understanding the timelines... students are able to cope with the task. It may not be important to know the exact years of the medieval conflict in Navarre, because it can be found on the web at present. So, we've had to accept that too, and we've seen that students can give a critical opinion on a text, find and organize the right information, express comparisons or cause-effect relationships..." (T1 experienced teacher)

One of the teachers insisted that she tries to limit the time for explanations and gives more time for students to do the activities on their own. Moreover, another teacher stressed the fact that these textbooks promote students' autonomy, since they include self-assessment and planning

activities, which allow students to observe their evolution and make the necessary improvements to progress in their learning.

Besides, the changes in the way teachers assess the learning of their students are worth commenting on. Two of the most experienced teachers affirmed that following the methodology of this textbook had changed the way they assess the work of their students, which significantly indicates they have changed the way they teach.

"What I consider important to teach has changed: I used to give more weight to content, I still think it is important, but now I value more the understanding, the ability of students to produce their own interpretations, their ability to work with information and follow the procedures of a historian. The test models I design now, for example, have nothing to do with the ones I used to design. I ask different questions to my students now. I want them to compare and connect ideas, to apply what they have learnt to other cases" (T4 experienced teacher)

When asked about the effect these changes have on their students, all teachers have commented that students are not especially fond of this textbook and have given several reasons for this scepticism. Students often complain to them that they do not learn much with this book, which teachers have connected with students' expectations about what learning history is. Students still want a "fixed and true version of the past, what really happened", something they can learn by heart and are thus unable to identify what teachers want them to learn (T4 experienced teacher). This difference in the understanding of what history is about was identified by all teachers, and hints at a lack of reflection about epistemological questions in history lessons. There is a clear difference between what teachers think they should do when they teach history and what students expect from their lessons, and the lack of epistemological reflection may be a reason for that. Connected to this, the difficulties students face in completing some of the activities are another reason for their rejection: rote learning is easier for them than doing activities which require higher cognitive abilities. Many students feel more confident with activities that just require reading and reproducing information than with those which require research, critical reading and evaluation of sources, reflection, or argumentation.

Conclusions

Based on our interest to explore whether and how *EKI* competence-based textbooks help students learn not only a set of contents but also a way of thinking and reflecting on what and how we know about the past, this article has tried to look not just into the kind of activities presented in the *EKI* textbook but also into the way teachers work with it.

As was shown in the first part of this article, epistemic questions and the relevance of training historical thinking skills are gaining traction in Spanish history education research. However, these pages suggest that theoretical reflections do not seem to have permeated teaching practices in school yet. Although of course they reflect on epistemological issues, epistemic cognition is not a term used among schoolteachers. History teachers are usually trained historians and social scientists with a brief pedagogic education; they have advanced epistemic beliefs about history, but they are not sufficiently trained to transmit this knowledge to their students, often not even aware that enhancing students' epistemic understanding about history constitutes an aim they should pursue.

On the other hand, historical thinking does not seem to be a term with which Basque history teachers are much familiarized. Seixas and Morton's concepts are well known for researchers in history didactics, but not so much for schoolteachers. Although teachers seem to be aware of the importance of certain abilities connected to historical thinking, they do not have a comprehensive understanding of this concept and thus do not train their students in a thorough way about it. The analysis of the activities in the *EKI* textbook has shown that, although the number of activities dealing with second order concepts is important, only some of the historical thinking skills are

trained systematically, while others still require more work. Multiple perspectives, cause-consequence relationships and work with sources are the most trained skills and the ones teachers have mentioned most frequently, while continuity and change, historical significance and the ethical dimension are given less attention. Thus, at least to some extent historical thinking skills are trained in the textbook, the activities included are more demanding and teachers are aware of their importance, which marks a substantial advance compared to the situation of Spanish textbooks described in the first pages of this article.

However, teachers have pointed out two important issues: first, interviewees refer to difficulties to deal with diversity in the classroom and feel they need training to adapt the teaching of historical thinking skills to those students who struggle more to learn them. The need to consider the diversity of students is a topic seldom addressed in the scholarly literature dealing with historical thinking and textbook analysis. Theoretical reflections consider ideal students who can be trained in historical thinking skills as a way of introducing them into questions such as what history is and how we gain historical knowledge, but teachers have identified the difficulties of such task in practice. Rote learning is easier for the students struggling with activities that require more developed cognitive levels, but the aim of school history should be that all students improve their historical thinking skills. Thus, more research and concrete teaching proposals about how to deal with historical thinking in diverse classrooms are needed.

And second, many students still identify history with rote learning of fixed narratives, and this becomes an obstacle for teachers trying to implement competence-based methodologies. This study suggests that including activities that make higher cognitive demands and historical thinking skills is probably not enough to help students develop their epistemic beliefs about history. More explicit reflections on the nature of the discipline of history and how we acquire knowledge *about* history should gradually be introduced in the classroom. This, at the same time, requires further training of teachers.

To the question of whether using the *EKI* textbook has affected the way teachers work, interviewees have given substantial evidence about how positively they value promoting students' autonomy and ability to build their own knowledge by training historical competences. Of course, they need to adapt the materials, but the fact that some of them affirm that they have changed their way of assessing indicates that something has changed in their way of teaching.

The fact that the study was focused on one textbook and the small number of interviewees participating constitute the main limits to the representativeness of this study. Further research should extend the number of textbooks analysed as well as the sample of interviewees. Moreover, the need to complete this inquiry with classroom observation and the inclusion of students' perceptions have become evident throughout this research.

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