



The Concept of Composition Instruction in the Žofková–Tožička Textbook within the European Context of Interwar Reform Pedagogy

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of composition instruction in the Pracovní učebnice jazyka českého (1933–1938) by Lidmila Žofková and Bohumil Tožička and situates it within the broader European context of interwar reform pedagogy. Drawing on all four volumes of the textbook series, the analysis argues that this work represents one of the most substantial Czech efforts to implement modern didactic principles inspired by pragmatism, pedocentrism, and the activity school movement. The comparative framework focuses on principles central to reform pedagogy, including pragmatism, child centredness, authentic text work, and activity based learning, which link the textbook to the ideas of John Dewey, Ellen Key, Leo Tolstoy, and Adolphe Ferrière. The textbooks systematically develop pupils' communicative competence through text based activities, observation, text transformation, and the integration of composition with reading, reflecting modern principles of language skills integration. The study also highlights the educational aims of the textbooks, which mirror the democratic and ethical ideals of interwar Czechoslovakia. The analysis demonstrates that the Žofková–Tožička series is a significant example of how Czechoslovak education creatively adapted European reform pedagogical ideas and how these influences shaped the teaching of composition. The study contributes to international scholarship by offering a rare Central European case that illustrates how global reform pedagogical ideas were translated into mother tongue instruction. The research is being conducted at the Department of the Czech Language, Faculty of Education, Charles University, and was supported by the Charles University Grant Agency (GA UK), project no. 606525.

Keywords: active school movement, composition instruction, Czech language didactics, European pedagogical influences, reform pedagogy

1. Introduction

This study explores the textbook series by L. Žofková and B. Tožička as a key example of how the didactic principles of the European active school movement were applied to interwar Czechoslovak education.

1.1. Historical Background of Czechoslovak Education

Between 1918 and 1939, Czechoslovak education¹ gradually shifted away from the traditional Herbartian model—which relied on transmissive teaching, memorization, and a strict focus on grammar. Instead, new approaches emerged that centered on pupil activity, textual analysis, process-oriented writing, and integrated language skills. This development, documented by several Czech scholars (Čornejová et al., 2020; Urbanovská, 1996; Kořa & Rýdl, 1992; Kasper et al., 2018), significantly reshaped how composition and communication were taught during the interwar years. It represents a major turning point in the history of Czech language didactics and reflects broader educational transformations across Europe.

J. Průcha (1978, p. 31) described the reforms of the 1930s as a truly formative milestone that influenced Czech language instruction over the long term. Analyzing this period uncovers the roots of contemporary curricula and highlights enduring pedagogical challenges. Furthermore, J. Kořa and K. Rýdl (1992, p. 16) emphasize that understanding these historical shifts is essential for placing Czechoslovakia within the broader European educational tradition.

1.2. International Influences and Democratic Citizenship

During this period, Czechoslovak educators actively engaged with international reform movements, closely following developments in Germany, the United States, Scandinavia, France, and Switzerland. The school was viewed as a vital tool for shaping democratic citizens (Key, 1912, pp. 150–165)—a perspective that strongly informed the textbooks of Žofková and Tožička.

1.3. Transnational Context and Curricular Influences

The educational reforms of the 1930s mirror broader transnational shifts in the development of pedagogy, language didactics, and composition instruction. As Schultz (1999) demonstrates in her study on the history of writing instruction, adopting progressive models required a fundamental departure from rigid, formalistic rhetorical traditions in favor of child-centered learning. Under the influence of European reform pedagogy, textbook design began to reject the passive imitation of adult writing styles, prioritizing the child's own expressive and communicative needs. Schultz (1999) notes that these historical progressive movements anticipated modern writing practices by institutionalizing student-centered methods such as free writing, task-driven independent reflection, and peer editing.

This international evolution aligns closely with the various foreign influences that reshaped Czechoslovak language didactics during the interwar years. Throughout the 1920s, composition pedagogy was heavily influenced by transnational ideas. Most notable was the American approach to writing instruction, which encouraged educators to emphasize student independence, prioritize actual text production over mechanical reproduction, and move away from strictly literary norms. Concurrently, European theoretical impulses arrived from France, specifically through Ferdinand Brunot's integrated language instruction (*slovesnost*) and Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism—the conceptual framework that later grounded the functional-structural linguistics of the Prague Linguistic Circle (Šmejkalová, 2015, pp. 19–20).

¹ In the interwar period, Czechoslovakia operated a two-tier system of compulsory education: elementary schools (*obecné školy*) and lower secondary civic schools (*měšťanské školy*), which provided general education for pupils aged 11–14 and formed a bridge between primary schooling and vocational or academic pathways. Despite their central role in the First Republic's educational system, this type of school remains relatively unknown in international research. The *Pracovní učebnice* by Žofková and Tožička was created specifically for this level and offers a compelling example of how principles of European reform pedagogy were implemented in the Czech context.

In terms of educational policy, these pedagogical changes were shaped by broader democratic and geopolitical goals. The new curricula introduced in Czechoslovakia in 1933 were explicitly designed to help students develop moral self-governance and foster democratic ideals, while guarding against intolerant nationalism. This ideological foundation placed interwar Czechoslovakia within a shared Central European progressive space; similar curricular objectives were established in the Austrian curricula of 1928 and the Prussian curricula of 1925, whereas contemporary French guidelines from 1920 lacked such explicit democratic directives (Kepřta, 1933, p. 25). The inclusion of collaborative text evaluation and structured tasks in the *Pracovní učebnice* series by Žofková and Tožička directly reflects this global curricular movement. This demonstrates that interwar Czech didactics actively implemented transnational democratic and linguistic trends within everyday school materials.

2. Materials and Methods

This study draws on the author's doctoral research into interwar civic school textbooks and builds upon previously published work (Kronovetrová Fingerová, 2024; 2025).² It examines the approach to composition instruction in the four-volume series *Pracovní učebnice jazyka českého* (1933–1938) by L. Žofková and B. Tožička within the context of European reform pedagogy.

2.1 Research Questions

The study addresses three primary research questions:

1. How is composition instruction structured in this textbook series?
2. To what extent does this design reflect the principles of reform pedagogy (Dewey, Key, Tolstoy, Ferrière)?
3. How were these international influences adapted to the Czech curricular framework and the specific environment of civic schools?

2.2 Methodological Framework

The research combines internal and external textbook criticism with qualitative content analysis. Internal criticism examines text structures, task design, and linguistic material. External criticism places these materials within their historical, curricular, and socio-pedagogical contexts. The comparative framework evaluates analytical categories derived from the active school movement, pragmatism, pedocentrism, and modern mother-tongue didactics (Dewey; Key; Tolstoy; Ferrière).

2.3 Research Sample and Historical Context

The research sample consists of the complete four-volume series *Pracovní učebnice jazyka českého* (1933–1938). Emerging from the educational reform movements of the 1930s, this series represents the most significant practical application of reform pedagogy in interwar Czechoslovakia. L. Žofková collaborated with V. Příhoda,³ drawing on insights from the

² This research is conducted at the Department of the Czech Language, Faculty of Education, Charles University, under the supervision of Prof. Martina Šmejkalová, Ph.D., and was supported by the Charles University Grant Agency (GA UK), project no. 606525.

³ Václav Příhoda (1889–1979), a key figure of Czechoslovak reform pedagogy, significantly influenced interwar education through his American-inspired concept of the global method and individualized instruction. The School of Higher Pedagogical Studies in Prague (*Škola vysokých studií pedagogických v Praze*), established in 1921, served as a crucial academic platform where Příhoda led influential research seminars. These seminars became the theoretical laboratory for the 1930s curricular reform commissions. Lidmila Žofková actively participated in this reform environment, translating the laboratory experimental findings and progressive psychological principles directly into the instructional task architecture of the *Pracovní učebnice* series.

seminars at the School of Higher Pedagogical Studies in Prague, official reform committees, and her own teaching practice in civic schools.

2.4 Data Analysis and Research Reliability

The qualitative content analysis applied a combined deductive-inductive coding system. The primary categories included: (a) the type of source material (literary versus authentic text), (b) the objective of the task (reproduction, transformation, or original creation), and (c) the level of pupil activity (independent work versus collaborative peer evaluation).

To ensure reliability, a random 20% sample of tasks was recoded by the author after four weeks, confirming high consistency over time (intra-coder reliability). Validity was enhanced through data triangulation, cross-referencing textbook findings with historical primary sources—specifically the 1932 curricula and contemporary educational texts—as well as existing empirical research (Debická, 1996; Hauser, 1969; Hubáček, 1983; Jelínek, 1972; Šmejkalová, 2015). Following Hloušková's (2001) historical-comparative approach, external criticism focused on authorship and official approval processes by the Ministry of Education (MŠANO), while internal criticism analyzed textual structures.

2.5 Limitations and Potential Bias

Two limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, text analysis alone cannot verify the reality of classroom practice (the enacted curriculum); interwar teachers may have used these progressive materials in a traditional manner. Second, selecting the highly acclaimed Žofková and Tožička series introduces a potential selection bias, which might lead to an overestimation of how progressive interwar education actually was. To mitigate this risk, the findings will be cross-referenced with historical student notebooks, school inspectors' reports, and more conservative textbooks as part of the broader doctoral project.

3. Results

This section presents the findings of the didactic and content analysis, illustrating how the examined textbook series integrated activating tasks and democratic principles into composition instruction. The following analysis tracks how these volumes structurally transformed language instruction by translating European reform pedagogy into concrete classroom applications.

3.1 Reform Pedagogy and the Reaction to Herbartianism

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Herbartianism dominated education in the Czech lands. In school practice, however, its theoretical foundation was often reduced to mechanical memorization, transmissive teaching, and pupil passivity (Jelínek, 1972, pp. 130–131; Hubáček, 1980; 1983). Although Herbart's original system was grounded in ethical and psychological principles, his followers simplified it into a rigid instructional framework. Classroom teaching focused heavily on abstract concepts, rules, and definitions, burdening pupils with purposeless maxims within a formal, distant teacher–pupil relationship (Kasper & Kasperová, 2008, pp. 398–401)⁴. Criticism of this model emerged in the Czech environment before the First World War and intensified during the conflict, as educators increasingly anticipated post-war structural reforms (Váňová, 2020, p. 333; Urbanovská, 1996, p. 2).

⁴ Critiques of Herbartianism among the examined foreign pedagogues and thinkers can be found, for example, in: Dewey, 1916, pp. 33–41; Key, 1912, pp. 204–208; Tolstoy, 1862, pp. 2–10; Ferrière, 1922, pp. 29–33.

Domestic reformers drew heavy inspiration from international progressive movements (Čornejová et al., 2020, p. 16; Debická, 1996, p. 149), with Czech educators being particularly influenced by four key figures:

- John Dewey: Pragmatism, "learning by doing," and connecting school with real-world experiences (Dewey, 1916, pp. 87–94, 163–170).
- Ellen Key: Pedocentrism and the unhindered development of the child (Key, 1912, pp. 3–7).
- Leo N. Tolstoy: The concept of the free school, spontaneity, and the use of authentic texts (Tolstoy, 1862, pp. 7–12, 21–23).
- Adolphe Ferrière: The active school movement and activity-based learning (Ferrière, 1922, pp. 5–7).

Pragmatism attracted significant attention because Czech teachers traditionally favored exact, empirical approaches in pedagogy and psychology⁵ – an orientation that was exceptional compared to neighboring Central European countries like Germany or Austria. Yet, this adoption was not uncritical. Proponents of pragmatism faced pushback from prominent figures like O. Chlup⁶, who warned against neglecting domestic educational traditions and argued that foreign models must undergo rigorous critical evaluation before local implementation (Kasper et al., 2018, pp. 12–14).

These theoretical debates translated into practice after the First World War⁷. The 1920s saw a wave of individual pedagogical experiments, which paved the way for systematic institutional reforms in the following decade (Kasper & Kasperová, 2020, p. 38). Between 1928 and 1933, the reform commission led by Václav Příhoda formulated a comprehensive program focused on the scientific management of education, individualization, and activity-based learning (Kasper et al., 2018, p. 221). These efforts directly shaped the new Czechoslovak curriculum of 1932, which explicitly mandated pupil activity, independence, text-based work, and the integration of different language components (Normální učebné osnovy, 1932, pp. 4–5; Debická, 1996, p. 150).

Ultimately, these systemic reforms were never fully implemented due to external constraints, including the global economic crisis, shifting political dynamics, and a lack of consensus among educators (Čornejová et al., 2020, pp. 11–17). However, the movement succeeded through several partial projects. Among the most prominent was the textbook series by L. Žofková and B. Tožička, designed specifically for civic schools to operationalize these reform ideals and pan-European trends. In line with the study's objectives, the following analysis examines how composition was conceptualized within these specific textbooks.

⁵ Czech teachers initially aligned themselves with positivism, later with pragmatism, and concurrently with behaviourism.

⁶ Otokar Chlup (1875–1965) was a leading Czech educationalist, professor at Charles University, and an influential theorist of school reform. Although he supported educational modernization and empirical methods, he urged caution regarding the uncritical adoption of foreign models, particularly American pragmatism. Chlup emphasized the importance of preserving domestic educational traditions and tailoring progressive methods to the specific socio-cultural context of Czechoslovakia

⁷ Changes in education were closely linked to broader transformations in society. It is impossible to analyse educational reform during the First Republic "without noting the efforts toward social, economic, and political reform of society" (Kasper & Kasperová, 2020, p. 38). All transformations were connected with the newly gained independence of the Czechoslovak state.

3.2 Composition Instruction in the Žofková–Tožička Textbooks

Žofková and Tožička conceptualize composition specifically as "the construction of sentences, paragraphs, and the entire compositional whole," treating it as a practical skill developed through systematic instructional design. This perspective closely echoes Doyle (1983, p. 162) thesis that students learn by navigating the specific paths that tasks lay out for them. Consequently, within this series, tasks function not as supplementary exercises, but as the primary vehicle for developing student writing competencies.

To guide this learning process effectively, the textbooks anchor assignments in topics derived from the pupils' lived experiences (e.g., Žofková & Tožička, 1933, pp. 49–53). This instructional approach directly operationalizes pragmatic learning (Dewey), pedocentrism (Key), active school principles (Ferrière), and the use of authentic texts (Tolstoy).

Structurally, the textbooks are organized into four traditional areas: reading, composition, grammar, and orthography. However, rather than maintaining rigid boundaries between these fields, the authors cross-reference them. From the third volume onward, reading and composition undergo formal integration, anticipating contemporary requirements for whole-language pedagogy. Pupils analyze excerpts from major literary figures to observe word order, stylistic devices, and macro-structural text patterns. This integrative framework is further reflected in grammar tasks that are embedded directly within literary excerpts, preventing linguistic concepts from being taught in isolation.

3.3 Activity-Based Learning and Task Design

Pupils are continually encouraged to take an active role in instruction. This task design directly aligns with contemporary curricular theory, which conceptualizes an instructional task not merely as a mechanical exercise, but as a direct call to cognitive activity (Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2021, p. 733). However, Žofková and Tožička were not isolated in applying these activating principles within interwar Czechoslovak education.

To map the broader methodological landscape, the examined textbook series was compared with the contemporary *Cvičebnice pro střední školy* (Havránek et al., 1933). Developed under the supervision of Bohuslav Havránek, this series operationalized the functional and communicative conception of language championed by the Prague Linguistic Circle (PLC)⁸, of which Havránek was a founding member. Rather than relying on rote memorization, Havránek's exercise book fostered student autonomy by structuring tasks around inductive and analytical procedures. The foundational methods centered on the observation and structural analysis of authentic texts to uncover underlying linguistic phenomena (Šmejkalová, 2010, p. 125).

The textbooks by Žofková and Tožička demonstrate a striking parallel to these functionalist principles. Their instructional framework places identical emphasis on the functional use of language, text-based analysis, linguistic cultivation, and practical communication. The PLC in interwar Czechoslovakia influenced not only secondary education but also many teachers.

⁸ Although the Prague Linguistic Circle is primarily renowned for its structural linguistics, its conception of linguistic cultivation (*jazyková kultura*) directly influenced school language instruction. As Čermák demonstrates, the PLC represented an extraordinarily influential scientific force in the interwar period. The members of the Circle, particularly Havránek, were active in institutions that shaped language education, and their concepts of linguistic cultivation directly influenced both educational norms and school practice. The PLC promoted a functional conception of language, placing emphasis on the communicative functions of linguistic devices, work with text, and the development of linguistic cultivation as a collective societal task, which is also documented by papers associated with its key projects (Čermák, 2014, pp. 75–79, 87).

Each volume opens with an introductory chapter titled *Requirements in Language Instruction*, which establishes the learning objectives for the respective school year. Volumes II–IV also incorporate a structured work schedule recommending that teachers engage with all four language components each month. This practice-oriented textbook design directly reflects the principles of the European active school movement (*école active*), systematically developed by Adolphe Ferrière. His conception of the activity-based school emphasized autonomous student work, task-driven learning, and experiential operation—didactic procedures that formed the methodological foundation of these textbooks (Ferrière, 1922, p. 1)⁹.

In Volume I, the instructional focus centers on baseline skills: guiding pupils to independently observe and describe their immediate environment, imitate model texts, or perform basic text transformations (Žofková & Tožička, 1933). Typical assignments at this initial stage include directives such as: "show that you understand sentence construction" (p. 53), "divide correctly into paragraphs" (p. 58), or "modify the article so that all verbs are in the same tense" (p. 59). At this level, pupils encounter text evaluation for the first time by comparing a narrative with and without direct speech, being prompted to "judge which narration is more vivid" (p. 61).

Communicative competence undergoes intensive development in Volume II (Žofková & Tožička, 1935). The introductory motivational text explicitly states that pupils will learn both to reproduce and modify texts (p. 121). Instruction emphasizes the core of the utterance, word order, paragraph division, and vocabulary building, while prioritizing the pupils' capacity for observation, narration, description, and the composition of transactional documents. The instructions increasingly target independent critical thinking. For instance, pupils are asked to judge whether a narrative flows fluidly and to identify what causes abruptness in complex sentences (p. 99). Furthermore, tasks prompt students to "notice how good writers connect sentences" (p. 102) or "notice how the poet intensifies the action or the mood" (p. 110), thereby constructing conceptual knowledge through comprehension. At this stage, text evaluation advances to a more complex tier, requiring pupils to critique the writing of their peers (pp. 113–118).

By Volume III, purely compositional exercises decrease as the composition chapters are structurally integrated with literary education, allowing literary analysis to dominate the instructional framework (Žofková & Tožička, 1936). Nevertheless, compositional skills remain central; pupils analyze source material from multiple perspectives, retelling, condensing, outlining, or comparing pairs of related texts. To support this integration, the authors draw exclusively on authentic material and texts by acclaimed authors, including Tolstoy.

The final volume completing the series challenges pupils to master both spoken and written discourse (Žofková & Tožička, 1938, pp. 57, 102). To provide instructional scaffolding for these advanced requirements, the authors introduce two "decalogues"—sets of ten core rules governing text creation and self-correction (pp. 6–7). By learning to systematically edit their own writing, pupils progress from peer evaluation to autonomous self-evaluation. Within the framework of Bloom's revised taxonomy, this shift represents the highest and most cognitively demanding tier of literacy development. This advanced cognitive engagement is evident in tasks requiring independent reflection based on aphorisms (p. 33), alongside exercises dedicated to building vocabulary, delivering occasional speeches, drafting formal letters, and producing independent biographical profiles (p. 100).

⁹ Ellen Key, in her book *The Century of the Child* (1912), points out that children "lose the capacity for observation" in environments based on drill and authority (Key, 1912, pp. 203–205). This motif is directly reflected in the textbook by Žofková and Tožička, which places observation at the center of composition work.

To illustrate this vertical trajectory across the four-year curriculum, the structural and cognitive progression is codified in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Methodological Progression and Task Types Across Volumes I–IV

Volume	Core Pedagogical Focus, Target Skills	Exemplary Task Types & Instructions (Žofková & Tožička)	Cognitive Level (Bloom)
Volume I (1933)	Basic text structuring, sentence mechanics, imitation, and basic observation.	"show that you understand sentence construction" (p. 53) "divide correctly into paragraphs" (p. 58) "judge which narration is more vivid" (p. 61)	Understanding, Analyzing
Volume II (1935)	Active vocabulary expansion, text alteration, initial peer-evaluation, and complex sentence flow.	"notice how good writers connect sentences" (p. 102) Evaluation of peer compositions (pp. 113–118)	Evaluating
Volume III (1936)	Integration with literature, text condensation, outlining, and working with authentic moral texts.	Text analysis from multiple perspectives, rewriting/retelling, outline design	Analyzing, Creating
Volume IV (1938)	Advanced spoken and written reflection, continuous self-correction, independent biographical work.	Application of text-correction "decalogues" (pp. 6–7) Developing reflections based on aphorisms (p. 33)	Creating, Evaluating (Highest Level)

When viewed syntactically, the tasks designed by Žofková and Tožička perfectly operationalize what Bakken and Andersson-Bakken (2021, pp. 733–734) define as textbook paratexts – instructional speech acts designed to trigger targeted learning processes. This rigorous task architecture is accompanied by structural mechanisms that foster student autonomy across the curriculum. The annual work plans and practical study guides included in Volumes II, III, and IV – also highlighted by Debická (1996, p. 151) – served to regulate individual student pacing.

Crucially, the series addresses macro-level classroom heterogeneity by embedding differentiation directly into the layout; Volume II introduces specialized extension exercises for high-achieving pupils, visually demarcated by a vertical line along the margin. This internal differentiation directly conforms to the mandates of the 1932 Czechoslovak curriculum. The official guidelines explicitly recognized that lower secondary civic schools served a heterogeneous student population with diverse talents, thus requiring teachers to adapt task difficulty, vary instructional methods, utilize parallel track tracking, or offer elective coursework (Normální učebné osnovy, 1932, p. 4).

3.4 Educational Aims and Democratic Ideals

The broader educational objectives of the First Republic also exerted a major influence on the overall character of these textbooks. Reflecting the contemporary socio-political climate, the volumes systematically cultivated four core dimensions of citizenship:

- Patriotism: In Volume I, a photograph of the first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, is featured on the endpaper, while Volume IV includes a photograph of his successor, Edvard Beneš. Their portraits are likewise integrated into the gallery of "our writers" (Žofková & Tožička, 1936, p. 145). Major historical milestones associated with the interwar republic and its prominent figures—including both presidents and the Czechoslovak legionnaires—are consistently woven throughout the text. Volume IV further underscores this state ideology by presenting a speech addressed specifically to the nation's youth by President Edvard Beneš (Žofková & Tožička, 1938, p. 102).
- Democracy: The textbooks devote exceptional attention to oral expression, conceptualizing public speaking as the very foundation of democratic communication. The capacity for clear, cultivated, and rhetorical expression was treated not merely as a linguistic skill, but as an indispensable civic competence required for active participation in a democratic republic.
- Moral education: The reading selections project structured social norms and normativized socialization patterns. The texts present family and civic archetypes—depicting mothers meticulously caring for children, fathers protecting the homeland and family, and children attending school dutifully—while continuously prompting pupils to assist others and accept personal responsibility.
- Promotion of reading culture: To operationalize literacy development outside the classroom, a voucher for a free book was inserted into each textbook. Pupils were systematically encouraged to engage in independent reading, a habit visually reinforced by the aforementioned photographs depicting both presidents posing with books.

This multi-layered ideological orientation converges closely with both European and American reform movements. As Tröhler (2011, p. 98) observes, American pragmatism fundamentally reshaped pedagogical theory by explicitly linking classroom learning with democratic participation and broader social progress. This perspective directly mirrors Ellen Key's vision of the school as a primary space for molding future citizens capable of reconstructing a better society (Key, 1912, pp. 150–165), as well as Ferrière's emphasis on student autonomy, civic responsibility, and authentic engagement (Ferrière, 1922, pp. 8–12).

Furthermore, the instructional framework reflects Dewey's assertion that teachers should function as democratic partners and facilitators between the curriculum and the child, rather than as authoritarian figures (Dewey, 1902, pp. 15–18; Dewey, 1916, pp. 87–94, 379–386). Within the *Pracovní učebnice* series, these progressive principles are deeply embedded in the way tasks shift responsibility to the students through independent work, collaborative peer-assessment, and autonomous self-evaluation.

4. Discussion

Based on the presented results, this section interprets the findings and discusses the broader pedagogical and historical implications of the transformation of composition instruction in interwar Czechoslovakia.

4.1 Synthesis of European Reform Influences

Reflecting upon the values that the textbooks of Žofková and Tožička adopted from European and American pedagogues, the analysis demonstrates that they systematically incorporate:

- Dewey's pragmatism: This is visible in the continuous invitations to observation, practical communicative tasks, and regular calls for student reflection. The textual work within the textbooks is structured inductively—moving from specific examples to general rules—which aligns with historical reform textbooks as well as contemporary didactic principles. This methodological procedure directly operationalizes Dewey's core conception of learning through experience (Dewey, 1902, pp. 11–14, 19–22; Dewey, 1916, pp. 49–56, 145–152).
- Key's principles: These are reflected in the deliberate selection of topics derived from the pupils' immediate lives and in the systematic attempts at internal classroom individualization through varying task difficulties (Key, 1912, pp. 33–38).
- Tolstoy's ideas: These are evident in the integration of authentic texts carrying a distinct moral dimension. Through these narratives, the child internalizes ethical and social norms freely through text engagement, rather than through rigid dogmatic prescriptions (Tolstoy, 1862, pp. 45–50).
- Ferrière's activity-based learning: This is demonstrated by the heavy structural emphasis on autonomous pupil activity and individualized work schedules (Ferrière, 1922, pp. 5–7, 12–15). Furthermore, the series adopts Ferrière's methodological priority of utilizing authentic literary texts to anchor student learning (Ferrière, 1922, pp. 20–23).

At the same time, these foreign influences were not merely copied; they were actively adapted to the specific domestic requirements of the Czech 1932 curriculum. (Šmejkalová, 2015, p. 20).

4.2 Conclusion and Future Perspectives

This study demonstrates that the textbook series by Lidmila Žofková and Bohumil Tožička represents one of the most significant Czech attempts to implement reform-pedagogical principles in Czech language instruction during the interwar period. The analysis situates these textbooks within a broader European context and shows that Czechoslovak education responded creatively to international pedagogical impulses, adapting them to the domestic curricular framework of civic schools.

The study addressed three key questions:

1. *How do Žofková and Tožička conceptualize composition instruction?* They understand composition as a practical communicative activity grounded in text work and observation. Pupils' communicative competence is developed from understanding the function of words in sentences to constructing paragraphs and complete texts.
2. *To what extent do the textbooks reflect principles of reform pedagogy?* Across all four volumes, elements of European reform pedagogy are identifiable: Dewey's pragmatism, Key's pedocentrism, Tolstoy's emphasis on authentic texts, and Ferrière's activity-based learning. These influences manifest in the inductive approach, the emphasis on pupil activity, the individualization of tasks, and the integration of language components.
3. *How are foreign influences adapted to the Czech curricular framework?* The textbooks convincingly reflect the requirements of the 1932 curriculum, particularly the emphasis on pupil independence, the integration of reading and composition, and differentiated instruction. They represent one of the most sophisticated attempts to adapt international pedagogical ideas into mother-tongue instruction in civic schools during that period.

The textbooks of Žofková and Tožička can thus be understood as a progressive and innovative response to the reform efforts of the interwar period. The authors successfully combined modern didactic principles with the practical demands of mother-tongue instruction, creating a series that systematically developed pupils' communicative competence through text work, observation, and text transformation. At the same time, they supported the democratic and ethical ideals of the First Republic.

In a broader context, this textbook series represents not only a significant Czech contribution to reform pedagogy but also a valuable Central European case showing how international impulses—Dewey's pragmatism, Key's pedocentrism, Tolstoy's authentic texts, and Ferrière's active school—can be sensitively and functionally adapted into a national educational environment.

Furthermore, it can be stated that the reform pedagogy of the 1930s remains a very modern concept. Today, educational efforts focus heavily on competency building (Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2021, p. 732). It can therefore be argued that the textbook analyzed here builds communicative competence comprehensively by progressing systematically from words to sentences, paragraphs, and complete texts.

The findings of this analysis demonstrate that the *Pracovní učebnice* series by Žofková and Tožička was not merely a localized pedagogical experiment, but a highly sophisticated implementation of what international scholarship terms "textbooks that teach." As Wakefield (1997) explains, effective instructional materials function on this principle precisely because they are designed to evoke active student participation aligned with contemporary cognitive and societal goals (pp. 1, 8–9). The systematic development of communicative competence through task-driven pupil agency—rather than passive content presentation—confirms that the textbook's structural architecture was intentionally aligned with the progressive goals of interwar Czech curriculum reform. Furthermore, both authors possessed extensive, long-term teaching experience, which directly enabled them to "think like a teacher" and transform the textbook writing process into a goal-directed activity that closely parallels classroom instruction (Wakefield, 1997, pp. 16–17). When an educational movement aims to foster higher-order thinking, a mere accumulation of information is insufficient; instead, there must be a seamless match between the textbook structure and the concrete learning activities in which the pupil is to engage (Wakefield, 1997, p. 7, pp. 19–20). The Žofková–Tožička series embodies this exact standard, proving that interwar Czechoslovak didactics were remarkably close to contemporary, modern conceptions of language teaching.

From a contemporary perspective, the historical analysis of the Žofková–Tožička textbook series offers valuable insights into the fundamental principles of modern reading and writing literacy development. The authors' early emphasis on integrating reading with text production aligns with current, research-backed approaches to literacy, which view reading and writing as deeply intertwined cognitive processes. By shifting the pedagogical focus from mechanical memorization to functional text transformation and authentic communicative purposes, this interwar model prefigures contemporary competency-based curricula that prioritize real-world text production over isolated grammatical drill.

This historical trajectory is heavily reinforced by contemporary international scholarship on writing didactics. In his comprehensive synthesis of effective writing instruction, Graham (2020) argues that optimal development in composition occurs when students are released from mechanical rigidity and provided with opportunities to use writing for authentic purposes, approximate textual forms, and systematically engage in self-evaluation. Current empirical research proves that maximizing student progress in literacy depends on textbook designs that foster high cognitive engagement through text transformation and structured peer feedback

(Graham, 2020). The instructional architecture observed in the Žofková and Tožička series—which seamlessly balances structured directives with spaces for collaborative peer-evaluation—directly operationalizes what modern didactics define as an effective, evidence-based learning environment.

Ultimately, this study contributes to international scholarship in the history of education by demonstrating how reform-pedagogical ideas were translated into practice through a specific textbook series for Czech language instruction in civic schools.

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