

# The textbook as a means of developing learning activity: Why do we need textbooks in developmental learning?

O livro didático como meio de formação da atividade de estudo:  
por que precisamos de livro didático na aprendizagem desenvolvimental?

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## ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the theoretical and practical experience accumulated by the author during years of preparing textbooks for learning the Russian language within the D. B. Elkonin-V. V. Davidov as a collaborator of V. V. Repkin. The article's central argument is that the textbook plays a pivotal role in fostering language acquisition in early primary school, a period when its primary function is to establish an environment conducive to students' engagement in the processes of meaningful analysis and generalization of the subject's characteristics, manifested through the medium of a study dialogue. Consequently, the article posits that the hallmark of a developmental learning textbook is its dialogical nature.

**Keywords:** System D. B. Elkonin-V. V. Davidov. Language Learning. Textbook. V. V. Repkin.

## RESUMO

O artigo analisa, com base na experiência teórica e prática acumulada pela autora durante anos de elaboração de livros didáticos para a aprendizagem da língua russa no interior do sistema psicológico-didático D. B. Elkonin-V. V. Davidov como colaboradora de V. V. Repkin. Sustenta-se a tese de que o livro didático é essencial para o desenvolvimento da aprendizagem da língua nos anos iniciais do nível fundamental, quando assume como função mais importante proporcionar condições para que os alunos reproduzam os processos de análises e generalizações significativas das propriedades do tema estudado na forma de um diálogo de estudo. Portanto, a principal característica do livro didático na aprendizagem desenvolvimental é que ele deve ser dialógico.

**Palavras-chave:** Sistema D. B. Elkonin-V. V. Davidov. Aprendizagem da Língua. Livro Didático. V. V. Repkin.

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## 1 Introduction

The necessity of the textbook in the educational setting can be a subject of confusion. It contains the information that students are expected to learn, including definitions and rules that are intended to be memorized. Additionally, it provides exercises that facilitate the application of these rules. Consequently, the role of the textbook in facilitating learning becomes evident. However, when the same question is posed in the context of developmental learning, the answer becomes less clear. The objective of developmental learning is not merely to inform the child with concise definitions and rules, but rather to establish conditions that enable them to discover scientific truths, discern the most significant rules and their foundations, and subsequently learn to apply these rules. The objective of the textbook in the developmental learning system is to present knowledge in a form that is ready-made and does not require children to engage in independent research. This raises the question of the necessity of the textbook in the developmental learning system. One perspective suggests that the textbook has become a relic of traditional pedagogy, and its role should be reevaluated. Alternatively, the textbook could be redesigned to contain learning exercises, but this would also redefine its function.

## 2 Development

The role of the textbook in developmental learning is a subject of considerable debate, which has been a recurring theme in the discourse among the developers of this didactic system. While the D. B. Elkonin-V. V. Davidov system currently incorporates a methodological learning kit in almost all its programs, there is no consensus among the authors regarding the nature of the textbook and its necessity within this system. While some developers acknowledge the textbook's necessity for dissemination and implementation in mass schools during a particular stage of the system's evolution, they regard it as superfluous and potentially detrimental when discussing the implementation of the system in its

"pure" form. Conversely, others assert the textbook's indispensability in fostering study activity, recognizing it as the paramount objective of developmental learning. These proponents ascribe to the textbook functions that extend beyond the scope of a conventional textbook.

In the early 1960s, experimental research into study activity led scientists to conclude that traditional textbooks (those of the era) containing examples of knowledge to be learned and material for practicing the relevant skills, not only fail to contribute to the formation of study activity but can significantly impede and even destroy this process.

The issue lies in the presentation of scientific concepts in children's textbooks. These textbooks offer empirically generalized material for assimilation, albeit with the assistance of theoretical terms, which hinders the child's ability to comprehend and assimilate the concepts. This phenomenon creates an illusion of mastery in the child, as they are unable to fully understand the theoretical concepts. Concurrently, the didactic materials (concept definitions, rules, and schemes) provided in children's textbooks appeared to be the sole viable option. Consequently, independent analysis, which constitutes the crux of scholarly inquiry, was excluded from the learning process. Regrettably, numerous contemporary textbooks, which are widely utilized in educational institutions, also exhibit these deficiencies.

This phenomenon, compounded by the dearth of textbooks meticulously designed to nurture study activity, offers a compelling explanation for the underutilization of textbooks in experimental research initiatives focusing on study activity, which emerged in the early 1960s. In these experiments, experimental teachers employed the author's lesson notes, utilizing stable textbooks solely as sources of learning exercises. Empirical evidence from these studies demonstrates the efficacy of this approach, with the study activity of the majority of students showing notable progress. This observation led to the formation of an opinion among the experimental participants regarding the perceived inadequacy of the textbook designed for study activity formation and the absence of specific functions in a textbook to facilitate children's research.

Concurrently, the necessity for specialized collections of exercises to consolidate and develop skills and habits was acknowledged. In this regard, a novel concept was proposed by L. I. Aidarova, which entailed the creation of such collections by the students themselves. This approach was designed to facilitate a more profound and effective assimilation of theoretical material.

As previously stated, the notion that the textbook is ineffective for developmental learning and, in some cases, detrimental remains prevalent among the developers of this system. From our perspective, this assertion can be accepted if the textbook is regarded exclusively in its conventional format—as a repository of information to be mastered and a series of exercises designed to ensure this mastery. However, if we shift our perspective and consider the textbook not merely as a repository of information, but as a catalyst for the acquisition, comprehension, and mastery of knowledge, a new paradigm emerges. This paradigm involves the creation of a textbook that functions as a model for educational activity. The concept of a textbook as a model of educational activity was initially proposed by L. I. Aidarova, who outlined a highly unconventional project for a textbook that would be compiled by the students themselves. Regrettably, this innovative initiative did not gain widespread implementation in educational practice. The proposed textbook featured a system of models that reflected the sequential transformation of the object of study, including a morphosemantic model of a word or an inflectional model of a part of speech. However, it should be noted that merely including a model of the object of study in a textbook does not inherently transform it into a vehicle for model-based study activities. A textbook of such a plan should reflect not only the result, but also the process of the study activity itself, its stages: the formulation of the problem, the analysis of its conditions, the selection of a method to solve the task and its implementation, control, and evaluation. This approach has been meticulously implemented in Russian language textbooks for the initial years of primary school, as well as for the 5th and 6th grades, by V.V. Repkin (REPKIN; VOSTORGOVA; NEKRASOVA, 2019; VOSTORGOVA, 2019).

The paragraphs (sections) of these textbooks commence with a problem situation that functions as a role-playing exercise (in the early years of primary school, this situation unfolds as a particular plot with the participation of crosscutting characters). The paragraph then presents tasks, the execution of which leads students to discover new concepts and forms of action. Subsequently, a series of exercises is presented, in the course of which a new method or new knowledge is clarified, and the corresponding skills are practiced. The paragraph culminates with control tasks, which are incorporated into the early years of primary school curriculum, or control questions, which are included in the fifth and sixth grade curriculum. These final tasks enable students to assess their understanding of the paragraph, summarize their independent study, and evaluate their own performance.

However, according to Repkin (1999), this pedagogical approach does not introduce anything fundamentally novel into the process of developing study activities, as all its specified components are mastered by students solely through their joint engagement with the teacher. This model can serve a reflective function for students only after they have engaged in a distributed activity. The model of study activity presented in Repkin's textbook is, in contrast, designed for the teacher, serving as a methodological guide for organizing the study content and methods. From this perspective, the textbook functions as a specific teaching aid, providing the teacher with an overview of the key points of the lessons. The primary function of a methodological manual is to assist educators in the interpretation of lesson plans derived from children's literature (hence, the methodological manual in each set is designated as the textbook's methodological commentary).

However, V. V. Repkin has repeatedly noted that there is another very significant aspect in which study activity should be considered. As this activity develops, the child develops an objective-cognitive attitude towards reality (V. V. Davidov). Without such a relationship, learned modes of action are not included in the child's real activity and do not acquire personal meaning for them.

Psychologists have demonstrated that the foundation of this relationship lies in an individual's capacity to consider and coordinate diverse perspectives when addressing a particular subject. This capacity can be cultivated from early childhood, particularly through play activities, which involve the child assuming the roles of other participants in the game and being prompted to evaluate the situation from their viewpoint. Engaging in such play fosters the development of a conditionally dynamic cognitive stance in children, thereby facilitating the transition of their thinking to a more sophisticated level. It is noteworthy that this effect is contingent upon the child's engagement in specific play activities. Conversely, alternative forms of play can impede the development of this ability by perpetuating an egocentric perspective.

In the context of developmental learning, the prerequisites for addressing this issue are in place, with the study dialogue emerging as a pivotal element. This dialogue serves as a crucial method for organizing collectively distributed activities in the process of solving study tasks during the early years of primary school. In this paradigm, the child is not merely an observer, but rather an active participant in the process of acquiring knowledge. They assume the role of a researcher who is committed to transcending the limitations of their individual perspective by engaging in a comparative analysis and synthesis of diverse viewpoints.

The efficacy of the study dialog hinges upon its capacity to engage with realistic positions that accurately reflect at least some of the object's objective properties. In the absence of such a foundation, the dialog risks devolving into a mere formal exchange of subjective opinions, lacking the necessary substance and rigor. The positions articulated in the dialog must be methodically designed, incorporating the most essential properties of the subject under consideration. However, it is a formidable challenge to ensure the presence of such positions in authentic children's dialog.

According to Repkin (1997), this can be achieved by selecting the necessary points of view on the topic, constructing a model of the study dialog that reflects these viewpoints, and providing this model to students for

collective or individual use (at least at an older age). This approach enables students to evaluate the perspectives of various participants in a simulated study dialogue, compare them with their own positions, and collectively formulate a unified point of view, thereby cultivating an objective stance towards the subject matter. In light of these considerations, it can be posited that, along with the object model, situation models assume a particular significance in the context of developmental learning. The function of situation models in the educational process is to facilitate the organization of study dialogues. It is important to reiterate that the creation of models of situations that are required in the actual process of classroom discussion is nearly impossible. However, these very situations, presented to children in a "ready-made" form, can serve as a "trigger" for a general classroom discussion. To ensure the most accurate reproduction of a particular situation's intricacies and facilitate repeated reference, it is more expedient to formulate these models as dialogues between characters in a children's book. This book serves as the primary medium for orchestrating a study dialogue.

The most significant function of the textbook in the process of establishing the study activity is to establish conditions for students to reproduce the processes of meaningful analysis and generalization of the properties of the subject in the form of a study dialogue. Consequently, the primary characteristic of the textbook in developmental learning is its dialogical nature. While the specific function of the textbook in developmental learning is, of course, of fundamental importance, this does not exhaust its role. Beyond its primary function, the textbook fulfills other roles, and the experience of implementing the system in elementary school underscores the significance of these additional functions, necessitating careful consideration.



## El libro didáctico como medio para formar la actividad de estudio: ¿por qué necesitamos del libro didáctico en el aprendizaje desarrollador?

### RESUMEN:

El artículo analiza, a partir de la experiencia teórica y práctica acumulada por la autora durante años de elaboración de libros de texto para el aprendizaje del idioma ruso dentro del sistema psicológico-didáctico D. B. Elkonin-V. V. Davidov como colaboradora de V. V. Repkin. Se sustenta la tesis de que el libro didáctico es fundamental para el desarrollo del aprendizaje de la lengua en los primeros años del nivel fundamental, cuando asume la función más importante de brindar condiciones para que los estudiantes reproduzcan los procesos de análisis y generalización significativos de las propiedades del tema en forma de diálogo de estudio. Por lo tanto, la característica principal del libro didáctico en el aprendizaje desarrollador debe ser dialógico.

**Palabras clave:** Sistema D. B. Elkonin-V. V. Davidov. Aprendizaje del idioma. Libro didáctico. V. V. Repkin.

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