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THE EDUCATIONAL POTENTIALS OF BAKA L.'S PACKETBOOKS

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Abstract

This study explores the Packetbook Project, an innovative initiative aimed at renewing Hungarian literature education in Slovakia. The primary objective of the project is to make students' reading experiences more personal, relevant, and engaging by building on the freedom of choice, contemporary literature, and experiential pedagogical approaches. The paper provides an overview of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the Packetbook, investigates its pedagogical potential, and places special emphasis on the shift in assessment paradigms that align with its educational philosophy. At the core of this shift is the concept of formative assessment, which seeks not merely to evaluate students' performance but to actively support their learning progress. The Packetbook and formative assessment together constitute an

interconnected framework that redefines the learning process as complex, personalized, and experience oriented.

Keywords:

Packetbook, Educational Reform, Experiential Pedagogy, Formative Assessment, Pedagogical Innovation, Learner-Centered Approach, Hungarian Literature Education

1. Introduction

The place and role of literature education in public education is a constantly evolving and often contested issue. In the 21st century, particular attention is drawn to the tension between curricular expectations and student interests, as well as between text-centered approaches and the need for experiential learning. During this process, textbooks themselves have undergone significant transformations: their role, structure, and pedagogical function have continuously evolved over time. The history (and, in some respects, the current state) of traditional, knowledge-centered, and linearly structured textbooks is discussed in greater detail in the earlier studies of Zsófia Molnár-Kovács (Molnár-Kovács, 2013; 2017; 2019; 2025). Declining motivation in schools, a decrease in students' willingness to read, and increasing doubts about the effectiveness of traditional, frontal teaching methods have urged educators to search for new pedagogical solutions. In this context, it is also of particular importance to reduce linguistic bias in assessment practices, for example through the application of the Triple A method, which not only supports students' language development but also promotes the acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity within the school environment (Istók et al., 2023, 2025; Lőrincz & Istók, 2023; Lőrincz et al., 2022). There is a growing demand for educational models that regard students not as passive recipients, but as active meaning-makers, and that reframe literature teaching as a space for personal engagement, creative interpretation, and learner autonomy (Réti, 2022).

Although several studies have explored the transformation of textbooks and assessment practices in literature education, there remains a notable gap in research regarding how flexible, modular, and choice-based learning environments can be systematically integrated into classroom practice. Previous research has focused primarily on the structural and linguistic aspects of traditional or reformed textbooks, but has paid less attention to the development of alternative pedagogical frameworks that promote learner agency and experiential approaches.

Packetbook Project was conceived within this pedagogical context, with the aim of redefining the teaching of literature in Hungarian-language schools in Slovakia. This project directly addresses the aforementioned gap by offering a coherent pedagogical model that combines contemporary literary immersion, popular culture, and experiential and drama-based methods in a modular structure.

Breaking away from the traditional textbook structure, the project offers a flexible, modular, and choice-based learning environment that draws on the immersive qualities of contemporary literature, the pedagogical potential of popular culture, and the methodological tools of experiential and drama-based pedagogy (Baka L., 2023). Unlike previous approaches, Packetbook focuses on integrating these elements into a unified framework that responds to both curricular expectations and learners' interests, thereby providing an innovative solution to current challenges in literature education.

The aim of this study is to present the pedagogical and methodological foundations of the Packetbook concept, explore its practical applicability, and examine the forms of assessment that align with it, with a particular focus on the potential of formative assessment. The study is structured into three main parts: the first outlines the theoretical framework and objectives of the Packetbook; the second analyses the possibilities for its implementation in pedagogical practice; and the third investigates opportunities for transforming assessment culture within the framework of the project. In conclusion, the study summarizes how the Packetbook Project may contribute to the renewal of literature education and to positively shaping students' attitudes toward reading.

2. The Baka L. Packetbook Project

The Packetbook Project is an innovative educational development initiative that aims to modernize and make literature education more student-centered, in alignment with the current reform efforts of the Slovak educational system (Baka L., 2016a). The project is grounded in the theoretical concept of the packet novel, which allows readers (in this case, students) to determine for themselves which literary works to read and in what order to engage with them. This approach enables a flexible and personalized structure of the curriculum. The reading materials are organized into "packets," from which teachers and students can jointly select based on current interests and learning needs. This method departs from traditional, linear curricula (Baka L., 2023).

The Packetbook primarily focuses on contemporary literature (with particular attention to speculative fiction, fantasy, and works that reinterpret folk tale traditions). It is important to note, however, that its literary focus is closely tied to broader efforts to integrate popular

literature into the curriculum, an endeavor that has sparked significant scholarly debate over the past decades (Manxhuka, 2019; 2020; Horváth, 2020; Kiss & Szűts, 2021; Kiss, 2022).

Furthermore, the use of drama pedagogy (Eck, 2017; 2020), along with experimental adaptations of literary classics into "choose-your-own-adventure" formats (Lőrincz & Nagy, 2024; Nagy, Trencsényi & Veszprémi, 2024; Nagy, 2025), represent additional innovative directions in literature teaching. These approaches complement the aims of the Packetbook Project, contributing to the renewal of teaching practices by promoting personalized, active, and experiential engagement with literature.

The project's goal is to present literature in education as a living, diverse, and interdisciplinary subject. It emphasizes not only the development of reading comprehension but also the application of creative and experience-based pedagogical methods. The curriculum structure allows students to make autonomous choices, while also supporting teachers in implementing differentiated and flexible lesson planning (Baka L., 2016a).

The chapters of the Packetbook form a coherent system built on experience-based pedagogy, aimed at reigniting interest in reading. The project seeks to replace the often inaccessible traditional literary canon with contemporary works that resonate with students' lives and concerns. Through engaging approaches, these texts foster a love of literature (Baka L., 2023). Regarding the nature of educational content, Simon (2010, p. 91) says: "Educational content must necessarily change from time to time within the teaching and learning process. If this does not happen, education becomes stagnant."

Published Packetbook chapters include: J. K. Rowling *Aranyvérűek és árják* (Baka L., 2019a); Lakatos István: *Dobozváros* (Baka L., 2016b); Kleinheincz Csilla: *Ólomerdő* (Baka L., 2015); Csurgó Csaba: *Kukoricza* (Baka L., 2019b); Huszti Gergely: *Mesteralvók hajnala & Mesteralvók viadala* (Baka L., 2021a); Jeff VanderMeer: *Déli Végek-trilógia* (Baka Vida B. – Baka L., 2019); Brandon Hackett: *Az ember könyve* (Baka L., 2017a); *A steampunk műfaja* (Baka L., 2016c); *Az alternatív történelem műfaja* (Baka L., 2017b); Ben H. Winters: *Földalatti Légitársaság* (Baka L., 2021b).

The Packetbook's primary objective is to develop students into engaged readers, understood as a complex process that goes beyond the technical skill of decoding text. This includes deeper reading comprehension, the development of critical thinking, the experience of immersive reading, and the ability to make independent text selections. The pedagogical

framework of the Packetbook strongly supports the conscious application of diverse reading strategies, which play an increasingly important role in reading comprehension (Fejes et al., 2023).

The project places special emphasis on making reading a source of joy. To this end, the pedagogical tools used promote freedom of choice, alignment with personal interests, and opportunities for creative engagement (Baka L., 2016a; 2023).

One of the greatest advantages of the Packetbook is that students are not required to follow a predetermined reading list. Instead, they may choose from a variety of texts that differ in genre, style, and complexity. This diversity supports differentiated learning, allowing classes, groups, and even individual students to engage with materials that match their reading level and interests. Reading thus becomes a personal, exploratory experience rather than a compulsory task (Baka L., 2023).

The Packetbook's structure also encourages deeper engagement with texts beyond rote reproduction. The project includes activity cards, creative tasks, drama exercises, and digital supplements that foster reflective and interactive interpretation. Students may dramatize scenes, write dialogues, create visual art, or even produce their own alternative versions of a story. These activities promote deeper comprehension and encourage the development of a personal connection with literature (Baka L., 2016a; 2023).

The physical form of the Packetbook is not merely a technical feature but an integral part of the learning experience. The "box" as an organizing tool makes the element of choice tangible and clearly structures the available content. This tactile and visually arranged format enhances student motivation, especially in lower grades or in contexts where digital skills or access to devices are limited. The physical format thus complements digital tools in a pedagogically meaningful way, supporting student autonomy, differentiated processing, and the concretization of individual learning paths.

In sum, the Packetbook Project effectively supports the goal of developing readers by promoting an open, personalized, experiential, and collaborative approach to reading. As a result, students will not only be able to read, but, perhaps more importantly, they will want to read.

3. Pedagogical Potentials of the Packetbook

From a pedagogical perspective, the Packetbook Project is not merely an alternative textbook format, but a complex, student-centered, interactive, and reflective learning environment. It aims to renew both the content and methodology of literature education, responding to the changing needs and interests of 21st-century learners. The wide range of pedagogical possibilities arises from the project's dual function: on one hand, it provides a didactic toolkit for fostering reading culture; on the other hand, it offers an alternative to traditional frontal, homogenous, and linear instructional models.

One of the central pedagogical values of the Packetbook is its ***emphasis on strengthening student autonomy***. Instead of adhering to a predetermined, standardized reading list, students are encouraged to choose from literary texts organized into thematic "packets" based on their personal interests and reading levels. This opportunity for choice is inherently motivating, as learners feel they have a say in their own educational process. Learning thereby shifts from an externally imposed obligation to an intrinsically driven, exploratory process, transforming reading into a personal and meaningful experience.

This approach supports ***differentiated instruction***, which is grounded in recognizing and accommodating individual learning pathways. The teacher, in the role of facilitator, is not simply a transmitter of knowledge but instead considers the composition of the class, students' prior knowledge, and individual interests when guiding them through the various options offered by the Packetbook. The resulting learning trajectory becomes more effective and engaging for students, while also offering teachers richer feedback on student progress, motivation, and engagement.

The pedagogical foundation of the Packetbook is rooted in ***experiential learning***, which holds that learning is most effective when based on direct experience, active involvement, and emotional engagement. The literary texts featured in the project are not merely read and interpreted; rather, they are explored through complex learning scenarios in which students engage with the world of literature through a variety of creative and participatory tasks. These may include dramatizations, visual artwork, writing alternative endings, creative writing exercises, role-playing activities, or even literature-themed board games.

The pedagogical aim extends beyond cognitive development (such as reading comprehension or acquisition of literary concepts) to encompass the ***development of social and emotional competencies***. Collaborative tasks enhance students' cooperation, communication,

self-reflection, and emotional awareness. The activities are not simply reproductive in nature but present real interpretive challenges, fostering the development of critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills.

A significant innovation of the Packetbook Project lies in its ***inclusion of contemporary, popular, and speculative literature*** alongside traditional literary texts. Genres such as dystopia, alternative history, and fantasy allow students to encounter literature that reflects their own culture and areas of interest. This is especially crucial during developmental stages when identity formation and value construction are key. The selected texts engage directly with students' lived experiences, life questions, and dilemmas, thereby rendering literature education more relevant, resonant, and personally meaningful.

Moreover, the project offers ***interdisciplinary opportunities***. Depending on the thematic focus of a particular "packet," the exploration of a literary text can incorporate elements from the social sciences, history, the arts, and even natural sciences. This fosters cross-curricular integration and supports the development of a holistic worldview, an increasingly central aim in contemporary pedagogical thinking.

The ***role of the teacher is redefined*** within the Packetbook framework. Rather than functioning solely as a provider of knowledge, the teacher becomes a facilitator, learning guide, planner, and co-navigator of the educational process. Their role involves assessing students' prior knowledge and interests, observing group dynamics, and selecting the most appropriate packets and methods for engagement. This requires a high degree of pedagogical sensitivity, methodological awareness, and reflective practice, yet the role is also liberating for both teachers and learners, creating space for autonomy and initiative.

The pedagogical possibilities of the Packetbook are further enriched by its physical design. As a material learning aid, the box is not only aesthetically appealing or practical, it also serves a clear pedagogical function. It ***makes the diversity of learning opportunities tangible***, stimulates student curiosity, and helps structure the learning environment. Particularly in lower grades or in settings with limited digital infrastructure or digital literacy, the visually and physically accessible format can serve as a powerful motivational tool.

4. A Paradigm Shift in Assessment: The Intersection of the Packetbook and Formative Evaluation

The Packetbook Project is not merely aimed at rethinking curricular content or the methodology of literature instruction, it also represents a radical reinterpretation of traditional pedagogical paradigms concerning teaching and learning. The underlying concept of the project views learning not as a linear process of knowledge acquisition, but as a complex, active, and personally meaningful process of constructing understanding. Consequently, assessment cannot remain static or confined to its traditional classificatory function, it must adopt a new role capable of dynamically tracking, supporting, and responding to student development. The Packetbook creates learning environments in which students progress along individualized pathways, shaping their knowledge through personal choices and intrinsic interests. For such processes to reach their full potential, assessment practices must be able to adapt accordingly.

This reconceptualization of learning inevitably entails a parallel paradigm shift in assessment. The Packetbook aspires to establish not only innovative teaching methodologies but also a learner-centered, reflective approach to assessment, one that prioritizes student's autonomy, and self-assessment. In such learning environments, traditional systems based on grading and performance measurement often prove insufficient or even counterproductive. Instead, what is needed are assessment models that accompany the learning process and conceptualize student progress not as a single data point, but as a continuous sequence of feedback and reflection.

In this context, the role of formative assessment becomes particularly significant. Rather than sorting or ranking students, formative evaluation focuses on promoting learning and supporting individual development. The open, modular, and experience-based structure of the Packetbook aligns closely with the principles of formative assessment, as both emphasize the cultivation of learner competencies, independent thinking, and collaborative learning processes. The following section will explore how these two pedagogical innovations (the Packetbook and formative assessment) intersect, and how their integration can contribute to a meaningful transformation of classroom assessment culture.

5. Implementing (Pedagogical) Formative Assessment within the Packetbook Project

In this section of our study, we focus on pedagogical assessment as it is implemented within educational institutions. According to Golnhofer (2003, p. 335), pedagogical assessment

refers to a comprehensive, systematically organized feedback process that employs a wide range of methods and includes the evaluation of education and upbringing, as well as their levels, subsystems, goals, actors, and content. Báthory (1985, p. 179) argues that when a teacher assesses, they are essentially determining the degree of alignment between an expected outcome and the actual state of achievement. Tóth and Horváth (2021) emphasize that assessment influences the functioning of the entire educational process through feedback, and it is this feedback mechanism that makes the system both regulated and adaptive. As Szarka and Szabó L. (2024, p. 21) point out, assessment involves monitoring, judging, comparing, influencing, acknowledging, and reinforcing. It is no coincidence, then, that pedagogical assessment plays a crucial role within the teaching-learning process (Molnár & Víg, 2013).

In a narrower sense, pedagogical assessment can be regarded as both an instructional and an educational method (Hencz, 2007, p. 2). It functions as an educational method when it involves rewarding, acknowledging, punishing, or reproaching students (Bábosik, 2003). At the same time, it acts as a teaching method when it emphasizes comparing intended outcomes to actual results, providing feedback, and evaluating various levels and elements of teaching and learning (Báthory, 1997).

According to Szarka and Szabó L. (2024, p. 24), pedagogical assessment serves twelve functions: feedback, reinforcement, monitoring, motivation, providing information, orientation, regulation, correction, diagnosis, prognosis, development, and selection. This list clearly illustrates how crucial it is that teachers perform assessment with precision, awareness, and pedagogical intention.

Formative pedagogical assessment integrates naturally into the Packetbook approach, as its primary aim is not to quantify student performance, but to support the learning process, mirroring the core principles of formative assessment. Also known as developmental or process-oriented assessment, formative assessment prioritizes guiding the learner's progress, fostering self-reflection, and providing meaningful feedback that facilitates further development rather than assigning grades.

Given the distinctive pedagogical philosophy of the Packetbook project, formative assessment can be seamlessly embedded within its framework. Unlike traditional textbooks, the Packetbook does not present a linear curriculum; instead, it offers a modular, flexible toolkit that allows students to shape their learning paths based on their individual interests, levels of prior

knowledge, and learning goals. This open and adaptable structure aligns well with formative assessment practices, which do not rely on standardized benchmarks, but rather emphasize personalized growth and support tailored to each learner's evolving needs.

Given that the Packetbook promotes experiential and activity-based learning, the methods of assessment must likewise reflect this pedagogical orientation. Instead of traditional testing, approaches such as product-based feedback, learning journals, self-reflective prompts, and peer assessment are far more compatible with the project's underlying principles. In addition, the transformation of the teacher's role (which is a cornerstone of the Packetbook framework) naturally aligns with formative assessment practices. Here, the teacher acts not as a transmitter of knowledge, but as a mentor and facilitator who co-constructs the learning process with students. This shift enables educators to reflect not only on the content of learning but also on the processes through which learning occurs.

The collaborative learning structures embedded in the Packetbook (such as group work and project-based activities) also provide fertile ground for formative assessment. Students are encouraged to share their work, offer feedback to one another, and engage in collective reflection on the learning journey. These practices not only enhance learning outcomes but also strengthen social competencies and foster intrinsic motivation. Altogether, formative assessment is not only applicable within the Packetbook system but is inherently connected to its broader pedagogical objectives.

5. Conclusion

The Packetbook project is not merely an alternative model for literature education; it represents a comprehensive pedagogical rethinking that aims to transform learning into a personal, reflective, and active process. By allowing students to make individual choices regarding their reading materials, integrating contemporary literature and popular genres, and employing experiential pedagogical tools, the project creates a learning environment in which students are not only recipients of knowledge, but also active agents in shaping their own educational journey. Within this conceptual framework, the role of the teacher is also redefined: the teacher becomes not the sole source of knowledge, but a facilitator and mentor who supports student autonomy and creativity.

Integrating formative assessment into this system is not only feasible but essential. Formative evaluation methods (such as self-reflection, continuous feedback, and collaborative assessment) align naturally with the pedagogical logic of the Packetbook and contribute significantly to the development of students' autonomy, metacognitive awareness, and intrinsic motivation. Learning thus becomes not only outcome-oriented but also process-centered, leading to deeper and more sustainable knowledge acquisition over the long term.

Teacher and student feedback collected during pilot implementations illustrates how this approach translates into classroom dynamics: teachers reported that responding to students' reading journals with comments that emphasize personal interpretation encouraged deeper engagement, while structured peer review sessions around creative reinterpretations of texts fostered collaborative discussion and critical reflection. Students described feeling more motivated to read and share their ideas when given freedom of choice, and teachers observed increased participation from previously less engaged learners, indicating tangible shifts in classroom atmosphere and learner agency.

This study highlights that the Packetbook model and formative assessment are not only compatible, but mutually reinforcing in their pedagogical potential. In future educational practice, the combined application of learner-centered experiences, self-directed learning, and value-based feedback may represent one of the most promising directions in educational development. However, realizing this potential requires more than tool or curriculum development; it demands a deeper paradigm shift on the part of teachers, students, and educational policymakers alike.

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