

# Continuity as a System of Activity Directed at the Development of General-Education Complexes

## Continuidad como sistema de actividad dirigido al desarrollo de complejos de educación general

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#### ABSTRACT:

This paper provides a rationale for the need to address the issue of the development of enlarged educational complexes and brings to light continuity as a goal-oriented system of activity. Philosophers of education consider continuity to have a wide range of aspects, from the pattern of development to the process. In this regard the methodological basis for the current research was made up of a systemic-activity approach and the theory of organizational development. In the framework of the research certain structural components of continuity are defined as well as the model for activity on effectuating continuity is worked out. The authors reveal the risks of the organizing the activity of educational complexes on effectuating continuity.

**Keywords:** continuity, system, educational complex, development, factors, issues, structural-functional model

#### RESUMEN:

Este trabajo proporciona un fundamento para la necesidad de abordar el tema del desarrollo de complejos educativos ampliados y trae a la luz continuidad como un sistema de actividad orientado a objetivos. Los filósofos de la educación consideran que la continuidad tiene una amplia gama de aspectos, desde el patrón de desarrollo hasta el proceso. En este sentido, la base metodológica para la investigación actual estaba formada por un enfoque de actividad sistémica y la teoría del desarrollo organizacional. En el marco de la investigación se definen algunos componentes estructurales de la continuidad, así como el modelo de actividad sobre la realización de la continuidad. Los autores revelan los riesgos de la organización de la actividad de complejos educativos sobre la realización de la continuidad.

**Palabras clave:** continuidad, sistema, complejo educativo, desarrollo, factores, problemas, modelo estructural-funcional

# 1. Introduction

Russia's system of general education is currently going through some major changes in its functioning, both content- and structure-wise. The process of restructuring educational organizations has touched all its stages, from preschool to college education. The nation is currently witnessing a trend toward the creation of enlarged general-education complexes, both in its cities and in its rural localities. The enlarging of general education organizations presupposes resolving 2 strategic objectives, educational and economic. Resolving the educational objective is aimed at boosting the quality of education via providing students with access to the latest resources and educational services and actualizing the principle of accessibility and person-oriented development. The economic side of these structural transformations is aimed at the optimum use of finances and effective engagement of resources in education. The findings of an analysis of the operation of enlarged educational complexes indicate that these objectives are not always resolved successfully, which is due to a number of both practical and theoretical issues. These issues warrant some serious methodological conceptualization and may require putting together relevant mechanisms for the development of such educational complexes (Kharisova 2016).

The process of enlarging general education organizations could be viewed as a way to help do away with any discrepancies between society's requirements for quality general education and the poor and ineffective performance of certain educational organizations, as well as to help preserve continuity between educational organizations across different stages of education (Lomakina 2014).

As an objective reality permeating all developing systems, continuity has been explored in its various scientific aspects quite extensively. In pedagogy, continuity, depending on the research subject, may be viewed as a consistent pattern of development, as a didactic principle, as a condition, as a link between phenomena, as a result, as a component of pedagogical craftsmanship, as a way of developing the major components of the education system (objectives, content, methods, forms, means, etc.), as a component part of continuing education, and as a process. This has been substantiated by the findings of research conducted by a number of scholars, including A.M. Novikov, S.M. Godnik, D.V. Legenchuk, V.M. Prosvirkin, Yu.A. Kustov, A.K. Oreshkina, I.S. Surovtsev, A.P. Smantser, A.K. Mendygaleeva, and others. Scholar N.F. Vinogradova suggests considering continuity in the following aspects: pedocentric (the educational process being centered on the student), content-related (establishing the content lines), and activity-related (the focus being on the leading types of activity for each age) (Vinogradova 2000).

Thus, there is every indication of the need to address the practical issue of how to effect structural changes in general education organizations so as to ensure that they will be efficient subjects of educational activity, continually operate in growth and development mode, and be competitive within the system of general education – and, above all, that high school graduates will be well-educated, well-mannered, and well-disposed toward developing throughout life.

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## 2. Methods

To help resolve the above issue, the authors have accomplished the following: analyzed the efficiency of general education complexes that are already in operation in the city of Moscow and identified some of the major issues with their operation; explored the regulatory and legal framework underlying the development of educational complexes across the nation; summarized the scientific background for the study and identified the scientific issue; fine-tuned the concept of continuity; gained an insight into some of the factors influencing the activity of educational organizations, identified some of the risks facing it, and looked into some of the mechanisms underpinning it. The methodological basis for the study is made up of a systemic-activity approach and the theory of organizational development.

### 3. Results

To determine the mechanisms underlying continuity in educational complexes, it is necessary to first get a clear idea of what an educational complex is. An educational complex is an educational organization wherein the instructor and student teams are consciously engaged in learning and in exploring and enhancing the educational process. A large general-education complex may incorporate organizations specializing in preschool, primary, core, and secondary general education, as well as supplementary children's education, special (adjustment) structural units, and other educational institutions. General-education complexes are an establishment that is intended to bring together intellectual, financial, personnel, material-technical, information, and other resources with a view to helping develop further the system of general education, create the right conditions for boosting the quality of education, ensure the continuity of curriculum, ensure the possibility for students to select and undertake a custom learning path based on their individual needs, and enhance the way state funding is used.

In his research study dealing with models and mechanisms for managing educational complexes, scholar D.A. Novikov construes an educational complex as an association of educational institutions and asserts that educational complexes ought to be considered from the perspective of strategic grounds for associating them together: the degree of horizontal integration; the degree of vertical integration; the degree of organizational integration (Novikov & Glotova 2004). M.V. Nikitin defines an educational complex as a self-developing, self-changing educational organization (Nikitin 2016). There are the following types of educational complexes known at the moment: multi-functional educational complexes, multi-specialty educational complexes, and multi-level educational complexes.

This study has helped identify the key factors influencing the creation and development of educational complexes. These, above all, include the outmoded material-technical base of some educational organizations, insufficient student and teacher manning levels (e.g., in rural localities some classes may have few students, while there may also be a lack of teachers, with some instructors having to teach more than one academic subject), insufficient teacher qualification levels, the quality of education being out of line with the latest requirements for it, a lack of funding experienced by certain educational organizations, students having insufficient access to various additional educational services, etc. The need is there to create sustainable educational complexes that would cultivate positive social and cultural learner experience, which should lead to social-economic and cultural growth in the nation (Novikova & Afanas'eva 2016).

Below are some of the major objectives associated with the development of educational complexes:

- creating the right conditions in the way of providing learners with a wide and varying choice of educational services;
- putting together large robust educational organizations that could provide learners with the opportunity to undertake an individual learning path;
- ensuring the possibility of forming robust pedagogical teams capable of implementing top pedagogical practices;
- ensuring continuity between objectives, content, and technology across different stages of education so as to ensure the psychological comfort of all participants in the educational process;
- ensuring the economic efficiency of the educational process, which presupposes considering education as a seamless manageable system;
- expanding the potential for actualizing the educational needs of learners and pedagogical potential of teachers.

Enlarging educational organizations may help boost:

- the potential for team consolidation;
- the social status of the educational complex. When educational institutions centered around a strong organization get enlarged, that gives a boost to the status and image of not just that organization but of all units joined to it as well;
- pedagogue motivation. This is a crucial factor in the development of a unified educational complex. All kinds of issues may arise from the interaction between colleagues representing different units, while the efficiency of work may also depend on varying levels of professional competence. Therefore, the leadership and administration ought to make the team interested in working within a single educational space and taking an active part in modernizing the educational system;
- the concentration of educational resources (material, personnel, information, managerial, scientific-methodological, financial, etc.), due to the integration of educational organizations, which should have a natural effect on the quality of education;
- the regional and ethno-cultural factor. Based on the overall potential of regional systems of education and the region's demography, territorial location, and climatic and natural characteristics, there may take place some structural changes (Shukaeva 2009).

Changes in the structure of the educational organization may entail changes in the entire system of education (objectives, content, educational technology, resource potential, management structure, the various conditions, etc.) and may require of the senior personnel and teaching staff different managerial approaches and professional competencies.

A significant factor in the development of general education complexes is continuity in education. This issue is not new for pedagogy and Russian education. However, the new socio-cultural and economic conditions under which the nation and its education system are currently developing make it necessary to concretize this pedagogical concept and develop relevant mechanisms for its effectuation. Article 63 of the law 'On Education in the Russian Federation' states that curricula for preschool, primary general, general, and secondary general education allow for continuity of learning (Federal Law No. 273-FZ). But things are totally different in practice. The issue of curriculum continuity owes its relevance to changes that have been taking place in the system of general education over the last decade. This includes the new paradigm of education, predicated on the individualization and differentiation of education, the diversity and alternativeness of educational systems and educational organizations, the flexibility and dynamicity of curricula, and the ability to adapt to changing social-economic conditions and the individual interests and faculties of learners – these changes have brought about the need for innovative changes in education intended to help establish internal continuity within and organize the educational system, which would be characterized by pursuing a single line of children's development, continuity in objectives, content of learning, technology, and methods and techniques employed.

Through the lens of this research study, continuity, as a pedagogical category, is considered as not just an objective system but one of goal-oriented activity within an educational complex aimed at integrating the stages of education, curricula, and forms of organizing the educational process.

As a system, continuity has an internal and external form. External continuity is associated with the form of organizing the educational process, while internal continuity is determined by the content of education laid down in the base didactic structures. The authors confine this discussion to considering continuity solely from the viewpoint of organizing the educational process in an enlarged general education complex, as a system of activity directed at affecting the shift from quantitative changes to qualitative ones, which concerns both the development of the complex itself and the development of learners.

Continuity has the following structural components to which some changes should be made, while preserving most of the traditions from the former educational organization: objectives, content, educational technology, forms of control over the results, and traditions. Continuity

performs the following functions: systematizing, integrating, ensuring consistency, regulative, ensuring an ongoing process, socializing, motivating, developing, helping design the content, forecasting, and others.

Cultivating continuity in an educational complex is actualizing its functions to the fullest. In this regard, it may be asserted that continuity has different levels and could be assessed based on certain criteria and indicators. In order to identify some of the criteria for assessing the level of continuity, it is important to first determine: the objects reflecting continuity within the educational system; the aspects of the effect of continuity; the spheres in which continuity is manifested. The objects reflecting continuity are objectives, content, educational technology, learning methods and techniques, methods of control, and the various conditions (personnel-related, regulatory, material-technical, scientific-methodological, motivational, and organizational-managerial). Continuity influences the development of learners, the development of the very educational organization, and the development of its conditions and potential. Continuity shows in curricula, syllabi, subject domain curricula, nurturing programs and supplementary education systems, the work programs of methodological associations, and the outcomes of education. The major reflection of continuity is the learner, with their personal qualities and their levels of education and upbringing.

Among the major principles of the activity of educational complexes directed at cultivating continuity are: the continuity of general education; integrativeness, which presupposes not just the merging of educational organizations and joining up their potential but creating an entirely new subject of education; synergy – the ability to assess joint effects from educational activity through coordinated behavior and mutually-supportive relationships; integrity, implying the implementation of single goals and objectives for education; systemicity, implying the building of a single educational system; diversification, which implies structuring the system of education in such a way as to ensure the diversity of educational services and curricula.

As a system of activity, continuity is an aggregate of interrelated changes taking place within the educational system of a complex, changes to its potential and resources, its managerial structure, and the degree of pedagogue preparedness to effect the stage-by-stage systemic development of learners.

To be able to resolve the objectives set, educational complexes ought to have a standard model for activity on effectuating continuity. A model of this kind could be a structural-functional model that is an invariant for a scientifically well-grounded system of structural-content components (those related to objectives, content, management, motivation, etc.) and mechanisms for implementing them.

This research study considers the activity of educational complexes directed at cultivating continuity to be predicated on the concept of organizational development and presuppose the following stages:

- diagnosing the quality of educational services, as well as the potential and needs, across the educational organizations being joined together;
- formulating a problem field and determining the reasons behind the low levels of continuity;
- developing a strategy for the development of the educational complex, a structural-functional model, a program for development, local projects, and the plans for implementing them;
- effecting the changes;
- assessing the outcomes of the changes (Kharisova 2013).

The objects of change in enlarging an educational organization are the educational process, the system of management, and the potential of educational institutions. Here is an example of a project for effecting such changes:

### **3.1. Modernizing the educational process**

*Issues:* declines in the quality of education in certain schools and preschool educational institutions; declines in the quality of educational services; declines in the competitiveness of educational institutions; the limited potential of educational institutions.

*Objectives:* identifying the issues in each educational subdivision and formulating a problem field; working out a general strategy and specific programs for modernizing goals, objectives, and educational technology; creating the right conditions for boosting the quality of the educational process (material, personnel, financial, educational-methodological, managerial, organizational, etc.).

*Technology:* conducting problem-oriented analysis of the educational activity of preschool educational institutions; working out a strategy, a model, and a program for development with the involvement of pedagogues and third-party experts; searching for and implementing novel educational technology; boosting pedagogue qualification; creating the necessary conditions for the implementation of the strategy and program for development. It is crucial to understand that such educational complexes ought to function as innovative educational organizations and operate in growth and development mode.

### **3.2. Modernizing the system of management**

*Issues:* the ineffectiveness of the system of management, job duty overlaps, poor delegation of authority practices being in place.

*Objectives:* conducting the analysis of the system of management and identifying the issues; searching for, working out, and implementing a new system of management; altering the style of management and making changes to senior personnel.

*Technology:* applying managerial mechanisms from the theory of the organizational development of institutions; altering the style of interaction within the intra-system units of the new educational complex; creating a new organizational culture within the merged team.

#### *3. Modernizing the potential of the new educational organization.*

*Issues:* ineffective conditions, outmoded material-technical base, low levels of pedagogues' professional competence, lack of funding, job duty overlaps, insufficient use of resources that are available, etc.

*Objectives:* cutting costs, renewing resources, enhancing pedagogue qualification levels, developing a new strategy for development.

*Technology:* phasing out outmoded resources.

Thus, in effecting structural changes in educational organizations, it pays to identify the gaps in continuity and come up with ways to interlink objectives, content, educational technology, styles of management, and resources (personnel, material-technical, educational-methodological, etc.). An important condition for effectuating continuity is pedagogue preparedness, both information- and motivation-wise. It is crucial that teachers and pedagogues know the end-result of their pedagogical activity, have a command of technology for effectuating continuity, have the ability to analyze things, and are willing to help their students develop and develop their own professional qualities (Tyunnikov 2013).

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## **4. Discussion of results.**

In organizing the activity of educational complexes on effectuating continuity, both horizontal and vertical, it pays to take into consideration the following risks:

- the wrong choice of goals and objectives for restructuring educational organizations; premature assessment of the outcomes of changes. To prevent this from happening, it pays to competently work out a relevant program for development and a plan/schedule for changes, as well as relevant assessment criteria;

- insufficient pedagogues qualification levels. In this regard, it pays to design special career enhancement courses, conduct workshops and round tables, engage the scientific community, etc. It is crucial to understand that changing the structure may require changing the entire system. The new educational structure ought to work in novel ways – that is operate in growth and development, renewal, and innovation implementation mode;
  - underestimating the need for certain resources;
  - low pedagogue motivation. There often occurs a conflict of interests, and pedagogues may psychologically be unprepared to work in a new team. Pedagogues oftentimes work in waiting mode, without engaging in the actual process of restructurization;
  - a poor management system. New executives, or the new administration, may lack the necessary managerial experience and knowledge, with too much focus being on organizational issues;
  - traditions that used to be practiced in certain educational organizations sinking into oblivion or getting abandoned.
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## 5. Conclusion

A present-day Russian high-school graduate ought to be highly educated, well-grounded spiritually and morally, and well-disposed to develop further so as to become competitive in society. The potential to attain a major objective of this kind rests with sustainable educational complexes committed to continuity and seamlessness as crucial mechanisms underlying the development of man.

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