THE VERSATILITY OF THE MEANINGS OF CONTINUITY

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Abstract: *In the article "Versality of the meanings of continuity" a selective presentation of the phenomenon of the continuity of modern debates on the functional character of education is made. The scientific crossing of the concept of continuity in pedagogy, in search of its applicative essence, generates a vision that includes as much of the space of the respective phenomenon as possible. Approaching the problem in the title, we do not have a polemical intention in mind, but we want to show why we need to return to this problem, which is actually not a new one. The phenomenon of continuity is examined from various perspectives, from which the idea of a complex process emerges, namely: connection, system, principle, process, legitimacy, requirements, conditions, factors, functions. In order to illustrate some dimensions of continuity in learning, a complex pedagogical experiment was carried out, from which we present a sequence aimed at the initial level of development of children's specific formations within preschool education, based on a technological ensemble of the functionality of integrity - continuity.*

Key words: *continuity; principle; system; systematization; systemic learning; evolution; succession; lifelong learning; continuity mechanisms.*

Introduction

Approaching the concept of continuity in pedagogical science reveals a rich range of meanings. Thus, currently, there is no unanimously acceptable opinion on the definition and interpretation of the pedagogical essence of continuity. According to the statements of specialists in the pedagogical field, the notion of continuity has had and continues to have a special evolution and a special impact on the education system, starting with preschool and up to higher school, on personality formation, on human activities in postmodernity

[I. A. Comenius, C. Cucoș, Gh. Stanciu, T. Callo, L. Cuznetov, Vl. Guțu, O. Dandara, etc.]

The applications of the concept of continuity are in the perimeter of the learning activity, which, as is known, is also carried out for the purpose of distributing the study material.

The successive distribution generates the connection and agreement between the steps and stages of the educational process. The interpretation of the assimilated at a new, advanced level, belongs to the development process that conditions the continuity and evolution of the child on a higher level.

The theoretical dimension of continuity

As is well known, the issue of continuity as a principle was theoretically argued for the first time by the Czech pedagogue I. A. Comenius [1], in the work "Marea didactica". I. A. Comenius proposes a fundamental pedagogical principle: education should be done taking into account the individual's stages of development, his particularities of age. Starting from this principle, the author reaches the following conclusion: the content of the training must be distributed according to the age levels, so that nothing is taught *that would exceed the child's ability to understand*.

Although the principle has been perceived for a long time, and in the process of examining continuity, I. A. Comenius examines the continuity of positions as ***a necessity*** of the learning process, noting that, in general, the knowledge acquired throughout life must be distributed in such a way so as to make up an ***encyclopedia*** [ibidem, p. 58], today there are still conceptual "balancing" in this sense, both continuity and "encyclopedism" being put under several question marks.

Therefore, as we deduce from the above, I. A. Comenius, for the first time, tried to identify continuity *as a universal pedagogical category*, which has an impact on all pedagogical problems, as well as educational ones, directly relating continuity to learning.

Also in this ideological framework, the approach of the Swiss pedagogue J.H. Pestalozzi is relevant, who among the first proposes structuring the learning process according to the legalities of children's mental development, formulating the rule of *gradual graduation and rigorous succession* in training. According to the author, learning involves ascending succession in steps, from accessible to difficult, from near to far, from present to future. In this framework, as a priority, the author considered the fact that continuity becomes an *internal process* of development, which, in the end, must end with

self-development, self-movement. We also find the tendency to establish *continuity relationships* between different learning stages [Appud 3, p. 88].

J. J. Rousseau's opinions are current in the context of the active personalization of learning in postmodernity, which affirms the need to respect childhood in correlation with the principle of conformity with nature and urges to know the nature of the child in order to understand and respect the particularities of his age. In this sense, the author notices: *"the child is not an adult in miniature, but a being with specific particularities, with its own requirements and aspirations"* [Apud 2, pp. 146-150]. This fact fully supports the idea that the functionality of completeness and continuity requires the shaping and optimal *capitalization of children's age possibilities*. We refer, in particular, to children aged 6-9.

The continuous nature of learning, according to A. Disterveg, occurs when the student is able to go through each stage, with a degree of independence that corresponds to the particularities of age, so as to reach the general goal: the development of independence and the "rightful" knowledge of matter. In the learning process, the author mentions, not only the child's nature must be taken into account, but his *individual peculiarities* must also be respected. It is from here that we once again "extract" the idea of active personalization of learning in the context of continuity. We cannot fail to appreciate the author's statement that "at each stage of learning, successive sequences of matter are identified and do not admit radical interruptions, and some data are extracted to awaken the student's curiosity" [10, pp. 79-84].

Reflections on the versatile nature of the perception of continuity also lead us to the central idea of J. Fr. Herbart's *theory of psychological steps* [5, p. 23], who claims that the learning process inevitably goes through the *deepening of the learned material and its awareness*. In their turn, these two processes, deepening and awareness, can be achieved either in a state of rest or in motion. Therefore, clarity, association, ordering and overview represent continuity. In addition to this, J. F. Herbart also formulates an acceptable explanation with reference to *ensuring continuity of relations* in the activities of educational agents (students-teachers), between different generations. Each generation, the author argued, has the circle of the concrete age, which is closed. Both the pedagogue and any individual, each with his ideas, discoveries, trials and, respectively, his experience. Each era is characterized by some specificities typical of this period. The eternal truth remains that, a priori, no domain of an era can be considered finished, we can never say that a system approaches a finality. Therefore, the pedagogical process is uninterrupted, and with the change of generations, continuity ensures the transfer of experience from one historical period to another [ibidem, p. 41].

Thus, continuity in learning is characterized by:

- *The invariable component* - determines part of the learning content, which is preserved with the transition to the next learning stage;
- *The functional component* - offers the possibility of passing quantitative changes into qualitative ones;
- *The component that has the role of operator* during the transition period from one learning stage to the next and ensures the preservation of previous knowledge at the new stage [14, p. 89].

Continuity finds its expression in the category of pedagogical principles that ensure *coherence* and *reciprocity* between *all levels of education*, starting with preschool education and up to higher education: the principle of systemic approach, continuity and consecutiveness; the principle of systematization and continuity (didactic principle); the principle of unity and continuity (principle of education); the principle of reverse connection (feed-back); the principle of unity, continuity and systematization, etc. All these principles converge towards the idea of the system of order, because a sustainable and effective learning is carried out in a *logical-systemic order* and takes place in a continuous manner, without jumps and interruptions. The educational units and elements are arranged in a hierarchical order, so that each content element follows others and is followed by others. Learning is cumulative, and its process intervenes as an act of systematization, integrating new knowledge into previously existing cognitive-informational systems. This fact determined the approach of continuity as a *didactic principle*.

Here the question arises if the specificity of postmodernist discontinuity does not totally cancel this principle of continuity, if children/students learn better when certain learning topics are approached more broadly and "enter" issues located in sophisticated networks of relationships. From this perspective, it seems relevant to us that each new element of knowledge ***becomes a property*** of the child when it is based on what is already known, when it easily fits into what is already acquired. The solution to the dilemma lies in the fact that the *connection between new and old*, valid for any orientation in education, should be set in motion from old to new, as well as from new to old, with multiple "jumps" of perception and assimilation. The new will become a property of the student's consciousness only if it is organically included in the system of knowledge and skills, when the pedagogue takes this into account, knows in what doses to integrate the new material so that it is fully included in the child's consciousness. So, *active and systemic personalized learning* is a *condition* of

continuity in the assimilation of knowledge, from one step to another [Apud 11, pp. 59-62].

Starting from the idea of continuity, the ideas formulated by contemporary authors are quite conclusive. Thus, Vl. Guțu, addressing *the principle of systematization and continuity*, states that it expresses the requirement to achieve intra-curricular and inter-curricular continuity. In the researcher's view, this process aims at: continuity in the organization of interdisciplinary learning units, from class to class, from level to level (*from one course to another course, from one cycle to another cycle* - emphasis is ours); continuity in the design of objectives and the training of students' skills; the continuity of the organization of the contents in an intercultural plan; continuity in the application of didactic and evaluation strategies [4, p. 305].

From this perspective, another important finding should also be noted, namely the fact that *the principle of systematic and continuous learning* manifests itself in the educational area in the context of two levels and presents two aspects for each of them [6, pp. 150-151]:

1. *At the level of the education system*, where a coherent and open system can be built and organized through educational policy; the development of educational documents that explicitly stipulate systemic coordination and natural continuity between the different education cycles.
2. *At the level of the educational process*, the two aspects of this principle call for learning carried out in a systematic and continuous manner.
    - *the systemic aspect* involves an ordering of information according to a logic of the act of learning, of the respective discipline and of didactics. Thus, each element of the studied material should be logically linked to other elements, the present ones being based on the previous ones and being support for the ones that will follow them.
    - *the continuous aspect* implies the fluent, logical, staggered, permanent, consistent and without jumps of the educational process.

If we look from a psychological perspective, then systematization and continuity are based on the *principle of transfer* (specific and non-specific), on making intra, inter, pluri, transdisciplinary connections [7, p. 355]. The requirements of this principle concern the activity of the teaching staff to the same extent, as well as that of the students. On the one hand, *systematization* expresses the requirement that all the content designed and transmitted to

students be organized in a system and ensure the appropriate conditions for its integration into the system of the students' previous acquisitions, on the other hand, *continuity* is a natural consequence of the conditions of systematization, highlighting the logical articulation of the contents assimilated in different temporal moments. So, the observance of this principle has formative effects at the personality level, by forming the skills of systematic activity, perseverance, the spirit of rigor in thinking and action, which allows the child to adapt without great difficulties in the next stage of the educational system.

The opinions that propose the combination of the principle of *harmony, systemic, succession, continuity* and correlation in a single principle, *the holistic one*, are conclusive in the area of continuity approach. In this way, the material that was learned today must reinforce that of yesterday, opening the way for the next day [12, p. 316].

From the above, it is obvious that researchers approach continuity from the perspective of different *meanings*: as part of the systematic and continuous principle; as a didactic condition; as a means or way; as a system; as a method etc. It should be noted that most researchers highlight the content-informational aspect of continuity in learning. Therefore, these approaches to continuity in learning outline the essence, emphasize its universality and polyfunctionality.

The principle of continuity plays a special role *in the continuing education system*. Studies indicate that continuity manifests itself as an *integral quality* of the education system. In the context of *continuing education*, the category "continuity" becomes *universal*. Its content is much richer, because, in this case, we are talking about relationships and complementarity of subsystems in general of education, included as *components* in the *unique system of continuous education* [9, p. 24]. Through a descriptive meaning of the structuring principles of the continuous education process, we observe the relationship between the *principle of continuity* and the *principle of progressivity*. At the same time, the principle of progressivity implies the evolutionary character of the educational process and ensures the successive movement of the individual from one social step to another more mature, advanced one [13, p. 79].

Therefore, the principle of continuity is a necessary condition for achieving continuous, evolutionary, integrative and harmonious education. Achieving the principle of continuity is an important factor in making education more efficient. We must remember that from the perspective of *permanent education*, the integration of the contents is approached by L. Hainaut both as a vertical integration, which ensures the coherence of the different stages of

education, and as a horizontal integration, which determines the formation of competences to transfer the acquired knowledge in new contexts. The author opts for the following principles of *vertical integration*:

- no phase is the last, each one has its reason for being;
- the delimitation of the stages must be judicious in relation to the intellectual maturity, motivation and age of the learners;
- no phase is isolated: each one leans on the previous one and opens to the next one;
- the phases are complementary;
- the transition from one stage to another must operate without a break [8, p. 23].

Results

Thus, for the representatives of continuity theories, its general picture sums up several important aspects, reflected in Figure 1.

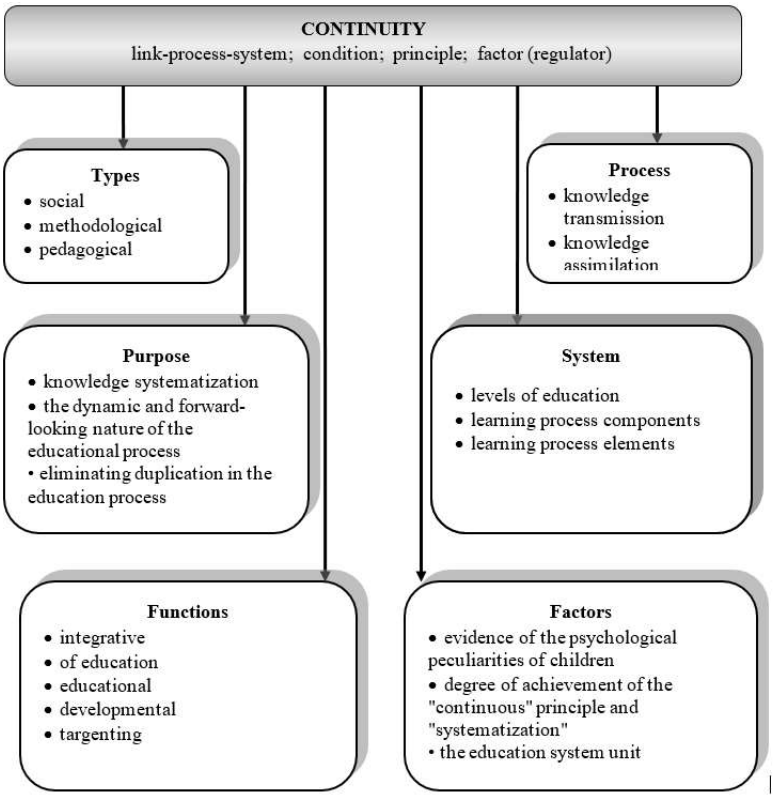

Fig. 1. The pedagogical significance of continuity

The experimental dimension

To illustrate some aspects of continuity in learning, a complex pedagogical experiment was carried out, from which we present a sequence aimed at the initial level of development of the specific formations of children in preschool education, based on a technological ensemble of the functionality of integrity - continuity.

For example, the finding test I (three+three) involved the inclusion of the subjects in an integrated activity of three didactic games and three learning activities: the "Colors" game, the "Happy/Sad Color" game; the game "Color of the holidays"; the learning activity "Merging words"; the "Sentence" learning activity and the "Plural" learning activity.

Table 1. Subject evaluation reference

The criteria of assessment **(dependent variables)**	**Evaluation indicators (independent variables)**
The imagination He sees the world around him in pictures	*Capacity:*
	1. to notice the whole
	2. to fully perceive objects, phenomena
	3. to understand meanings
	4. to discover things already known in a different way, anew
	5. to express his opinion operatively
Creativity	*Capacity:*
	1. to create verbal images

Create word pictures	**2. to adapt to various instructions in order to solve the task**
	3. to think independently
	4. to combine the contents in the reproduction of the new
	5. to express one's original opinion
Thinking **It actively positions itself in relation to the surrounding world**	*Capacity:*
	1. to see the surrounding world through notions
	2. to take an active position in relation to the knowledge task
	3. to carry out elementary research actions
	4. to reflect on the information
	5. to show flexibility in solving a task
Personalization of learning **Has motivation for learning**	*Capacity:*
	1. to motivate learning actions
	2. to act independently, creatively with objects
	3. to show flexibility in expressing thoughts
	4. to show confidence in expressing their own opinion
	5. to adopt various action procedures in realizing new situations

Reference levels: L I (unsatisfactory); L II (below average); L III (satisfactory, average);

L IV (high). The quality of the answers was assessed according to the qualifiers: *to a great extent*

big; satisfactory, average; below average; unsatisfactory.

Examining the answers of the subjects involved in the ascertainment stage, the distribution was made by levels according to the indicators, by applying the degrees of success (in percentages) and the quality of the tests was ascertained. In order to give a comprehensive character to the evaluation undertaken and to avoid descriptivism as much as possible, we have centralized the data obtained following the application of the six tests. Data are presented as a percentage.

Table 2. Synthetic results for the ascertainment phase (preschool age, 6-7 years)

Block 1 (second semester, academic year 2015-2016)					
Subjects	**Coordinates**	**Appreciation levels (%)**			
		I (unsatisfactory)	**II (below average)**	**III atisfactory, average)**	**IV (high)**
118 children (6-7 years)	Imagination	13,5%	42,4%	35,6%	8,5%
	Creativity	15,3%	44,1%	33%	7,6%
	Thinking	15,3%	45,7%	31,4%	7,6%
	Personalization of learning	16,1%	44,1%	32,2%	7,6%
Block 2 (second semester, academic year 2017-2018)					
76 children (6-7 years)	Imagination	15,8%	42,1%	35,5%	6,6%
	Creativity	17,1%	42,1%	35,5%	5,3%
	Thinking	15,8%	44,7%	32,9%	6,6%
	Personalization of learning	17,1%	42,1%	34,2%	6,6%
Average (Block I, Block II)					

Levels	Imaginati on	Creativity	Thinking	Personalizati on of learning
I	14,7%	16,2%	15,6%	16,6%
II	42,3%	43,1%	45,2%	43,1%
III	35,5%	34,3%	32,1%	33,2%
IV	7,5%	6,4%	7,1%	7,1%

If we refer to each variable, we find the following:

Imagination. Indicator: *Sees the world around in pictures*. Based on the results, we find that at the *high level* (IV) of imagination they were placed (7,5%). This category of subjects fully perceives objects, express their opinion operatively, capitalize on various methods of action in order to rediscover things already known. Subjects formulate correct, consistent, relevant and original answers. (35,5%) subjects were registered at a *satisfactory medium* (III) level of imagination. During the evaluation, the subjects adapted to the learning task with distrust, showing instability in the exposition of thoughts, less able to reinterpret already known things (for example, to assign other meanings to colors and to argue the opinion). The children showed less confidence in expressing their own opinion, they presented answers with some inaccuracies in relation to correctness. Another part of subjects (42,3%) demonstrated *below average level* (II). This category of children showed incomplete understanding of the meaning of what was reported, showing a dispersed attitude towards the task. As a result, the subjects demonstrated a reduced flexibility in solving the task, they encountered difficulties in exploiting, anew, the known things, they encountered difficulties in operatively expressing their own opinion; the response is below average in terms of correctness, consistency, relevance and originality. It is worth noting that at the *unsatisfactory level* (I) there were assigned (14,7%) subjects who did not understand the meaning of things, as evidence a lack of interest in the instruction and in the task was found. They failed to subordinate the work actions to the task they were to accomplish; the children did not show any response.

Creativity. Indicator: *Create word pictures*. The *high level* (IV) of creativity is recorded by (6,4%) of the subjects who understood the meaning of things, easily adapt to the instructions for solving the task, as a result they create correct verbal images. They express their opinion operatively. This category of children shows independent thinking, they are flexible in combining

contents, thus using some new elements. The answers were correct and original. The answers of the subjects who placed themselves at the *average satisfactory level* (III), (34,3%), indicate the following: the children had difficulty understanding the meaning, they had difficulty adapting to the instruction of the pedagogue and the task they had to perform, they presented answers incomplete, they did not always demonstrate independent thinking. The answers given were less accurate and relevant. Another category of subjects demonstrated *below average level* (II) and represents (43,1%) children. This group of children had difficulties in creating verbal images, they hardly adapted to the teacher's instructions. The subjects showed less independent thinking. They were less able to combine the contents to reproduce some new topics. Responses were below average relative to experimentally designated criteria. Subjects who did not present any answer, thus demonstrating a lack of interest in the task and the instruction of the pedagogue, were placed at the *unsatisfactory level* (I) and constituted a number of (16,2%).

Thinking. Indicator: *It actively positions itself in relation to the surrounding world*. *High level* (IV) of thinking was demonstrated by (7,1%) of the subjects. These subjects took an active position towards the task, they perceive the surrounding world through notions. A distinctive characteristic of this group of subjects is the research actions, the new perception of things already known, the ability to reflect on the basis of information. The answers were correct, consistent, relevant and original. Another group of subjects (32,1%) demonstrated *medium satisfactory level* (III). These children did not really show an active position to know, respectively the low interest in research actions. They demonstrated less flexibility in solving tasks. Responses were satisfactory in relation to the assessment descriptors. (45,2%) of the subjects were placed at the *lower middle level* (II). This category of children did not show interest in the knowledge task, they sporadically try some basic research actions, but they do not succeed. Partial subjects showed flexibility in solving the tasks. They were less able to reflect on the information presented to them. Responses were below average. Subjects (15,6%) who demonstrated an *unsatisfactory level* (I) were also certified in the respective samples. This group of children showed no interest in the instruction of the pedagogue in relation to the completion of the task, in relation to the information presented. The children did not show any response.

Personalization of learning. Indicator: *Has motivation to learn*. The percentage accumulated at this coordinate demonstrates the fact that a significant part of children (43,1%) demonstrated a *below average level* (II). Children with difficulty explaining and motivating the actions they have to perform, at the same time have an unstable attitude towards the task; partially

capitalize independently and creatively on materials/information. Responses were below average. Another part of children (33,2%) demonstrated a *satisfactory average level* (III). The children adapted with distrust to various instructions in solving the task. During the performance of the task, they showed instability in the exposition of their thoughts. They were less able to adopt action procedures in carrying out new tasks. The answers presented were satisfactory in relation to the descriptors. *High level* (IV) was recorded in (7,1%) subjects. The operational children expressed their opinion, motivated the operational actions to achieve the task, at the same time they showed an active attitude towards the task. During the performance of the tasks the subjects demonstrated flexibility in the presentation of thoughts. A distinctive characteristic of this category of subjects is the confidence in expressing their own thoughts, in adopting the procedures of action to accomplish the tasks. The answers were correct, consistent, relevant and original. At the same time, it was found (16,6%) subjects with an *unsatisfactory level* (I) of personalization of learning actions. These children showed a lack of interest in the learning task, they cannot act independently, creatively with the objects, they show insecurity in the actions they perform. It did not complete the task.

Conclusions

In an attempt to synthesize the ideas that essentialize continuity, we can agree the following findings:

1. In postmodern education, continuity is manifested as an objective component of the formative process, fulfilling the function of regulating its uninterrupted character. Continuity remains a *didactic principle* that includes:
    - continuous connection between and within different sides, parts, stages and steps of learning;
    - expansion and deepening of knowledge, accumulated at the previous stages of learning;
    - the evolutionary survey of the entire educational process, taking into account the content, forms and working methods.
2. Continuity is a process of evolutionary development of the personality at each stage of the education system, it is based on the relationship between the stages of learning and development of the child, which is carried out on the basis of the new *formations* of the previous stage, and, as a result, the creation of a system of conditions, which would favor the easy transition of children from one stage of the learning process to another and the development of an integral personality.

3. Experimental results converge towards the idea of the need to respect the principle of *continuity* at all learning stages, starting with preschool education.
4. Generalizing what has been reported, it can be stated that the pedagogical phenomenon of continuity is a current one, being a complex process, which involves: links, system, principle, process, requirements, conditions, factors, functions, in a wide diversity of approaches with special meanings.

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