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Design of Students' Creative Activity in the Conditions of «Digital Freedom»: Comparative Analysis of Group and Individual Strategies

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Abstract

The modern neural network, as a prototype of artificial intelligence, becomes not just an assistant in student learning, but its co-author, co-creator, a partner and a mentor. The ever-increasing and less-controlled capabilities of artificial intelligence in the field of collecting and analyzing information, organizing experiments, modeling and forecasting, generating original content, call into question the very principle of freedom of human creativity. The concept of "digital freedom" is introduced in the article to describe the new conditions of students' creative activity. The information environment is considered as a resource and, at the same time, a barrier for traditional approaches, which are adopted in pedagogy, to project creative activities of students. In the situation of digital freedom, new effective models and strategies for organizing, conducting and evaluating student projects arise. The article provides a review and comparative analysis of group and individual design strategies, introduces and describes new strategies for project activities based on collective leadership and co-creation with artificial intelligence. The experiences of project creative work performed by bachelor's students and master's students of the Higher School of Journalism of the Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications, the Institute of International Relations and the Institute of Psychology and Education of KFU were analyzed.

Keywords: digital freedom, design, project and creative activities of students, strategies for project and creative activities, models of project activities.

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Introduction

Is it possible for new digital technologies to open the horizon for the personal creative initiation or, on the contrary, they can deprive a person of a right to create? The digital world is a communication space familiar to mankind, a platform for professional and personal initiation and self-development. It is a dynamic, multi-tasking, all-accelerating digital environment that has special characteristics of the information flow: diachromism and diatopy. Here, a new hypostasis of personality, a new facet of "I-concept", "I-virtual", receives rights and freedoms, gaining immortality for the first time in the history of mankind. "I-virtual" will remain as a matrix, the digital trace of a personality in the context of self-realization: presentations, products of communication, creativity, professional interaction. Each "I-virtual" personality of the digital community members saturates the global network matrix with its intelligence, emotional and behavioral algorithms, which the neural network transforms into self-developing systems. We are talking about open systems, which were described by academician Valentin Andreev. The modern digital world is a dynamic, self-developing, open system. Information space as an updated digital environment is at the same time both an ocean of opportunities and a limiting matrix of forbidden blocks, formats, stereotyped strategies. As Andreev (2010) wrote in his autobiographical novel "Life as an Adventure of Creative Self-Development": "The modern Internet, which is undoubtedly a great intellectual good, at the same time weakens the creative abilities of the young. Even the most unique information becomes valuable only if a person was able to comprehend it, critically work through it, and let it pass through itself. "

The Internet in particular, and the entire digital world, in its variety of manifestations, is just the living environment of a modern person. To study the phenomenology of how digital environment influences a personality, it is necessary to highlight some specific new phenomena, the paradoxes of this environment, unusual and not yet adapted by a man.

One of the key characteristics of the digital world is the paradigm of freedom. But freedom in the digital environment paradoxically turns into a factor of digital dependence. A man of the future becomes a slave to the system; outside of digital technologies, he is not able to perform any socially significant action: all types of communication, analytics, orientation in the world and in knowledge occur with an online assistant. It is also about freedom of personal expression in the digital space, freedom of context production (all types of information), information exchange, data storage and analytics. While in the literature there is no single understanding of the content of the phenomenon of "digital freedom", so let us turn to understanding the key concept of "freedom". According to encyclopedists, "freedom" is the state of a subject which gives the determining cause of own actions, that is, actions are not directly determined by other factors, including natural, social, interpersonal, communicative and individual generic" (Sukharev,

2007). In this case, it is important to understand which part of a person makes a “free” decision. Indeed, today the modern "I-concept" of a personality is supplemented by an increasingly influential and even dominant component of the "I-virtual" (Andreeva & Sibgatullina, 2018). This structure of a personality increasingly fulfills the mission of decision-making in a digital reality. Modern philosophers discuss the freedom of a man “as an integral being”. The opinion of Belyaev & Maksimov (2011) arouses our interest; they emphasize that personal freedom is characterized by “the presence of natural, social and spiritual components, which dominance determines the specificity of its various forms. Integrity is the initial fundamental principle of the existence of all freedom forms that are inherently private” (Belyaev & Maksimov, 2011). Moreover, freedom as a value category can be a property of not only an individual, but also a social space. Just like morality is a personal category and public morality is a property of social systems. “We should talk about the presence of individualistic or collectivist tendencies in freedom, amenable to consideration in the social and personal dimension” (Belyaev & Maksimov, 2011) – such conclusion is made by the authors of the philosophical concept of freedom.

According to Hegel (1976): “Thinking is free for itself, not only in form, but also in terms of content. However, freedom of thought is not freedom without authority. Thinking has certain principles, which, however, are its own principles, and it reduces everything to them; however, these principles themselves ca be developed. Each time has its own principles, and they have authority for it”.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The hypothesis of the study is the assumption that the use of group and individual models of students' project activities, based on the approaches of collective leadership and co-creation with artificial intelligence, determines the internal strategies for designing creative activities that are spontaneously organized in student groups in response to the situation of “digital freedom”.

In the course of the study, the following tasks were solved: 1) determine the essence of the concept of "digital freedom" as a new condition for project and creative activity of students; 2) theoretically substantiate and characterize the appearance of creative phenomena in a situation of "digital freedom"; 3) develop models of individual and group project activities of students in the conditions of "digital freedom"; 4) put into practice models of individual and group project activities of students in a digital educational environment; 5) determine the internal interaction strategies that are spontaneously organized in a group in response to the situation of “digital freedom” when using models of individual and group project activities of students in a digital educational environment.

Literature review

The principles of digital freedom were tried to be described back in the 90s by the first ideologists of the World Wide Web independence. So, in the Declaration on freedom on the Internet, initiated by the organization “Reporters Without Borders”, the following principles are spelled out: freedom of expression, freedom of access, openness, freedom of innovation, privacy (Declaration of freedom on the Internet, 2012).

Fromm (2011) believed that freedom is the goal of human development. In the monograph “Escape from Freedom”, he substantiated the mechanism of avoiding freedom as “a phenomenon of human anxiety caused by the collapse of the old world, in which a person, despite all the threats, felt confident and safe.” In a situation of transition from the old to the new world order, a person falls into the conditions of new opportunities and orthodox fears (Fromm, 2011).

Freedom, as one of the categories of universal human values, is far from comprehended and accepted by the pedagogical community as one of the most important values for improving the modern system of education, training and upbringing. Summarizing the ideas of philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, we can give the following definition of the concept of "digital freedom". “Digital freedom” is the state of the system, ensuring the transparency of information (production, storage, reproduction, analytics) for users of the global network beyond the mental, national and other borders of the real world. At the same time, general (global) digital freedom often turns into digital unfreedom for the individual, violating the boundaries of privacy, confidentiality, authorship, professional norms, standards and ethics, creative novelty, and independence.

Inevitably, in a situation of “digital freedom”, the norms of ethics and aesthetics, personal privacy and authorship, creative strategies and models of social interaction are increasingly being transformed. “Globalization will change the world; it will transform priorities, values, worldview of students and teachers in the 21st century. A person will face the choice of self-determination. Responsibility of an individual for his own fate and his future will grow” - - Andreev (2013) wrote in "Pedagogy of Higher School". The “ideal” model of a modern personality proposed by the author includes such features as openness to experiments, innovations and changes, indispensable participation in experimental educational and scientific researches, etc. (Andreev, 2013). The conditions of “digital freedom” make the technology of project activity one of the most popular pedagogical technologies, since its use in the educational process of higher education allows students to intensify manifestations of innovativeness, creativity and free thinking. Recently, undergraduate and graduate students themselves increasingly become the initiators of the use of a

project technology; generate ideas for creative projects as independent startups. And this practice is welcome at all levels of education. Thus, the president of the Russian Academy of Sciences Aleksandr Sergeev, in an interview with the newspaper "Argumenty Nedeli" ("Arguments of the week" – transl. by authors) (Uglanov, 2020), emphasizes the importance of real projects that are in demand by the society. "The Bachelor's Degree is finished with the defense of the startup project. A team is formed, and it is given a task – to defend a startup to move to a Master's Degree. The best startups are chosen among all the projects. A university gives them financing" (Uglanov, 2020). Motivation of students in this case becomes as high as possible; the project can become not only a method of training, but a means of creative self-expression of a person in digital space, the meaning of professional and personal development.

Indeed, in the context of digital freedom, humanity is on the verge of a new understanding of itself and the world. Moreover, the most significant transformations occur precisely in the education system and determine the choice of effective learning strategies, in particular, when applying the methods of project and creative activity, which today is happening with the use of digital technologies.

Over the long-term practice of project management, design subjects and presentation forms have been changed: from albums and wall newspapers, excursion routes, and reports, to video lectures, webinars, scenario applications, long-reads of complex video presentations, and films. When working on a project, the role and position of a teacher changes, he becomes a facilitator, expert, coordinator, consultant, energetically and enthusiastically supporting student's creative search. The learning process itself in the framework of design and creative activities becomes learning in collaboration, where participants are equal partners. In the situation of "digital freedom", when conducting student creative projects, new phenomena arise. There are some of them below:

1. Digital attitudes. In social psychology, attitude is understood as a certain belief of the individual; a system of relations, opinions and behavioral reactions is formed in accordance with it. Gordon Allport (cited in Belinskaya & Tikhomandritskaya, 2001), one of the theorists of this phenomenon and a researcher in the psychology of media communication, defined attitude as "a state of mental readiness that has been developed on the basis of experience and exerts a directing and dynamic influence on individual's reactions regarding all objects or situations connected with a person".

In project and creative activities, digital attitudes are a phenomenon of the formation of stereotypical thinking. The stereotype, conventionality thinking, formed in a situation of "digital freedom", becomes the main barrier to creativity. The limitations of stereotypical thinking as the opposite of new thinking, which

accepts the world in a situation of multidimensionality and variability, is described by Taleb (2009), who identified several problems (distortions):

1. Descriptive delusion: even a random, spontaneous event is post factum described in such a way that it does not seem unreasonable. This delusion is based on the stereotypical approach of thinking to find causal relationships even where they do not exist.

2. Player delusion: transferring experience from a situation with regularities to a situation without rules, and vice versa.

3. Delusion of inverse statistics: the belief that future events are predictable through a study of past events (Taleb, 2009). So, modern students try to solve a new creative problem by methods and strategies borrowed from network resources. Hence the important rule of the creative project: "always deny the first thought that came to mind, most likely it is borrowed."

2. Reference: this phenomenon suggests an analogy of the new with something already existing. This is an analog or auxiliary image. For example, a drawing, a photograph that an artist or designer studies before work to understand the methodology of work, or to clarify the structure of how the project has already been created. It is a sample of the genre, style, “frame” into which it is easier to enter a new work. It is considered a norm in creative scenario writing to indicate the reference of films “with similar” ideas, genres, heroes. In a positive sense, reference is a technology for correlating one's project with an “ideal” achievement. In a different sense, reference is not a creative but a reproducing action: copying masters, which allows you to see the world through their eyes.

3. Surfing of an informational stream: the use of a dynamic resource of a stream in the format of spontaneous, often background media consumption, seemingly aimless “wandering in the network”. Initially, the concept of "surfing" means controlling the wave, when a person literally flies on the front or bottom of a moving wave, using the energy of the stream. The author of the theory of flow, who described it as a unique mental state of association with the environment, Csikszentmihalyi (2011) writes: “The state of flow is to be fully involved in the activities for its own sake. The ego is no longer valid. Time flies. Each action, movement, thought follows from the previous one, as if playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you apply your skills to the limit.”

4. Creative hacking: bio-hacking began a procession on a network from Silicon Valley and is declared to the world as a technique for controlling a body based on an understanding of internal systems and using all

new technologies. A lot of reasoning appears on the technologies of "hacking creative achievements", as on the "opening" of unconscious codes and secrets of creativity, for the awareness and search for the most effective strategies of a personality development and self-development of creative abilities.

Thus, analyzing the substantial features and phenomena of the organization of student creative projects in a situation of digital freedom, we can conclude that actions and phenomena of creative activity, which almost always remained in the zone of spontaneity and inspiration, can be subjected to conscious transformation, self-control and self-development. This is perceived as new practical knowledge, however, back in the 90s of the last century, within the activities on the design of the "I-concept" of a creative person self-development through scholarly traditions of an academician Valentin Andreev, there were published more than two hundred works devoted to the value of self-processes and self-esteem of own resources.

Methodology

The following set of mutually complementary methods was used in the study:

- theoretical research methods: theoretical analysis of philosophical, pedagogical, psychological, sociological literature, modeling, comparison;

- empirical research methods: study of documentation, study of experience, observation, enquiry.

The research facility included three institutes in the structure of the Kazan (Volga region) Federal University: the Institute of Psychology and Education, the Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications, and the Institute of International Relations. The choice of these institutes as a research base is due to the fact that they provide training for teachers, psychologists and journalists, and these are representatives of the humanitarian professions, which are characterized by a high level of independence and responsibility, combined with the creative nature of the activity. The representatives of these professions, in our opinion, have the highest need for the formation of competencies that allow them to creatively design their activities in solving professional problems, as well as in setting goals and developing strategies for professional and personal self-development.

Experiment description and procedure.

The experiment was held at the Institute of Psychology and Education, the Higher School of Journalism of the Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications and the Institute of International Relations of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University from 2017 to 2020. The number of students participating in the study was 380 people – 27 academic groups of students in total. The network

project activities of students took place within the framework of the following academic disciplines: “Educational Technologies in Higher Education”, “Pedagogical Activities in an Interactive Educational Environment”, “Psychology of Leadership”, “Introduction to Education”, “Journalism investigation on TV”, “Media-psychology”, “Psychology of virtual reality”, “Transmedia storytelling”. In the course of work with students - future teachers and journalists, more than 250 creative projects were created.

The experiment was organized in three stages:

- theoretical stage (2017);

- practical stage (2018-2019);

- stage of generalization and processing of results (2020).

At the first stage, the essence of the concept of "digital freedom" was determined as a new condition for project and creative activity of students. The appearance of creative phenomena in a situation of “digital freedom” were theoretically substantiated and characterized. At the same stage, there were developed models for individual (Fig. 1) and group (Fig. 2) project activities of students in the digital environment.

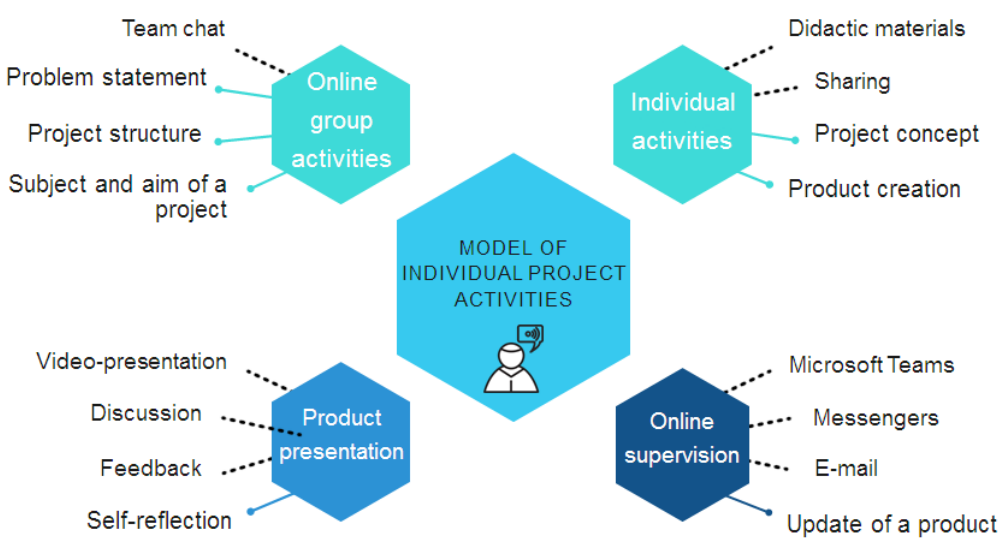

Fig. 1. Model of individual project activities of students in the digital environment

These models include an algorithm for creating a network project, which is understood as “a joint educational, cognitive, research, creative or game activity of partner students, organized on the basis of computer telecommunications, having a common problem, goal, agreed methods, ways of working to achieve a common result of activity” (Polat & Bukharkina, 2007).

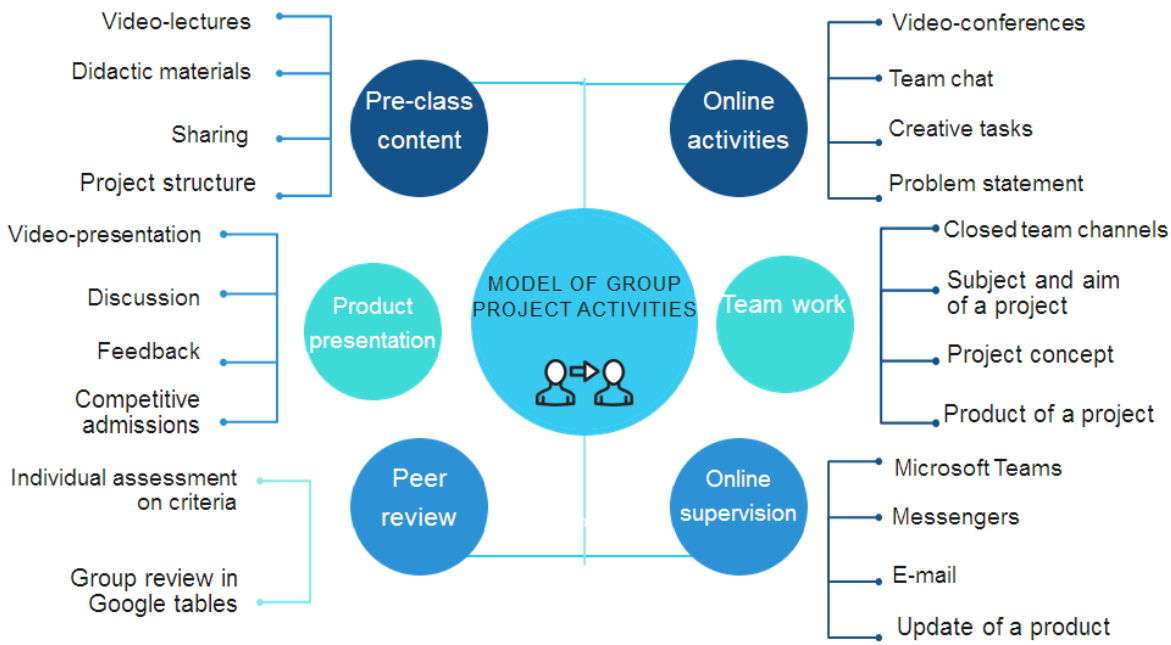

Fig. 2. Model of group project activities of students in the digital environment

The models developed in the course of the study represent a variant of the organization of project and creative activities of students in the framework of mixed and distance learning, when the interaction of students and a teacher partially or completely occurs in a digital environment, in the conditions of "digital freedom". It should be noted that the implementation of these models was originally planned in the context of blended learning, but, in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational process in Russian universities was temporarily converted to digital format, which allowed testing the models in the context of distance learning.

At the second stage of the study, models of individual and group project activities of students in the digital educational environment in the conditions of digital freedom were implemented in practice. Students developed educational projects in the course of classes (group on-line projects) and final projects based on the results of mastering the discipline (individual off-line projects). The interaction of project team participants in full-time and blended learning was carried out in a classroom, while distance learning teams interacted on the basis of the electronic Microsoft Teams application.

The following forms of project products were created as a result of students' network project activities during the implementation of various training courses: educational newspapers and magazines, design of information portals and websites, production of news and problem stories, television talk shows, documentaries in the journalistic investigation genre, concepts of conducting a transmedia information company, television art videos (sketches), videos on psychological (group behavioral) experiments in the field of media psychology, master classes, video lectures, sightseeing routes, scientific articles, script applications, long-reads, etc.

The results of work on projects were evaluated according to criteria developed jointly with students, including: consistency, logic, original critical analysis of the collected facts, the total volume of the material studied, the use of the source, overt observation (or other author's original methods), emotional perception and presentation of the material, enthusiasm for the project, original content, creative approach to the design and presentation of project materials, stylistic and grammatical literacy in the material presentation, composition of the material, original individual or group forms of work and presentation, time (or other) resource for the project, the reliability of the material (credibility opinions) and so on. The fact is that in the era of digital technology, creativity can fade into the background, a student may well present the material collected by "floating around the Internet" and pass it off as an original author's product. That is why, with the participation of project teams, criteria were developed that minimize or completely exclude the compilation option, and activate self-search.

After the implementation of a project and presentation of its results, a start strategy was discussed and defined, which led project team members to the goal.

At the third stage of the study, based on the results of the survey, as well as the use of methods of analysis and pedagogical observation, there was developed a classification of internal spontaneously organized strategies for designing creative activities in a student group in response to the situation of "digital freedom" and using models of group and individual project activities in digital educational environment. At this stage, the substantive characteristics of these strategies were also defined and described.

According to the results of observation, design strategies for students' creative activities can be classified according to two criteria: group architecture and creative activity styles. The analysis of the products of project teams' activities allowed us to identify the following types of strategies for project activities in the context of "digital freedom".

The first way to classify design strategies for students' creative activities is by group architecture classification. On this basis, three types of strategies can be distinguished: an equal group (Peer-to-peer), a hybrid group, and a centralized group.

Equal group ("Peer-to-peer"). "Peer-to-peer" (P2P) - in computer science is a single-rank, decentralized, peer-to-peer network based on the equal rights of participants. Often there are no dedicated servers in this network, and each hub (peer) is both a client and a server. For the first time, the phrase “peer-to-peer” was used in 1984 to design the IBM Advanced Peer to Peer Networking (APPN) architecture.

The equal rights of participants, when each of the students in a project group performs successively different roles and acts as a generator of ideas, a performer, an editor, and a producer, implies an equal level of intellectual and creative development of the group members. It is based on the principles of respect, self-government (independence and responsibility). The advantage of such a strategy is the possibility of combining the processes of self-learning and mutual learning, in a sense of team strength and interchangeability of partners, when even in case of an unexpected leave of one of the participants, the “chain”, figuratively speaking, continues to keep creative tension, and a group successfully completes the task.

Hybrid group. This group work strategy acts similarly to the function of the network, in which there are servers used to coordinate work and search for special super-information. Hybrid groups combine the speed of centralized networks with the reliability of decentralized networks. Such project teams include in their members one expert (professional, master) who is able to teach other participants unique skills. Meanwhile, he does not become the leader of a group, he works on an equal footing, but significantly raises the level of demands and opportunities of a creative group. During the project implementation, it is important that the expert does not take a leading role and remains in the role of an ordinary executor. In such hybrid groups, the rapid development of professional skills is observed. Students have the opportunity to learn valuable practical skills on an equal footing. The incentive for development is a sense of responsibility for the team result and the availability of a sample of high-quality professional activity with an equal load distribution.

Centralized group. An analogue of this strategy in the digital world can serve as a multi-peer network, which operates on the basis of the client-server model, where clients address to the central network hub (server). In a project team, there is certainly a leader who manages the activities of a group, stores data and presents the results of work. An advantage is the speed of work; a disadvantage is the unequal efforts of the participants. As a rule, a leader may not be satisfied with the level of preparation of participants, and may entrust the work to more communicative, responsible, intelligent and creative students. As a result, the main burden on working with the project is assumed by the “mighty group” - initiative team members; the rest are in the role of spectators, critics, recipients of feedback. The disadvantage of this group is also the risk of “burnout” of leaders due to the high load and its uneven distribution.

In a situation of digital freedom, the creative landscape of group interaction is also organized in a special way. This implies another way to classify student project strategies for creative activities - classification by creative styles. On this basis, one can distinguish such strategies as: individual creativity strategy, group creativity strategy, strategy of intuitive and imaginative creativity, a strategy of hybrid creativity with the use of artificial intelligence.

Individual creativity strategy. In such a group, a creative leader (author, editor, director, screenwriter) uses only his creative potential, the remaining members of a group embody his ideas. The basic condition for work is the creative level, the authority of a leader. At the same time, part of the group will be disappointed with the result, because, firstly, the result may not meet individual expectations, and secondly, the creative needs of each of the group members remained unfulfilled. More successful becomes the implementation of a project, where everyone performs an individual creative task. The disadvantage of this strategy is that in such works there is no unity of style and level.

Group creativity strategy. The method of generating ideas for a project within the framework of this strategy becomes, as a rule, a “brainstorm”. Ideas are discussed and selected according to the criteria of originality and realism. In the situation of the development of pedagogical and social projects, ethical parameters and professional risks can also appear as criteria for selecting ideas. At the same time, each member of a group conducts his own part of work, but then all the results are synchronized, entered into a single template. A positive outcome in the case of successful project implementation is not only the development of professional skills of group members (both pedagogy and journalism are based on collective creativity), but also the improvement of a group psychological climate - group members receive creative skills in professional communication. According to a teacher, such groups work without authoritarian leadership strategies more often. The digital world dictates its own rules of communication, which also apply to learning.

Strategy of intuitive and imaginative creativity. In the world of algorithms, analytical technologies and system approaches, in the course of design and development activities there is often a request of students for understanding of the logic and structure of the creative process itself. Thus, drama structures (three-act structure of the ancient theater, the “path of the hero” by Campbell (2003), script structures according by Vogler (2007) are studied in the screenwriting course of study. A comparison of the structures analysis in the films dramatic basis is carried out. However, the study and understanding of these structures by students does not always lead to their application in project activities. In 20 percent of cases, students choose the art house approach, trying to create an atmospheric movie, violating the canons and structures. In drama, the concept of "anti-structure" is even introduced.

A strategy of hybrid creativity with the use of artificial intelligence. In response to the situation of open information, when any project can be found on the network and, having slightly adapted to the requirements of the educational process, to pass off as their authorial original content, students are faced with a choice. Sensible pragmatism tells them to go the shortest way to solving the problem, but "I am the creator" requires the realization of potential, the development of creative capabilities, the realization of the team interaction possibilities. In this case, let us recall the provisions of a "game theory" ("Nash equilibrium") about optimal behavioral strategies (Petrosyan et al., 2012). Students, as a rule, choose the best way: they use network resources and at the same time give free rein to creative abilities. Moreover, they inevitably encounter the phenomenon of attitude. In this case the affirmation that you should first create your own approach, and then relate it to what has been done may be important.

Results

According to the survey, 63 percent of students chose group strategies for project activities, 37 percent - performed work according to the “individual creativity” scenario. A survey among students showed that 92 percent of them, starting work on a creative project, first automatically make a request on the Internet. This phenomenon can be written off as a behavioral standard, a fixed pattern, a social attitude (see the phenomenon of “digital attitude” described earlier).

Discussions

The results of the study confirm that design and creative activities, and especially work in the conditions of research projects, represent a wide field for the development of a modern specialist. The most effective was the use of project technology, built on a combination of traditional, already classic, methods (for example, motivation and evaluation) with methods of creative initiation on the Internet. We are talking about using the potential of the global information space (mass media, multimedia, etc.) in project activities, which every year expand their capabilities and sphere of influence. Due to the wide informational “field of activity”, students develop communicative and sociocultural competencies, the ability to intercultural communication.

At the same time, a study of the students' contemporary design activities has confirmed the increased development of clip, superficial, associative-shaped, rather than logical and research thinking in students. As a result of the high level of accessibility of information, the level of creative decisions, the novelty of ideas, and the ability to interpret the facts of the author are reduced. Students began to demonstrate an insufficient vocabulary and grammatical levels, as well as low personal erudition. The presence of criteria that emphasize the importance of understanding the underlying problems and cause-effect relationships,

emotional personal inclusion in the search, allow students to gain significant experience in the course of project activities for creative self-development in the conditions of "digital freedom". The theoretical materials presented in the article will subsequently form the basis of an empirical study devoted to assessing the impact of group and individual models and various strategies of students' project activities in the digital educational environment on the success of their learning process at the university.

Conclusion

Personal freedom on the Internet ends where the space of social interaction begins; it means it ends immediately, from the first step. For communicative professional fields, such as pedagogy and journalism, freedom of the network often results in a violation of the freedoms of authorship, freedom of creativity due to scaling of ideas and opinions competition, due to uncertainty of the identity boundaries, and blurring of valuable national and professional boundaries. Today, a journalist from Kazan is becoming a direct competitor to the New York Times journalist, and a teacher from KFU is at the same professional “ring” with a teacher from Yale. The unit of competition is information. Whoever owns more exclusive information is the winner. The freer the digital environment is, the higher the moral responsibility and the less personal freedom users have.

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