

Psychological and Pedagogical Factors to Organize Creative Online Contests for Children and Youth

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses special aspects of organizing art online contests for schoolchildren and students. Perception and presentation of the creative product in the online form (photography, video- or audio clips) require a special approach towards establishing assessment criteria for the creative product. Online contests hide certain risks connected with the honesty of the participants, technical problems, impossibility to assess participant potential correctly at all times et cetera. Still, such contests resolve a number of issues connected with the adolescent and youth fears such as fear of public speaking, fear to hear the opinion of the jury and others. The authors propose methodological recommendations regarding the preparation of online contests based on the continuous psychological and pedagogical study of the phenomenon.

Keywords: *online contest, children and youth, psychological and pedagogical factors, competitive risks, adolescent fears*

1. INTRODUCTION

The world today presents vast opportunities for children and youth to show themselves in different kinds of activities inclusive of creative work. It is natural for young persons to express their thoughts and feelings in the art piece of their own making as well as compare their achievements with the same of the other children and adolescents. When researching the problem of the contest's impact on the expression of the creative activity and general cultural development of the students, A.A. Melik-Pashayev revealed that such type of activity fosters forming will qualities, and exposing performance prowess [1]. Nowadays anybody's natural need for creative self-expression and self-presentation is satisfied with a big number of contests open for any interested student.

We are speaking now about a festival and contest movement as a special form of educational and developing activity. With the Internet actively penetrating our life, a great number of contests appeared to come online. We did not execute any specific research on the topic but our analysis of the 300 contests randomly selected on the Internet showed that 70% of them are held remotely. This is a definitely positive phenomenon as the opportunity of remote participation allows extending outreach of participants of the contests. The more so since representatives of modern students (Generation Z) are active users of the computer technologies and the Internet, and a generation of preschoolers and primary students (Generation Alpha) consider new technologies to be their natural habitat.

Clearly, there are contests in different directions of scientific and practical activities. We will take a deeper look only into the contests connected with arts, i.e. events that are neither professional nor pre-professional. Analysis of the results of professional contests in arts (musical, fine art, choreographic, etc.) requires separate consideration of the problem.

The article material is based on studies of online contests for children and youth who wish to express themselves in some artwork but are not aimed at further professional learning in that direction.

Creative online contests are very popular (two-thirds out of the 300 analyzed contests proved to be contests in arts). A major positive feature of such contests is the possibility to fit all student participants irrespective of their place of living, age, limited health abilities, etc. But we noticed a trend in organizing such events: contest organizers simply shift creative material to the site, and members of the jury assess content just like real artworks of the children and youth creation. However, the examination of the artworks (drawing, craft, declamation, theater production, etc.) in reality and in the online mode, i.e. in the video, photo or scanned material, is different. This problem is rarely accounted for, as long as all parties of the event are happy with the results: children, parents, organizers, and heads of the educational establishments.

This contradiction allows defining a research problem that is lying in the necessity to study psychological and pedagogical factors in conducting creative online contests for children and youth and working out recommendations on the assessment of the children and youth works that were sent for the contests like that. Findings of the research accomplished within the framework of the State

Assignment of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation for the year 2020 «Festival and contest movement as a factor of social engagement of the students», reveals discrepancies in the assessment criteria with regard to contest entries made in the offline and in the online modes.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

1) Theoretical methods: analysis, synthesis, systematization, a generalization of findings and pedagogical modeling; 2) Empirical methods: standardized interviewing (we interviewed 38,403 students aged from 12 to 21 y.o.), conversation; diagnostics; focus groups based on Moscow School No. 46, No. 548 and an academic subdepartment of cultural studies of the FSBEI of Higher Education «Moscow Pedagogical State University» (103 persons); content analysis of online contests (210 sites); analysis of creative artworks received for the contests of the online media outlet «School Today» (3,966 works).

3. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Nowadays, contest movement development is an educational priority. Leaders of different levels are concerned with this issue following the regulations of the National Educational Initiative «Our New School» which defines necessity to develop a creative environment to expose specially gifted kids in every comprehensive school and develop a system of Olympiads and contests of the school students to achieve a high competitive ability of the graduates [2]. Despite the urgency of the problem, now there is a lack of the pedagogical studies in the field.

Our country enjoys a well-developed system of professional and pre-professional contests. Yet pedagogical science and society, these days, are not so concerned about the development of hard skills as they are focused on soft-skills including personal components like creativity, communicability, self-management, self-development, self-control, self-presentation, ability to find ways out of the difficult situation, ability to analyze one's own success and failures, make conclusions and change track if necessary. Harvard University, Stanford Research Institute, and Carnegie Melon Foundation conducted in 2011 research in the big companies and proved that soft skills account for from 75% to 85% of the success of the employee [3]. In other words, only the person possessing soft-skills, personal characteristics that facilitate building interaction with the outside world, different people and one's own interests, will be successful and sought-after as a specialist in the modern world.

All-comers art contest is an effective form to develop soft-skills now. Such contests invite artworks from children and youth who want to express themselves in any creative activity but are not aimed at becoming a professional in the particular sphere of art. It is worth noting that students regard such activity with a big interest. The contests help

the coming generation to form exactly the skills that present difficulties for the school students, i.e. public speaking, self or group presentation, cooperation, creative development, acceptance of the cultural versatility of the society. There are good grounds for saying now about the importance of developing emotional intellect which allows the person to be flexible and capable of finding his or her place in the environment [4].

Research of the student preferences in selecting creative contest.

Online interviewing held in 2019 by the specialists of the FSBSI «Institute of art education and cultural studies of the Russian Academy of Education» in Russia, Germany, Poland, Finland, USA and China, confirmed topicality of the art contests among students. The findings attest to the positive dynamics of opting for online contests as the student age grows. (Figure 1). If in primary school the children want to take part in real contest (78%), starting from 7 to 11 classes the percentage of those opting for the distant contests grows from 22% to 44%, for undergraduate students up to 58%, and for master's degree students up to 95%.

It is obvious that, with age, the desire to take part in professional contests tends to grow yet we have to note a sufficiently high percentage of opting for art contests. The fact that these contests are selected by primary schoolers is explained by the decision of their parents who want their child to receive general artistic development (92%). The choice of the high schoolers and students, though, shows that youth still got the interest towards creative self-presentation (under graduates - 51% and master's degree students - 32%).

We asked a question «For what reasons do students choose online contests?». We received the following answers: «I spend less time», «No need to go anywhere», «I am anxious before the performance», «When recording a video you can always give it a second try», «It doesn't hurt if the work is not liked », «No shame», «Afraid of the public performances» et cetera. The answers lead to a conclusion that majority of students got hidden fears of a real competition. We studied hidden fears of public events in School No.46 in Moscow. Our findings of the reasons to opt-out from participating in the online contests and festivals reveal hidden fears of adolescents: in the first place it is the fear of public performance (28%), then goes the fear to look inferior to others (21%), fear of being ridiculed by peers (18%), fear to be misunderstood by others (15%), fear of being disappointed in oneself (11%), and a lack of interest (7%) [5].

Our anticipated answer like «It is because I am good at computer technologies» was given by a very small number of students (12%). We accepted that fact as a margin of error which was determined by us at 5%. Further on when working with the focus groups we recognized that many students regard their skills in the IT and virtual communication as very high. For example, in the focus groups embracing 72 high school students of the 9th and 10th classes and 31 undergraduate students, respectively, 68 high school students (94%) and 27 undergraduate students (87%) appraised their performance level in the new

technologies as high. Despite relatively small number of the focus groups participants such result can be scaled, as modern children are positively qualified users of the information and communication technologies. This is another trigger for the interest in online contests as this is the podium to demonstrate not only creative abilities but technical skills as well.

Strauss-Howe generational theory claims that social characteristics of the generations completely change every 20 years [6]. For example, the generation of modern school and other students is called «Generation Z»; these young men easily use digital technologies, get freely oriented in the virtual world, easily establish online communication, they are mobile and knowledgeable. Going on with the research of the generation characteristics, Australian

sociologist Mark McCrindle introduced a new term «Generation Alpha», i.e. children born in the 2010 years, modern preschoolers and primary school pupils. These children grew with the gadgets in their hands, and virtual reality and online communication present for them a bigger value than real life [7]. In fact, Generation Alpha, to a bigger extent, sticks to a world concept, using J. Baudrillard's definition, as a simulacrum, receiving information not from their real impressions but from the networks [8]. After exploring domestic and foreign psychological, pedagogical, cultural and sociological studies, we can state that about 50% of modern adolescents spend time with their gadgets for more than 10 hours a day; 85-90% of school children use the Internet and are in the social networks about 80% of the time [9].

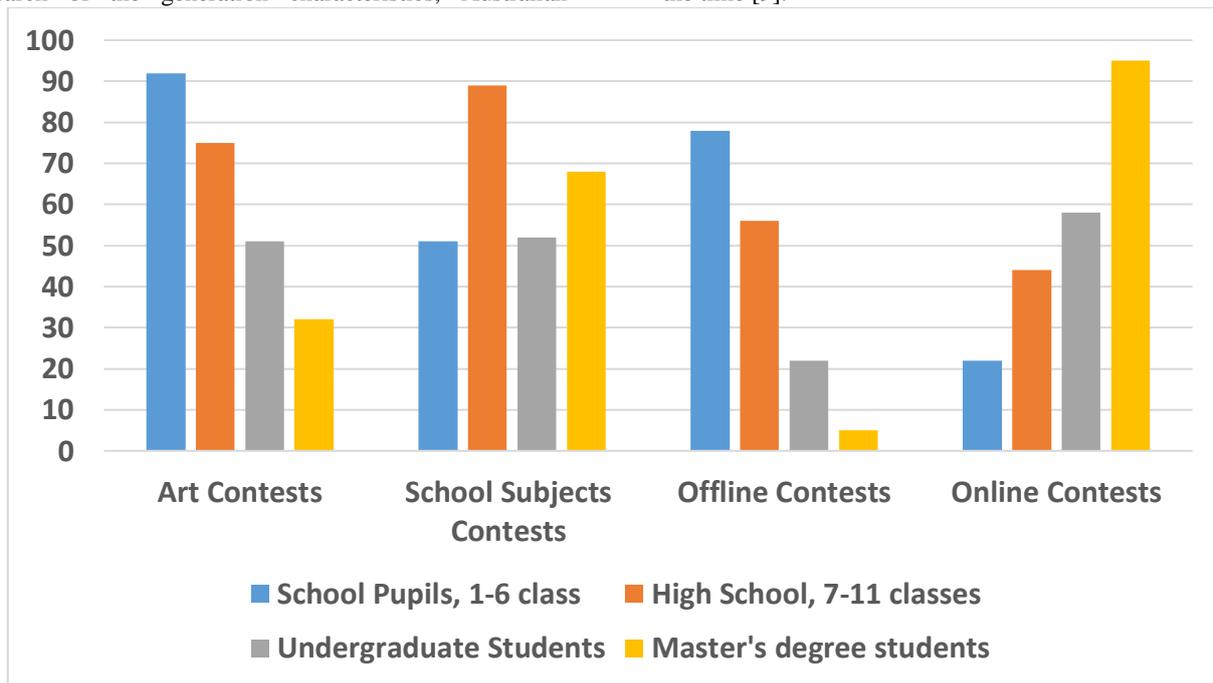


Figure 1 Diagram of the contest preferences by the students of different ages

It is beyond doubt that free command of information and communication technologies is a positive quality that facilitates life in the modern information society. Addiction to gadgets develops such important human qualities as self-dependence, skill to follow one's interests, but the very same skill creates difficulties in communication, cooperation with other people, the ability to reach a compromise and establish interpersonal communication. Modern psychologists claim that adolescents show a sharp decrease in the realistic perception of the environment, and, consequently, display infantilism, inability to establish communication with other people, decrease of empathy, the disappearance of romanticism that is natural for their age [10]. Having analyzed the works that come for the contest of the «School Today» online media outlet, we have to state a decrease in originality and increase in stereotype in children and youth creativity [11]. In particular, this fact is confirmed by the findings of Ann Mangen (Stavanger

University, Norway) who considers that reading an electronic book is reflected in the emotional perception of the material by the person. For example, it was stated that «iPad users showed significantly less compassion towards the heroes of the work and were inferior in remembering the details of the text to those who read from the book» [12]. Learning the features of online contests.

Difficulties with the assessment of creative works in the art contests are explained by the subjectivity and emotional and value coloring of each presented piece of art. Assessment criteria in the non-professional events are determined not so much by the mastery of participants as by the originality and expressiveness of their work or performance. This problem caused a big number of psychological, pedagogical and fine art studies. Those are fundamental works of L.S. Vygotsky, B.G. Ananiev, N.A. Garbuzov, A.V. Zaporozhets, A.R. Luria, A.N. Leontiev, S.L. Rubinstein, B.M. Teplova, V. Wundt, G. Fechner, T. Ribot, K. Stumpf, G. Münsterberg

and others that became classics in the psychology of creativity. Also we have to note the artists who devoted their work to the creativity of children and youth, such as T. Adorno, K.S. Stanislavsky, M.P. Chekhov, P. Valerie, K. Orff and others. Many researchers used to work and are working now in the sphere that integrate art, psychology, and pedagogy: A.V. Bakushinsky, D. B. Bogoyavlenskaya, D. B. Kabalevsky, B.M. Nemensky, A.A. Melik-Pashayev, and others. This sphere features many different studies connected with the quality of the children and youth artworks and forms of their assessment. It is long and well understood that children and amateur creativity cannot be assessed using professional contest criteria.

Yet, after we analyzed 210 randomly chosen online contests and student artworks submitted to the «School Today» online media outlet, we did not see any difference in the assessment criteria of the offline and online contests. Usually, for the events that are held remotely, contestants send their works accomplished in reality and saved on the electronic or digital media: drawings, sculptures, models, crafts are photographed (drawings are sometimes scanned); dances, music-making, theater miniatures, declamations are recorded as a video clip (audio records are rare). It is usually considered that this is the way to present a piece of art (even if it is a kid's or amateur work still it pretends for the role of a specific piece of art judged by certain criteria).

Can we regard video or photo material as a real creative works? Beyond doubt it is possible for certain parameters like composition, originality of the general solution et cetera depending on the kind of arts. But still, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that any capture of reality brings about certain distortions. Let us have a closer look at this problem using the examples of the fine arts online contests that include paintings, graphic works, applications, architecture models at cetera. We are not detailing the perceptual characteristics of the live artwork and its photocopy as that is a separate topic.

Before all, it is not the quality of accomplished creative works that catches the eye but poor professionalism of those who recorded the work on the digital media: the insufficient resolution of the scanner, wrong exposition of the camera, and as a result of a lack or excess of brightness, sharpness, digital noise and much more. It is very often that student works are recorded on smartphone as modern gadgets allow doing it quickly and simply. Resultantly, we face major presentation problems of the creative product: inexpressiveness, incorrect shadows, color distortions, etc. One can, of course, argue that offline contest presentation can have its drawbacks as well: wrong lighting, bad exhibit display or mismatch of drawings in sizes and color, et cetera. That is why we can say that both real and remote contests can have their drawbacks. Table 1 features some problems in the perception of the drawing in offline and online contests (we do not claim to have listed all the mistakes as the table names only the most common drawbacks).

Table 1 Problems in perception of the drawing in offline and online contest that interfere with its assessment

Offline Contest	Online Contest
Bad lighting	Bad scanning resolution, color distortions Bad lighting during photo shooting
The size is not accounted for in the hanging of the painting	Hard to understand the size of the picture, even if it is given, as all photos and scans are same size. Scans and photos are cropped
Maquette or three-D composition is placed wrongly, and it cannot be seen from various sides	The photos lose depth of the maquette thus turning into shadows
Finishing design of the work is done sloppily	Texture of the crafts and maquettes are not seen Shooting is done on a low-quality camera
The teacher's hand is visible	The drawing is "improved" with Adobe Photoshop, Paint.NET etc.
The work is done inaccurately	Software editing is visible and slovenly done
-	Imagination builds non-existing parts of the work as the picture looks cropped and unfitted into the frame size

In fact, we see paired drawbacks which can be detected both in the offline and in the online contests. Still, the analysis reveals that in the offline contest it is either fault of the participant or of the unprofessional organization of the competition and the show. In both cases, the problem is resolved through the increase in the quality of the job done. If we look at the drawbacks of the works presented for the online contest, then we do not see the bad work of the participants and organizers, but non-professionalism of the people who transferred creative products on the electronic media.

In such a case we can conclude that in the online contests the jury often assesses not the works but their presentations in the form of the photo or video material. Therefore online contests, of course, present creative activity of the children and youth but we have to admit that this is also a contest of the presentations of the works where photographer or cameraman input also matters. Following the analysis of the «School Today» online media outlet contests we detected a paradox: kids' good works shot by their teachers or parents are often poorly presentable; and photographs and videos done by the participants themselves show the work with a

better effect but often miss necessary art criteria. And we face a paradox when some people propose special methods to create artworks supported by software, and the jury of the online contest still sticks to the assessment criteria inherent for the offline event.

4. DISCUSSING THE RESULTS

Underdevelopment of the assessment criteria applied to online contests leads to serious risks: wrong assessment of the piece of art and, followingly, the psychological trauma of the participant that can transit into fears and lead to opt-out from participation in any contests. The risks are known to stimulate further development of the process, that is why its fixation permits developing methods to overcome them. Risks, as per V.I. Zubkov, are divided following the four essential features: subject-object characteristics (for instance, individual, collective risk); triggering event (voluntary, mandatory); contents (activity, inactivity); possible consequences. [13]. Specifics in the pedagogical risk lies in the following factors: the responsibility of the pedagogue in practicing his professional activity with the students; efforts directed towards overcoming uncertainty in decision-making; regulating communications between the participants of the educational process; operational coherence of all transactors.

For now, the topic of the risks of the organization and assessment in online contests is not sufficiently studied in the psychological and pedagogical science. There are methodological recommendations to prepare, accompany and relieve stress after the offline contests. Online variants of the events are treated easier: if a child or a young person is not physically present in the contest, the problem does not seem to exist. But the problem is there: discontent with the outcome, misunderstanding of a low or high mark, amputation of the triumph, and resultantly the person feels that he or she just wasted the time, and participating in the contest was very easy.

We found that today some online contest organizers do take into account discrepancy between creative work and its presentation, and introduce special marks that are different from their offline variant (24%), introduce different marks for the fine arts product and for the quality of its presentation (12%) but, unfortunately, 88% go on assessing the piece of art following the usual criteria. Figure 2 shows dynamics in decreasing risk levels after introducing special criteria for assessing the works online

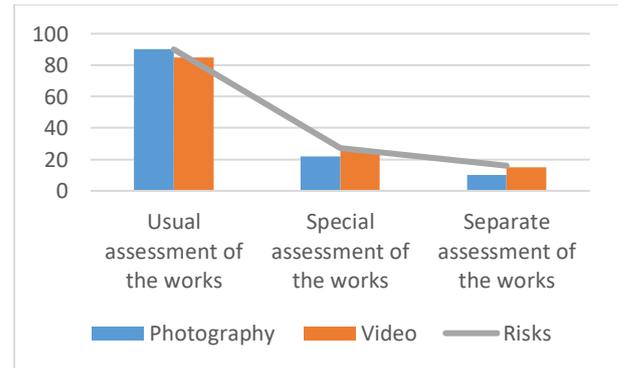


Figure 2 Diagram of correlation of the risk level and the form of the assessment of the contest entry

Now we see a necessity to develop methodological recommendations regarding organization and support of the creative online contests for children and adolescents which should comprise the following components:

1. Development of the system of assessment criteria for online contests. For example, special assessment of the works, i.e. development of the criteria especially for the digital presentation of the creative work or separate assessment when the work is assessed following generally accepted in some kind of art criteria and by the criteria applied towards photo and video products. Development of precise assessment criteria for digital presentation of the fine art, musical, theatrical, and choreography works will allow correct orientation for both participants and members of the jury.
2. Conducting training seminars to help prepare creative children and youth works for online contests. Pedagogues who represent the works of their students are undoubtedly qualified specialists in a certain kind of art but that does not mean they know how to present artwork on digital media. Since not every artwork can be presented on digital media then it is necessary to take into account special aspects of the works' online presentation when preparing the children and youth for the contest.
3. Attracting teachers to training in photo and video shooting. Such events are necessary for improving the presentation quality of the creative works because the equipment develops quickly, and teachers and parents do not have time to learn new technologies. The training will also improve interaction in the pairs «adult-child» and «teacher-student» as it will increase the level of trust and respect of Generation Z and Generation Alpha towards adults.
4. Pedagogical accompanying the participants in online contests. In such a case accompanying is required for both participants and pedagogues as well. Such accompanying can take the forms of consultations, answering questions, maintaining dialogs in the contest pages in social networks. Pedagogical accompanying should be done in stages: entering the contest, contest activity, analysis, and reflection.
5. Psychological support of online contest participants. Now we understand that web-psychology that was introduced in 2011 by the British psychologist Natalie Nahai is becoming

an important school of psychology. This is about how the online environment influences our thinking and behavior including our perception of the visual image. Online contest participants should be consulted and supported in creating and presenting their works. For example, the site of the «School Today» online contests presents the project «Web-psychology today» which is aimed at informing, supporting and consulting children, teachers, and parents.

All the above-mentioned measures contribute to prophylaxis in risk formation while conducting online contests.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The article analyzes some issues of assessing artworks that were sent for online contests. Based on the studies of specific aspects of presenting creative works in the online contests we can conclude that today in organizing events like that it is necessary to:

- Conduct psychological and pedagogical research regarding specific aspects of perception and assessment of the digital presentation of creative work,
- Develop special criteria system regarding children and youth artistic works that are performed in reality but presented on the digital media,
- Take into account children and adolescent fears as well as psychological and pedagogical risks,
- Create methodological recommendations for organizing and conducting online contests.

The practical implications of the research lie in the fact that its results can be used in organizing and conducting various online contests in arts. The use of the methodological recommendations will help to avoid negative developments and reach a high level of the educational and developing influence on the children and youth in the course of preparing and participating in the online contest.

Article materials are more summative in nature, therefore further studies and development of the criteria to assess creative works in online format will be focused on the development of the methodological recommendations for pedagogues who selected online contests as a form of working with the school students.

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