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Published in:
Design Education for Creativity and Business Innovation

Publication date:
2011

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication from Aalborg University

Citation for published version (APA):
Eriksen, K., Tollestrup, C., & Ovesen, N. (2011). CATCHY PRESENTATIONS: DESIGN STUDENTS USING
PECHA KUCHA. In A. Kovacevic, W. Ion, C. McMahon, L. Buck, & P. Hogarth (Eds.), *Design Education for
Creativity and Business Innovation: The 13th International Conference on Engineering and Product Design
Education* (pp. 222-226). Design Society.

CATCHY PRESENTATIONS: DESIGN STUDENTS USING PECHA KUCHA

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ABSTRACT
An important competence for designers is the ability to communicate and present ideas and proposals for customers, partners, investors and colleagues. The Pecha Kucha principle, developed by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham, has become a widely used and easy format for the presentation of new concepts and ideas in many areas and avoiding "Death by Powerpoint". This paper discusses the need and tools for making short presentations and describes the result from a business development project where engineering graduate students in architecture and design used the Pecha Kucha format to present their proposals at the final examination of their project work.
The authors conclude that Pecha Kucha is suitable for this type of presentations, although the flow of such presentations should be considered if used in connection with formal examination.

Keywords: Pecha Kucha, elevator pitch, project examination, design education, Powerpoint, PBL, Aalborg University, Pecha Kucha Night; innovation, entrepreneurship

1 THE NEED FOR CONCISE PRESENTATIONS
Short catchy presentation of a concept for an audience of supervisors and peers is a frequently used method of spreading knowledge and creating a qualified discussion or examination especially in Project Based Learning (PBL) environments. This kind of training also simulates the role and tasks of a professional designer, who might have a limited time to convince the customers, partners or investors that his specific idea is the right one. Such university programs in industrial design and design engineering therefore often train the students how to present their project material for each other, to teachers or potential stakeholders. This can provide the students with skills for presenting project material in a short and catchy form or even in a poster or summaries that would explain the concept clearly without supplementary oral presentation.

2 HOW TO MAKE A CATCHY PRESENTATION
It can be a difficult task in itself to compress a presentation of a complex project proposal, but fortunately there are tools and guidelines available in written manuals or the www to support such efforts. The need and request for short and efficient presentations is not new and not especially related to the design profession.
Within the last decade manuals several books have hence focused on how to present your ideas in ultra short versions like pitches or vision statements. Often these publications not only recommend how to design a concept presentation but also give you hints on how to compress the story of your life and your ambitions into a few sentences. Some sources [1] even emphasize the importance of your dress, tone of voice and which gestures to use.

2.1 The Elevator Pitch
A 'modern classic' in rapid conceptual presentations is the Elevator Pitch, that can be defined like this [2]:
An elevator pitch is an action oriented description of your business that is somewhat longer than a vision statement or tagline. It is designed to open a door to a more in-depth dialogue. Even if it doesn't lead to any specific business, this information about your business should be memorable enough so that the listener can tell others about your business. The idea of the elevator pitch is that you are alone with a prospective customer for the length of an elevator ride, say, around 30 seconds. That comes out to 100 words or less.

The guidelines for composing the best pitch are different when comparing the different sources in books or in the web. One of the books states that: *elevator pitches have four success factors:*
the hook,
the purpose,
the what and where, and
the delivery.
The hook is a catch phrase about your product or service that people would remember and take to heart. *The purpose* should focus on how you make customers happy. The *what and where* should tell the listener the business' situation and what it is seeked within this topic.
And *the delivery* is about becoming conversationally perfect, even if the pitch is to be given hundreds of times. [2]
Another author claims:
The elevator pitch is *'as essential to your business and as big part of your "brand" as your business card, your brochure, or your website and should be carefully crafted and easily adapted to address the specific needs of the prospect'*[3]
The Elevator Pitch can hence be seen as an ambition to communicate clearer and more convincingly by following communicative restraints that forces you to focus and create an output that is very useful in stressed situations but also has an aesthetic of its own. However the Elevator pitch is orally focused and not necessarily supported by visual aids so often used in design.

2.2 Pecha Kucha
The Pecha Kucha (PK) format on the other hand is visually structured and orally supported and seeks to trim the slide presentation of ideas and concepts into a short condensed appealing format.
PK is a simple and straight forward solution that helps the presenter to avoid the "Death by Powerpoint" as described by A.R.Garber. [4]
PK was originally devised by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham of Klein Dytham Architecture in Tokyo in 2003 while creating a place for young designers to meet, network, and show their work in public. The name derives from a Japanese term for the sound of conversation ("chit-chat") [5]

2.3 Pecha Kucha Nights (PKN)
The concept is developed as a structure to enhance the roll out of several presentations in sequence as a single event called Pecha Kucha Night. A Pecha Kucha Night is announced and organized as a public event, where different speakers are allowed to present a slide show of 20 images, each shown for 20 seconds. For each speaker this results in a total presentation time of 6 minutes and 40 seconds on at stage before the next speaker is up.
The idea is to keep presentations concise, the interest level up and to have many presenters sharing their ideas within the course of one night. Since the introduction in 2003 the PKN phenomenon has spread with great speed across the world in a kind viral form, so that open and free Pecha Kucha Nights are daily started up at 3-4 locations worldwide. Today more than 1300 officially registered events have been made, according to the www.pecha-kucha.org, March 2011. Typically 8-20 speakers tell about topics they would like to convey, whether it is about their personal hobbies, a special experience or suggestions for new initiatives or concepts. There are no further specific formats for presentation content, although it is recommended that images are at 1024x768 pixels, and the digital presentation program in the background of the speaker should be set so that the pictures change automatically every 20.second. [5]
The PKN schedule leaves no time for comments during each presentation or immediately after. Therefore business cards, mail addresses and similar contact information is handed over in the scheduled breaks dividing groups of more presentations.

3   RESEARCH ON PECHA KUCHA IN UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS
The Pecha Kucha format is initially attached to the new digital presentation tools such as Apple Keynote and Microsoft Powerpoint and the derived abilities to create a flexible and rich visual presentation with a palette of effects available. These digital presentation tools were instantly adopted and got a strong foothold in business offices, conferences and teaching.
Still only few studies have been made to elucidate the advantages and pitfalls when using the Pecha Kucha format in university instruction, presentation and examination.

A research team at Robert Morris University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA arranged a comparative study to clarify the difference between ordinary powerpoint presentations and a Pecha Kucha presentation. The researchers point out the advantage that the presenters successfully condensed the timeframe of a session without any measurable impact on student learning. They also conclude that an effective Pecha Kucha presentation necessitates considerable time and creative commitment on the part of the instructor, and it is also a matter of personal taste and presentation style whether you as a presenter find it fun or stressful to follow the rigid format.[6]

The above mentioned researchers point out that a more firm conclusion regarding the impact of using Pecha Kucha formatted presentations as an instructional technique in higher education call for further research in this area. We wanted, however, to put more focus on the students' use of the presentation format and test how it would affect the *examination situation* if the students were asked to present project proposals when following the limitations of doing 20x20 slide Powerpoint presentations of their projects.

4   EXAMINATION TOOLS AND FORMATS

The point in examining short projects in a PBL-based learning environment is to verify each individual student's achievement of the given learning objectives. But the examination also aims at teaching the student to choose and present knowledge in a clear form. Such examinations can be carried out in many different ways, like a plain oral examination, a written test, a poster presentation or a Power Point presentation. Each format has its own potential and nature when looking at the organization, the learning focus and the possibility to actually assess the student's level.

Table 1 is based upon the experience of the authors and represents a very rough description of the conditions and potential regarding the examination formats (A-D) often used in PBL-based learning in the Architecture & Design program at Aalborg University:

Table 1. Rough description of conditions and potential for different examination formats used in the PBL –based Design program at Aalborg University

Examination format/Characteristics	Organization	Learning focus	Used in PBL projects/courses	Assessment quality/focus
A.Plain oral examination	15-30 min un-/semi-structured conversation between student and teacher & censor	Oral communication, argumentation and theory based on memory	Mostly short courses typically in math/physics topics(1-3 ECTS)	+ time efficient + focused topic -Stressfully short -Memory based -risk of superficial examination
B.Written test	60-120 min structured/semi structured desktop writing. Later evaluation by teacher and censor	Written communication, argumentation and theory based on memory	Mostly medium size courses typically in design history topics (5 ECTS)	+ time efficient + focused topic -Memory based -Not possible to pose clarifying questions
C.Poster presentation	15-30 min un-/semi-structured presentation and conversation between teacher & censor and student	Oral presentation and argumentation referring to visual project material and theory	Mostly short/medium courses/projects typically in integrated design topics (2-7 ECTS)	+ Training more skills +focus on use and holistic approach -Time consuming
D.Traditional power point presentation	30-40 min structured	Oral presentation and argumentation	Mostly medium/long	+ Training more skills

	presentation by student followed by 30-60 min. conversation between teacher & censor and student	referring to visual project material and theory	projects typically in integrated design topics (8-15 ECTS)	+focus on use and holistic approach -Very time consuming

5 THE EXPERIMENT SETUP

Our experiment involved 129 postgraduate students in Architecture & Design (A&D) at Aalborg University in 2010. The students were attending a 2 ECTS course in Innovation and entrepreneurship based upon lectures on general principles of business models, ideation techniques, supervision and input from professional designers and architects who had successfully set up their own business. As a part of the course the students should describe their own personal and professional network and competencies and develop a business concept they could either sell or set up for themselves.

The A&D-students were asked to focus on an area, where they could spot a certain need or potential, and where they themselves could deliver a service or a product that would exploit their own personal or professional knowledge, skills and competencies.

5.1 The Content: Pain-Cure Profit

To help the students to focus and organize their business concept and the restricted presentation format they were asked to give special attention to the following aspects:

The Pain (what is the problem and for who?)
The Cure (How you will solve this problem with your new business concept)
The Profit (How will you make a sustainable business out of it?)

They were urged to take a broader perspective on the possibilities in their skills and competencies, although most of the A&D-students might see themselves as future architects, engineers, designers or researchers employed in the industry or as a team member in a studio environment. The current employment situation in the architects and designers professions is calling for new ideas and the PAIN-CURE-PROFIT (PCP) principle was used as an agenda to open the students' eyes for new promising areas that they might focus upon to the benefit of the society and their own professional career.

It was decided to simulate the concept of Pecha Kucha Nights with time limitation in the individual's presentation, but also by leaving out a discussion of each individual presentation which simply was quickly followed by the next. In this way the exam was like a long flow, interrupted only by breaks after every 8 project. By running 3 parallel presentations in different locations, it was possible for all students to make a personal presentation of their projects in a single day from 8:00 to 17:00.

5.2 The Presentations

The presentations took place in front of a panel with 2 examiners (1 supervisor and 1 censor) and an audience of students who had either presented or waiting to present their proposal. Generally the course examination of the many presentations went smoothly and the dropout rate of approximately 10% gave a little extra air in the plan. In the breaks between each 8 presentations-module, the examiners voted so that the students were told the same day whether they had passed the exam.

Surprisingly few technical problems occurred, but there was a clear diversity in the students' ability to speak over a powerpoint show with fixed interval switching between images. Most students relied on the slides alone, while about 10% of students used cue cards as well. The talented students were able to speak fluently while the slides changed or to improvise underway. Other students were very stressed if they couldn't tell all they wanted before the image shifted, or they ran into artificial breaks because the next slide came later than they had anticipated.

Each concept should be assessed at 4 points:
A. *The conceptual strength of the proposal (Pain and Cure)*
B. *Explanation on the commercial potential (Profit)*
C. *Reflection of own solution in relation to innovation theory*
D. *Strength and clarity in presentation of concept*

Examiners saw the situation as more stressful than normal examinations. Partly because there was not time to ask clarifying questions, and partly because the rapid shifts between the presentations did not give much time to note the levels of each presentation.

The students were then asked to evaluate both the course and the exam. There was consensus that the course focus and content was relevant and the students were generally happy to have learned to look at and develop their potential and to get trained in presenting their forces and ideas in a condensed message. The students, however, were dissatisfied with the failure to devote time to examiners or other students could comment or critique after each presentation.

6 PROJECT RESULT AND PERSPECTIVE

To provide a picture of what type of projects the students presented, more than 2/3 of the proposals primarily utilized the web-based technologies, media and business opportunities. From the establishment of clubs for *virtual environments at the gym treadmill* and *web-based platforms for jamming music* or web-pages that allow you to *manage your wardrobe*, but also suggestions for physical products like *local candy from all over the world* or a proposal for *more flexible houses*. And *services such as provision of outdoor potted plants* or *services for the design interested travelers*.

The project was not organized as a research experiment but primarily as a practical test on the possibility to enable more than 100 students to develop new business concepts and condensed presentations based on their individual competencies, adding a smoothe and fair examination.

We are convinced that the Pecha Kucha format was useful in more aspects. Partly because the students got specific knowledge and training in making short catchy presentations, but also because it was possible logistically to examine so many complex projects within a shorter time-frame than usual project examination. When comparing with the traditional examination formats, we would describe the simulated Pecha Kucha Night format like in Table 2.

Table 2. Evaluation of the use of Pecha Kucha Night format for project examination

Examination format/Characteristics	Organization	Learning focus	Used in PBL projects/courses	Assessment quality/focus
E.Pecha Kucha (PKN format)	6:40 min structured presentation by student for teacher & censor and audience	Verbal communication, argumentation and theory based on memory and supported by slide	Mostly short courses/projects (1-3 ECTS)	+ Training more skills +Less time consuming +Focus on use and holistic approach -Stressfully short -No feedback

By simulating the Pecha Kucha Night-format, the students were able to follow the presentations of the other students, but at the same time it created a stress that you would probably never find at the official public PKN's. The stress was mainly caused by the examinators' lack of time and the students' feeling that they were not given proper response to their project work.

The authors of this paper see a great potential in using the Pecha Kucha format for students project presentations, but we suggest that the format for the flow of presentations is adjusted to fit the purpose. This might be relevant if the presentation is part of a formal examination. We also suggest that students are given more specific guidelines on how to synchronize their speak to follow the slides. Probably the quality of such short presentations could be even better, if the students considered the guidelines given for comparable presentations like the Elevator Pitch, and such guidelines they might be transformed successfully into the presentations without disturbing the fresh and catchy format of the Pecha Kucha.

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