In the Classroom 134
Pecha Kucha in the Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks ever so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, perhaps you are, and you're still hanging out with me and I really do appreciate it. Over the years, I have sat in countless presentations. Many of them are extremely boring. However, some of the most fun, informative, engaging presentations have adhered to the PechaKucha rules.

The campus where I am working is about to launch a writing math and presentation center for students. I have been tossing around the idea of using PechaKucha as a way to draw in students to the center, as well as hold fun, informative contests, but I also think they are a great tool to use in the classroom. With that in mind, this week, we are going to take a look at how you can use PechaKucha in your classroom.

First of all, what is PechaKucha? According to Wikipedia, PechaKucha is Japanese for chit-chat. It is basically a storytelling presentation format. Pechakucha is similar in format to lightning talks and ignite talks. I have participated in both PechaKucha and ignite-type sessions. They are really engaging, I found them to be a little challenging, which I think is great for the classroom.

For PechaKucha, basically, presenters show 20 slides, but each slide is displayed for only 20 seconds each. They, therefore, have six minutes and 40 seconds or 400 seconds to present their ideas and the slides advance automatically. Some PechaKucha sessions have a theme where others are open to whatever the presenter wants to talk about. If you're having an open contest, that's what they would do.

Topics could vary from travel to research projects, student projects, hobbies, collections, whatever they want, where you can also design it around a theme. Maybe that you're talking about diversity and inclusion and have presenters just present around that theme. I think if you were going to do this campus-wide, initially, I would set it for open just to get folks used to the idea of PechaKucha before you dial that into specific themes.

I talked about ignite sessions. They're just like PechaKucha except ignite sessions are 20 slides, but the slides advance every 15 seconds or five minutes in total. Why would you use it in your classroom? According to Mendi Benigni, the goal of PechaKucha is to encourage the presenter to be concise, but also a bit more creative and informal. PechaKucha presentations are very visual.

The idea is to really strip out the bullet points and make them visual and make them about storytelling and sharing of ideas. Because of the time constraint, it helps to

keep presenters on topic. They have to be concise, they have to really dial into what the message is that they want to share. For someone to deliver a really well-received PechaKucha presentation, they have to practice ahead of time.

They have to do some rehearsals and really hone this in so they're on time and on topic as they move through. If not, it looks really awkward, but that's half the fun, watching folks get up there and try it. It's almost like karaoke in a way. Because presentations move so quickly and are visually engaging, there's less chance for a board audience. You could have a night of these anywhere from eight to 15 of these presentations in an evening and walk away excited and full of ideas.

The same in the classroom that you could do these in a classroom and things move so quickly that it keeps the engagement up. Normal presentations in the class don't usually stay on topic, don't usually stay on time, and ended up being quite boring that students try to include everything, including the kitchen sink. With PechaKucha, they have to really dial it in and be extremely focused. They only have six minutes and 40 seconds to do this in.

Also, the other thing that's really nice about this is they get to highlight the creative side of the presenter. Because they're really visually oriented in a way the storytelling is a center of this, they tend to be more visually engaging and just more interesting. I encourage you to check these out. When you are sharing this idea with your students, here's some things that you want to highlight for your students in order to help them create a good presentation.

The first thing is that there has to be 20 slides. Actually, I set up 21 slides and I'll explain in a second, but you have 20 slides and you will set the auto-advance to every 20 seconds. Get on the internet. You will find explanations on how to set your slides up so they auto-advance every 20 seconds. Now, the thing that I learned when setting up competitions for PechaKucha is I create a 21st slide.

What I do is I duplicate the very first slide and put it at the very front, but I don't make it auto-advance. I make it so you have to advance it through the keyboard or a mouse click in order to advance it to the next slide. That is where the 20 seconds will start going. That way you can have a slide sitting and there, you can have the presentation ready to go, just waiting for the presenter and when the presenter's ready, they hit the space bar, and off to the races they go.

That's how I set it up. Also, with your students, encourage them to develop visually attractive slides with images and graphics and photos, and certainly reduce the number of words on the slide. You don't want to have any bullet points because you don't want students to be reading these slides. You want them to engage in the storytelling aspect of it. The visuals, the images should support what is being said, and they also should add value.

It's not just any picture. It's a picture that has meaning to the story. Students often struggle for finding imagery, but you can find some wonderful images on Pexels, Unsplash, Flickr, Google, and really just focus on the creative commons licensing.

You want them make sure that they're not violating copyright as they're developing their slides. As I noted you don't want students to read directly from the slides.

The visual imagery should cue them in where they are in their presentation. Likewise, you don't want students to write out a script for their narration. This is not a reading exercise. It's a presentation exercise. It's the ability to think about and explain ideas while moving very quickly through a slide presentation. When you set up the transitions, don't use fancy slide transitions.

Stay away from things that swirl on the slide or flip on the slide. Use what is called a straight cut. Just simply change the slide. That is the quickest way to change a slide. These other transitions, they take up time and they're also really distracting. Just cut to the next slide and keep on moving. Likewise, you really don't have time to add video or audio into your presentation.

I would not encourage students to add those to the presentation, they will not have time for them to work properly and it cuts into their time. Six minutes and 40 seconds is not a lot of time. Likewise, you also want students to practice. Encourage them to practice their presentations a few times so they'll be comfortable when they present this to a real audience. Those are some tips just around the presentations. It's not a hard concept. 20 slides, very visual, they're going to auto-advance, but now here's some thoughts on how you can increase the success of this activity in your classroom. First of all, provide examples of PechaKucha sessions. When you're introducing this topic to your students, show them examples.

Then you can discuss what makes a good presentation, your students can see it in action, and this will help them build successful presentations. You may also want to demonstrate your own PechaKucha to students and it puts you under the same pressure. They're going to see how challenging it is even when you are a skilled instructor giving one of these presentations.

It's also important that students understand that this is not a typical PowerPoint presentation. The slides will advance automatically. They are not in control of the slides. They just go. This differs very much from your normal PowerPoint presentation. When you do this as an assignment, Richard Edwards encourages instructors to spread these PechaKucha sessions over multiple classes.

Even though the presentations are short and they're engaging, you can only see so many of them for so long, and then it overload. He sets the limit for about five per class period during a normal class period and that should be enough. That gives time for the presentation, gives time for Q&A, and then moving on to other days where you can give additional presentations.

Teams can also do PechaKucha presentations. If you have a two-person team, different ways that they can do it is they can alternate slides. They can bundle slides where one is doing five, the next does five, and then back and forth, or they split up 10 and 10. If you have more than one presenter or more than two, you can divide them up equally. Teams can also do this.

It's not just for a solo presentation. I'll give you a great example on how you can do a team thing later when I talk about really just different examples for this. With each of the presentations, you should also plan a period of time so the rest of the students can ask questions and get answers right after each of the presentations, right? This is an opportunity for the presenter to show their expertise. As a rule, questions are held until after the presentation, right?

Six minutes and 40 seconds. You don't want to throw somebody off track by asking questions in the middle of this. Just save the questions until after the presentation. If this is a graded activity, having a rubric is probably pretty useful. If you have requirements for certain content to be in there. Perhaps, if they're talking about their research, you may want to talk about their research question, their methodology, just a variety of things like that.

You would want to have that in the rubric. In addition to the presentation, the visual layout, those kinds of things that you can check off in grade. It would serve you well to build a rubric, to capture all these requirements. PechaKucha's can also be used to support other parts of the curriculum. For example, maybe you have your students present a proposal for a bigger project.

They could do it in a PechaKucha where they outline this. This may be an abbreviated, maybe not the full 20 slides, but you can have them present their proposal or present a research question. What are they going to research? What's their methodology going to look like those kinds of things, or if they're designers and they've created design, maybe architecture or art or something like that, that they can use the PechaKucha to talk about why they made certain design decisions.

They can be used in conjunction with other things that you're doing in your classroom curriculum. Here are some other PechaKucha ideas, different ways that you can use PechaKucha in your classroom. First of all, you can use it as mini-lectures. You can start off your class with a PechaKucha on a particular topic in order to grab student interests of the day's topic, but also you can use them as mini-lectures.

If you record them six minutes and 40 seconds are nice bite-size nuggets that you can give to your students. Right on point, right direct, and very concise. You can create wonderful videos just using that methodology. Another idea, and this is where that teams comes in is to do PechaKucha improv. Rather than the students build the slide deck, you can build the slide deck with random images and then have two teams alternate between images to develop a coherent story.

It's like that idea where somebody writes out a sentence and then somebody follows it with another sentence and you keep building upon the story, but there's no two writers as part of that story. You can do the same thing with Petechakucha this improv, where they have to build this story based on images they have not seen yet, tremendously fun. I think PechaKucha is also great for book reviews that you have students read different books, but they have to summarize this using a PechaKucha presentation

Or if you have them analyze different software applications. This is a way that students can summarize their findings and present them to the rest of the classes to include basic use. Also how they would use that software in whatever topic that they want. In a history class, PechaKuchas can be used for brief history lessons, pick a topic, and you can build a PechaKucha presentation right around that.

You can also use them to do a final exam review, highlight the most important things, 20 slides. Here's the things that we're going to highlight and just quick down and dirty boom, boom, boom. This is what we're talking about. Project overviews. If you are outlining a project you want students to work on, Pechakuchas could provide that project overview. You could provide the basics of the project as well as examples of successful projects.

Providing your introduction. At the very beginning of the class, you could use a PechaKucha to introduce yourself, sharing images from your past life, your teaching philosophies, your learning philosophies, any hobbies you have, family, what have you. You can talk a little bit about your history and like for an online class, your students could create also these type of introductions, record them and post them.

This last idea that I want to share is doing quick student briefs. Debbie West, she shared a great idea that was related to art, but I can see this being done on any topic. Basically, you put together a slide deck with one image related for each of your students. Here's what she had to say, "Have each student in the class choose one work of art to put into a slide show. When their slide appears, let them speak about it for 20 seconds" and you can do that for every student in your class.

They just have to wait for their particular slide to pop up and they give a quick explanation, 20 seconds. The next one pops up and rapidly go through all those different pieces of works of art. This can be done for a variety of close situations. I know in one class that they are talking about the history of rock and roll music, amazing what you could do but 20 seconds is really tight.

It has to be very concise and so there has to be a little thought ahead of time to get all the things you want. That is really PechaKucha in a nutshell, it's six minutes and 40 seconds of amazing fun. The presentations, students have to be on point. It gives them an opportunity to practice speaking, and they have to be concise. Imagery is huge, lots of different ways that you can use that in your classroom.

I would encourage you to go check it out, add it as an activity for your class. Let me know how it works out. Certainly, I'll respond to the comments for the posts that I provide on this. Also, check out the show notes. In the show notes, I have links to a lot of different articles and blog posts that are out there talking about PechaKucha, lots of great ideas in there. Speaking of checking things out, here is a quick plug for my book.