

Spice up your Business English class with PechaKucha!

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The objective of this workshop was to introduce PechaKucha as a teaching tool for the Business English classroom and share my experiences.

What is PechaKucha?

PechaKucha is a special presentation format using 20 PowerPoint slides that automatically move from one slide to the next after 20 seconds. It was introduced by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham in Tokyo in 2003, and now PechaKucha Nights take place all over the world. The official website is a useful source of reference for both teachers and English students and provides plenty of examples to watch. www.pechakucha.org

The relevance of PechaKucha for teaching

Full of enthusiasm after attending the PechaKucha hour at the IATEFL conference in Harrogate in 2014, I immediately wanted to share this enjoyable experience with my students. I could see its potential for improving students' fluency and spontaneity. It could help students deal with small-talk situations better and increase their self-confidence, not just for presentations, but generally. Additionally, it would bring an element of fun into the classroom.

Individual presentations

My first step was to give a PechaKucha myself and then get my students to prepare their own to present to the class. However, twenty slides, each for 20 seconds, means the presenter has to talk for 6 minutes 40 seconds. That is a long time for someone speaking in a foreign language and requires a great deal of preparation. Students with a CEFR level of B2 and above are able to cope, but in most of my groups we agreed on shorter presentations and reduced the format to ten slides. Talking for 3 minutes 20 seconds is within the comfort zone of an EFL student, even for those at CEFR B1 level.

Motivating students to spend time on a specific topic expands their vocabulary. Due to the timing restrictions, they have to practice beforehand, which further intensifies their exposure to this vocabulary. As to the topics, the aim is for the students to improve their fluency and what better way than to talk about something that interests them. Apart from sport and travelling, topics included *chocolate*, *people in my life*, and *how we built our house*.

Group variations

Although my students enjoyed the PechaKucha project, too much work was involved to get them to produce more than one. Since I felt this format had much more potential, I decided to develop group variations and prepared some slides myself - twenty slides on business topics like the company's products, business trips, aspects of teamwork or on small-talk topics like typical tourist attractions, local culture, etc. Then I used these slides in various ways, depending on the group size, language level, and students' interests.

A spontaneous PechaKucha means the class is unprepared. One by one the students have to react to the projected picture and talk for 20 seconds when it is their turn. A time bar at the bottom of the slide shows the 20 seconds ticking past so that the person talking can see how long they have before the slide changes and the next person takes over.

In the workshop I demonstrated how I usually start, using the illustrations from the English Practice Material published by telc. Each illustration depicts an emotion. The students can just describe the picture, or react to the emotion in some way by telling a story or referring to an experience. Afterwards we talk about the slides and brainstorm what could have been said and then the students have a second try. The idea is that everyone in the class has a chance to talk for one slide or more.

During a repeat run, the students know what to expect. You can either get them to comment on the same picture or start the round with a different person so everyone has a different slide. This group format can be used in different ways and in different lessons because the teacher can vary the instructions, e.g. personalise the slides, business context only, etc. If your class is too large, then divide the students into twos or threes and then get all the groups to talk their way through the slides at the same time. This is what we did in the workshop. First four participants spontaneously talked their way through some slides and then everyone present had the chance to try out the same slides with their partner.

Advice on topics

Slides showing the company's business products work well. Participants have the opportunity to practice shortly outlining the special features or advantages of the products and pass on information to other people in the group who may not have their know-how.

When choosing the topics, I found I had to adapt to the group. Movies, for example, vary considerably depending on the age and interests of the participants. Furthermore, since the presenters are under time pressure, the topics cannot be too complicated, especially for weaker groups. Workshop participants questioned if shy or weak students have problems with the format. My advice in these cases is to give additional help beforehand or during the presentation.

Handling Mistakes

Since the whole idea of using PechaKucha in the classroom is to encourage fluency, the presenter(s) should talk without any interruptions. I make notes and afterwards we talk about the good expressions and analyse the problems. We then repeat the presentation so that everyone has a chance to do better the second time.

Positive comments from students

Students especially like the spontaneity because "It's like real life!"; "It's a chance to see what my language level is really like". Groups appreciate the fact that everyone gets a chance to speak, and everyone can test their limits!

Recommendation

Business English students desperately want to improve their fluency and self-confidence. By adapting PechaKucha to the needs of your class, you can help your students feel more at ease in unprepared situations and reach their aims in an effective and fun-way. So, now it's up to you to try it out!

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