

Review of the book

Puentes: Spanish for intensive and high-beginner courses, by P. J. Marinelli & L. M. Laughlin.

Reseña del libro

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Puentes: Spanish for intensive and high-beginner courses is designed to help students with a foundational understanding of Spanish build a bridge or “*punte*” of knowledge that will provide a smooth transition to the next level of Spanish. The fourth edition has been revised to streamline grammar explanations and place more emphasis on practicing Spanish in conversation. Auxiliary materials accompanying the book include two CD’s of listening activities, a video program on DVD, an online activity workbook, and an instructor’s resource manual.

The book begins with a short grammar and vocabulary review for students, the *Paso preliminar*, and then is divided into 9 theme based chapters. At the beginning of each chapter the objectives and main grammar points are stated clearly, and corresponding reading and writing activities are recommended from the online workbook. The second page of each chapter features a painting by a famous Spanish painter (for example: Francisco de Goya y Lucientes), and provides several discussion questions to orient the class and peak the students’ interest. Students are then introduced to the thematic vocabulary of the chapter, which is followed by several authentic listening activities and an array of conversational and grammatical activities. Each chapter also includes a *Puente cultural* reading section which features the thoughts and feelings of two Spanish speakers from different countries: these commentaries are related to the theme of the chapter. At the end of the chapter appears *¡Vamos a ver!* which provides pre and post listening activities for the DVD video series. The last two pages of each chapter, the *Panorama cultural*, are devoted to exploring the culture, geography and language of a Spanish speaking country.

This book was designed with the ACTFL National Standards for Foreign Language Education in mind, and promotes—to varying degrees of success—communication, culture, connections, comparisons and communities. The book supplies all the necessary tools to help students make connections between Hispanic cultures and their own, and each chapter includes a plethora of authentic cultural materials. These materials often take the form of quotes from native speakers about a particular aspect of their home country or paragraph-long descriptions explaining a cultural issue related to the theme of the chapter. Overall the cultural materials provided are excellent. However, the *Panorama cultural* could be more creative in its presentation and description of different countries because the current format does not make the culture come alive for students. For example, every *Panorama cultural* is formatted exactly the same and includes a map and three paragraphs describing famous people or moments in history related to a particular country. It would be helpful if these pages included ideas for games and activities or recommendations of books or websites for students.

The grammatical explanations follow a format described by Lee and VanPatten which aids input processing, meaning that each grammatical concept is introduced in a conversational context before the mechanics of grammar are broken down for students. This allows students to

see the real world application of the grammar before they start discussing the rules that guide its use. The only difficulty with this format is that students are accustomed to being presented with the grammar concept first, which means that the professor needs to take time to explain why this format enhances learning or how students should approach it. The format of the grammar exercises does aid input processing because each grammar point is followed by simple exercises that allow students to focus solely on processing a particular grammar point. These basic exercises are, in turn, followed by more complex exercises that require students to produce their own meaning or express themselves creatively using the given grammar structure. Each chapter provides clear grammar explanations, but not enough examples of use are included, and often exceptions to grammar points are not mentioned. In addition, sometimes grammatical concepts are introduced in an order that does not seem logical. For example, the preterite tense is introduced in chapter 5, but the imperfect tense is not introduced until chapter 7. This means that students are conjugating everything in the preterite for two chapters, and suddenly they learn that there is another past tense, and that the way they have been using the preterite is not entirely correct. It would be helpful if the book at least provided an overview of the two tenses together, so that students would take into account or conceptualize the differences in the two from the beginning.

The multiple listening activities that accompany each chapter are authentic and entertaining instructional tools. They expose students to a variety of accents, speech patterns, slang and situations, and it is a joy to choose among the four or five activities that accompany each chapter. For example, in chapter 2, after introducing how to tell time, there is a listening activity in which students hear announcements from a bus station in Mexico, and have to figure out the departure times of the buses. The grammar activities, however, are not as stimulating for students, simply because they do not offer enough variety. There are many fill in the blank, multiple choice, and verb manipulation activities (e.g. *¿De dónde (ser) _____ ustedes?*), but the book does not offer ideas for games or other creative applications of concepts (22). More helpful to students and professors are the wealth of pair activities presented that outline various situations, and provide provocative questions to inspire student participation.

Much like some of the grammar activities, the instructor's annotated edition lacks creative teaching suggestions and does not include any mention of games. Teaching suggestions include such uninspiring comments as "To practice travel-related dialogue, say a line aloud and ask students to identify who is talking, the tourist or the travel agent (61)." The suggestions do not provide activities for a variety of learning styles, and, if used as suggested, are monotonous. The instructor's addition also lacks any reference to web resources. Well researched and pertinent web resources greatly aid learning and information gathering for both teachers and students.

Online workbook activities generally mirror the format of the grammar activities presented in the book, and are useful to help students review the material before they come to class. These activities are also available in workbook format, but students are required to complete and submit them online. However, as with any technology, there are often problems with the online system: these range from not allowing students to submit their answers to inflexible grading that does not take into account sentence variety. This requires that the teacher re-grade everything that the computer grades in order to ensure a fair grade for students and to provide feedback and error correction. The online activities include sound bites, drawings and video clips that inform and motivate the students in their study. For example, at the end of each chapter students watch a short video clip related to the country being studied. This clip discusses

famous monuments, shows footage of capital cities and gives students a general idea of the range of geography of a particular country.

The DVD video program presents a 4-5 minute episode that accompanies each chapter, and features five Spanish speakers from different countries who are living together in Puerto Rico. The pre and post video activities provided in the book give structure to the activity. The most striking problem is that, in the first episode, students are introduced to roommates from several different countries that are living in Puerto Rico, but are never told why they all decided to come to Puerto Rico or what they are doing there. Other than this, the videos provide an excellent opportunity for students to hear different accents, learn slang from several countries and observe several people interact in authentic contexts. The roommates are from Spain, Argentina, Mexico, Columbia and Venezuela. Sofia from Spain uses such distinct expressions as “*Oye tía*” while Javier from Argentina refers to his friends as “*Che*.” Through watching the videos students begin to understand that accents and vocabulary vary from country to country.

For the most part, *Puentes* provides students with grammar and listening activities that are authentic and culturally contextualized. Culture permeates every chapter and is carefully woven into practice activities. The wealth of authentic listening and pair activities facilitates communicative language teaching, motivates students and emphasizes the importance of speaking and listening. However, the textbook fails to provide teachers with creative teaching ideas, includes no interactive games and sometimes fails to present a variety of examples of specific grammar points.

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REFERENCES

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Alice Driver is a Ph.D. student in Hispanic Studies at the University of Kentucky. She and colleague Joshua Jennings Tweddell recently published an interview with Colombian filmmaker Víctor Gaviria in volume 12 of the *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*.