

Review of *Voces French I* program from Marge Mandl

The *Voces* French I digital textbook is a rich resource to support a proficiency-based environment. The totally online format offers a wonderful opportunity for growth in language development in what could even be an individualized learning situation. The text is complete with supporting grammar, vocabulary, culture, visuals, readings, challenging assignments, self-assessment, and evaluation of progress, etc. Each chapter has a comprehensive chart designating the scope and sequence of the chapters in the areas of vocabulary, grammar, culture, and phonetics. This chart is accompanied by a list of achievable chapter goals and objectives for the learner.

There are many user-friendly features to this program. For starters, all sections of the text are glossed in the left hand column. The section being used is always highlighted in blue in that column so the user knows what section he/she is exploring. This is a valuable feature. There is also a search feature which enables the user to find topics by simply typing in the desired words and then a list of possible locations in the textbook appears. These suggestions can be clicked on with ease. This is valuable to the student seeking review and validation of prior learning.

Vocabulary is presented both in visual and audio format. This enables the learner to continually reinforce correct pronunciation of list vocabulary as needed. Introductory video presentations by authentic native speakers challenge the learner to listen attentively to grasp the gist of the conversations. The vocabulary is also presented and reinforced in contextualized dialogues, readings, and practice exercises. There is ample vocabulary in each chapter and it is divided into 3 or 4 separate sections which are further divided into many practice and reinforcement exercises to encourage proficiency.

Grammar is presented clearly to support the level of proficiency. Charts with clear examples are provided for each concept and are followed by a section called *Parlons* where students are asked to immediately apply what they have learned in spoken contextualized dialogues. These language scenarios demonstrate the students' ability to incorporate new grammar into their current knowledge base thus pushing their proficiency level.

Culture is incorporated throughout the *Voces* textbook in outstanding colorful visuals and glossed readings. The captioned visuals are authentic and are rich cultural resources offering a window to the francophone world. Students are asked to explore the cultural readings and respond to cultural situations both in writing and orally. Critical thinking is encouraged as students compare and contrast their own culture with that of the French speaking world. Topics include a wide variety of interesting snapshots into French life including regional cuisine, dining etiquette, school and family life, leisure time activities, shopping, and vacation habits and destinations, etc.

Correct French pronunciation is emphasized throughout the entire e-text. Each chapter incorporates numerous *Phonétique* sections with exercises and audio emphasis with time given for focused practice and repetition of the individual sounds. Topics covered represent the French alphabet, sound-letter correspondence, diacritical marks, nasal sounds, liaison, elision, intonation patterns including stated exceptions to specific rules. These sections are very user friendly and offer the student excellent pronunciation support which many programs do not offer.

There are many other quality features of this program. For example, there is a section called *Panorama* in each chapter which is a focused look into a 360 degree photo of a selected location. Using this feature, students can walk into the francophone world and explore cultural topics and

create conversations based on elements in the photos. Exercises which follow the *Panorama* settings challenge students to utilize their French skills and their imagination in creative ways.

Student progress through the chapters is tracked as sections are completed. Students click on *Soumettre* to submit their answers and these scores are kept on the *Work Summary* section of each chapter. As they finish certain sections, students receive results to know their own progress. In the *Can-Do Checklist* section of each chapter, students can self-evaluate and reflect on their skill acquisition. If they are unsure of any of the specific topics in the checklist, they can click on an arrow which will take them back to the correct section of the chapter to review. This feature is a strong point in this program.

The *Voces* program emphasizes speaking, reading, listening, writing and culture and uses a variety of approaches in these skill areas. There is an extended reading at the end of the text. There are authentic documents to explore and write about. There are interviews to listen to and presentations to give. There are chapter reviews with games, and quizzes and tests for assessment of progress toward proficiency.

Who would benefit from this e-textbook program?

The French *Voces* program could be used in a variety of ways.

- Teachers could use this program as their primary curriculum supplementing where deemed necessary.
- Students in an independent study situation could use this program and take the burden off the teacher to create materials. Teachers could be assured that students would still be experiencing a comprehensive sequential program offering a proficiency-based experience.
- Teachers could also use portions of the *Voces* program to supplement their primary curriculum. One way to use it efficiently would be to project segments on the SmartBoard, etc. to share together readings, practice exercises, panoramic photos, etc. The uses are countless. (I wish I were still in the classroom to be able to use this program!)
- Homebound students could also benefit from this program.
- Teachers could also use segments of this program to create their *Integrated Performance Assessments*. Authentic video recordings of native speakers offer rich resources to support the creation of these assessments.

Respectfully submitted,
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