The Use of ‘Sabras’ as Mentors for Advanced Hebrew Students

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Instructor Goals

• To foster an emotional connection between the students and their mentors, native Israelis of an older generation, in order to facilitate the internalization of cultural knowledge by the students

Research Question

Does the employment of native-speakers as mentors in an advanced Hebrew class help with the absorption of cultural knowledge?

Previous Research

• Mentoring for Cultural Knowledge
  ◦ Computer-based (virtual mentor)
  ◦ Native-speaking mentor in-country
  ◦ Helping foreign students adjust

• Peer/Reciprocal Mentoring
  ◦ German adults + American students of German (online)
  ◦ Service-learning for ESL students
Students and their Mentors

Criteria for Mentors

- Israeli, of a generation older than the students’ parents (the ‘Sabra’ generation)
- Strongly identified with Israel and its culture
- Eager to share, take part in the educational mission

Finding and Matching Mentors

Students were asked if they knew someone who could serve as a mentor
- Instructor found mentors for the rest (3 of 7 students)
  - Instructor matched mentors and students based on previous knowledge of each individual

Mentors and their Mentees

Family
- Grandmother and granddaughter
- Mother and son
- Mother and daughter

Non-Family
- Former professor of Hebrew and Middle Eastern Studies
- Real-estate background
- Social work background
**Grandmother and Granddaughter**

- Spoke by phone once every two weeks, in Hebrew only
- Stuck mainly with the assigned topics, but also discussed some related issues
- Benefits to the student:
  - Helped the topics seem “more real” to the student
  - Brought the two closer together
  - Improved language skills AND cultural knowledge

**Mother and Son**

- Spoke daily via phone, in person 1-2 times per week
- Spoke a mix of Hebrew and English
- Student spoke frequently in class about his family
- Benefits to the student:
  - Connection to his roots
  - Comparing the cultures he grew up in with that of Israel

**Mother and Daughter**

- Spoke by phone daily (personal) and weekly (class)
- Spoke a mix of Hebrew and English
- Stuck to the topics given by the instructor
- Student might prefer a non-family mentor in the future, since she and her mother speak so frequently anyway

**Non-Family: a political pairing**

- Spoke by phone once every two weeks, in Hebrew only
- Mentor and student share an interest in Israeli politics
- Benefits to both student and mentor
  - Keeps the mentor involved in the aspect of teaching that he missed the most
  - Provides the student with a resource for additional knowledge of Israel and Judaism
Non-Family: an expressive pair

- Communicated once per week by e-mail, in Hebrew only
- Discussed the assigned topics, but are not limited to them
- Benefits to the student
  - Greater historical perspective
  - Greater fluency

Problems and Possible Solutions

- Unresponsive mentor
  - Instructor has assigned a new mentor
- Desire for more communication
  - Make mentor aspect of the course more structured

Problems, Solutions, and Recommendations

- Determine your goals for using mentors
  - Establishing/strengthening a connection with a family member?
  - Establishing/strengthening a connection with the student’s own religious, cultural, or national identity?
  - Providing a source for academic information in a less formal setting?

Goals
- Depends on the language and culture being studied
- Mentor discussions add depth and breadth to class discussions