***What is code-switching?***

Code-switching (also referred to as language-mixing or code-mixing) is the use of two or more language varieties in one conversation. A code-switch can be inter-sentential or intra-sentential. Code-switching is systematic and follows structural rules. Bilinguals code-switch for lexical and pragmatic purposes. Lexical gaps are those in which a word or phrase is better conveyed in one variety over the other, either because the speaker does not know the word or because an appropriate translation of the word does not exist. Pragmatic switches are used to quote other speakers, emphasize, interject emotion or humor, etc.

Myers-Scotton, C. (2006). Multiple voices: An introduction to bilingualism. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

***How do children learn to code-switch?***

Language is learned through socialization. Children communicate in the way that other people around them do. The language or language varieties a child may grow up surrounded by are those that they will learn to communicate with. If children are raised in a bilingual and code-switching community, they too will be socialized to code-switch. Evidence of successful code-switching is seen in the toddler years: children direct utterances in the appropriate variety toward the appropriate person. Parents and educators have a history of suspecting language confusion and disabilities in children who code-switch, but today there is a lot of research that suggests that code-switching is both linguistically sophisticated and strategic.

Paradis, J., Genesee F., & Crago, B. (2011). *Dual Language Development & Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism & Second Language Learning.* 2nd edition. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooke's Publishing Co.

***Why should educators encourage code-switching?***

As children grow up listening to and speaking two or more languages, their individual language combinations and code-switches participate in the formation of their cultural and linguistic identities. In interviews about “Spanglish,” sixth grade students expressed interest in maintaining their ability to speak Spanish and their desire to keep their (or their parents') home country as a part of who they are while they live in the US. Student code-switching, then, is deeply connected to their identity and solidarity with their communities: ‘”Because I’m not only American. I’m also from Mexico.”(p.284)

Martinez, R. A. (2013). Reading the world in *Spanglish:* Hybrid language practices and ideological contestation in a sixth-grade English language arts classroom. *Linguistics and Education, 24*, 276-288.

Many believe that today's students need Standard American English literacy and communication skills for college and career readiness. But, to prohibit code-switching in the classroom in favor of exclusively allowing SAE, would be to devalue the students' learned way of communication. When code-switching is not allowed, it is asking students to leave their cultural identities and what they know about language at the door.

***What if we, as educators of ELLs, embrace student code-switching? What if we connect our Standard American English literacy instruction to the communication patterns that our students already possess? What if we allow students to access the curriculum through their own unique lens on linguistics? What if we encourage code-switching?***

**How can ESL teachers employ student code-switching to facilitate literacy growth?**

Meet the standards: below are examples of the *ELA College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards* of the *Common Core State Standards*.

**Narrative Expression:** *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.*

In a story retelling exercise in a study by Ruth Becker (2001), students demonstrated advanced narrative skills when they were able to retell the story through code-mixing. Students ages 6 to 11 were able to successfully incorporate colorful dialogue, plot development, and characterization into their retellings.

Dialogue in a Mexican folktale, as retold by a student through pragmatic code-switching:

No me comas! No me comas! Mi jefe siempre come el queso en sus tacos.

But where am I going to get the cheese?

Aquí en un laguito.

I'll meet you there.

Encouraging students to express themselves in their preferred language is to allow them to show what they know about narratives. This is an opportunity for growth in comprehension and skills related to craft; transferring those skills to SAE can be the objective of another lesson.

Becker, R. (2001). Spanish-English Code Switching In A Bilingual Academic Context. *Reading Horizons, 2*(2), 99-115.

**Readers and Writers and Registers:** *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.*

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.*

Research by Ramón Antonio Martínez (2010) suggests that involving students in metalinguistic activities about how they code-switch in daily conversation can facilitate their analysis of purpose and audience in text. Martínez argues that bilingual code-switchers already know a lot about adjusting one's way of communicating based on the context. Employing this preexisting knowledge will help students as they analyze a text for its purpose or direct their own writing to a specific audience.

This exploration can be enhanced through the exploration of texts that are written in Spanish-English code-switching, such as:

Judith Byron's Skippyjon Jones series

Lori M. Carlson's Cool Salsa: Bilingual poems on Growing up Latino in the United States

Junot Dias' The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.

Martínez, R. A. (2010). *Spanglish* as a Literacy Tool: Toward an Understanding of the Potential Role of Spanish-English Code-Switching in the Development of Academic Literacy. *Research in the teaching of English, 45*(2), 124-149.

**Contrastive Approach to Grammar Instruction:** *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.*

Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords (2006) write about the contrastive approach to teaching grammar in which students compare language varieties (referred to as formal and informal) in order to investigate and discover grammar structures. Wheeler and Swords focus on African American English and SAE, but because speakers and writers so often transfer the words of one language into the grammar structure of another, engaging students in learning the SAE grammar expectations by comparing it with code-switching is valuable, too. Students seek patterns in both varieties and practice code-switching between the two, based on context. It deepens their understanding of SAE grammar because they are able to engage with and connect to it.

Wheeler, R. S., & Swords, R. *Code-Switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

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| Informal | Formal |
| The house of my friend | My friend’s house |
| The chocolate of Maria | Maria’s chocolate |
| The socks of the teacher | The teacher’s socks |