

## **Code-Switching, Bilingualism, and Biliteracy: A Case Study**

**Ana Huerta-Macías**  
Coordinator  
Family Literacy Center  
El Paso Community College

**Elizabeth Quintero**  
Assistant Professor  
University of Minnesota, Duluth

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to describe different aspects of code-switching as they occurred in the teaching and learning process in a classroom setting with young bilingual children and their parents. The findings indicated that code-switching, in both oral and written form, allowed for effective communication between the parents, the children and the instructor in a way that was natural and comfortable for all involved. The authors propose that code-switching be viewed as part of a whole language approach in bilingual contexts.

### **Introduction**

Code-switching is a subject which has existed in the literature on bilingualism since the early nineteenth hundreds when Espinosa (1917) wrote of a “speech mixture” in the speech of New Mexicans. Since then the research in this area has focused on different aspects of code-switching. Within the last two decades, studies have evolved which focus on the role of code-switching in young children developing their bilingualism (Fantini, 1985; Genishi, 1981; Huerta, 1980); on the social functions of code-switching (McClure & Wentz, 1975; Poplack, 1981); on the patterns of code-switching in the home among adults (Huerta, 1978); and among third grade children at play and during interviews (Zentella, 1978). More recently, educators explored code-switching in classrooms and have found it to be effective as a teaching and communicative strategy which can be used among bilingual students (Aguirre, 1988; Hudelson, 1983; Olmedo-Williams, 1983).

The purpose of this study is to contribute to this research by describing code-switching as it occurred within a social context that combined school and family and that valued language switching as part of the whole language approach to the acquisition of literacy/biliteracy. Thus, this study fills a gap in the literature; it reports on code-switching within the widespread, fast-growing, relatively new instructional context of family literacy. Specifically, code-switching is analyzed with respect to effective teaching, learning, and communication strategies in a classroom context which includes not only children and an instructor but parents as well.

A note about the definition of code-switching is in order before proceeding to a description of the study. Although code-switching may refer to different styles of speech within the same language, as in the case of monolinguals using formal and informal speech, it is most often used within the field of bilingualism or multilingualism to refer to the alternate use of two or more languages in discourse. A myriad of terms exist in the literature which describe specific occurrences (often with different linguistic configurations) of this type of linguistic behavior--code-mixing, code-alternation, language switching, language mixing, language alternation, and code-changing. Given that these terms have not been standardized in the literature, and that our intent is to holistically describe the use of two languages in the classroom, we will for our present purposes use the term "code-switching" in a global fashion to describe any kind of language alternation. The great majority of instances of oral code-switching in the data occurred between utterances or conversational turns, although the work samples revealed some instances of intersentential (within a sentence) switching, as the reader will note. The languages dealt with are English and Spanish.

### **Description of the Study**

Project FIEL (Family Initiative for English Literacy) was an intergenerational family literacy program for Limited English Proficient families. The project was funded by Title VII Office of Bilingual Education and Language Minority Affairs (OBEMLA) and implemented from 1988-1991 in a large bilingual, bicultural city of over 500,000 people. "At-risk" families with four, five, and six-year old children (Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, First Grade) were invited through seven different schools in the county to participate in this project. The goals of the project were:

- 1) To enhance the literacy and biliteracy development of parents and children through a series of participatory inter-generational activities;
- 2) To provide information regarding the literacy development process in children to parents and to provide a setting for the parents to utilize the information;
- 3) To enhance the parents' self-confidence in helping their children; and
- 4) To empower the parents to connect literacy activities to their own social/cultural situations (Quintero & Macías, 1991).

The whole language approach, which emphasizes that language be taught naturally as it occurs within any social environment as opposed to segmenting it into bits and pieces (Goodman, 1986), was basic to the project. The use of code-switching, furthermore, was considered a part of the whole language approach by the project staff, and as such was accepted in the literacy classes. Goodman (1986) states that "Whole language programs respect the learners: who they are, where they come from, how they talk, what they read and what experiences they already had..." (p. 10). Edelsky (1990) confirms this position by saying, "Whole language values code-switching as a sociolinguistic strength..."(p. 10) Thus, we felt that by accepting the use of both languages in the classroom, in whatever form seemed most natural to the families, we were validating the past and present sociolinguistic experiences of the parents and children, and enhancing the learning process for them by allowing them to express themselves in a comfortable and precise way.

The literacy classes were conducted for twelve weeks in the fall and twelve in the spring. Parents would come together with their children to their neighborhood schools, once a week, after school for the lessons. The lessons lasted approximately 75 minutes and included a variety of learning activities such as conversing, reading, writing and art projects. The classes, which consisted of small groups of five to seven families, were conducted in English and/or Spanish, depending on the linguistic abilities and desires of each of the groups. The families participated in the selection of themes (which varied weekly) for each lesson. The themes were open-ended in order to allow the families to adopt them to their own

needs, interests, and cultural situations. Some of the lessons, for example, included music, celebrations, the family, and foods. The design and implementation of the classes thus allowed for maximum participation by the parents as well as by the children with respect to the way in which the themes were developed in each class.

### **Research Methodology and Description of the Data**

The focus of this study is on a single classroom. This selection was made because there was more code-switching occurring in this classroom than in comparable classrooms; consequently, it offered more possibility for the study of this type of bilingual linguistic behavior.

Data for this investigation comes from approximately fourteen hours of video-tapes taken in this classroom, observation notes by a participant observer (teacher) and non-participant observers (project coordinators), informal parent interviews, and work samples done in the classes and at home. The videotapes were collected from October to April (approximately half of the classes in the project were alternately filmed). The dialogue on the videotapes was transcribed during the summers, with a focus on specific families in each class which had attended most regularly.

The analysis of the transcriptions was qualitative and open-ended. Instances of code-switching were first identified. The context was then analyzed as to the speaker(s), addressee(s), content/topic, classroom organization, children/parents present. The series of tapes also permitted us to see the students' use of each language from class to class. The observation notes by the staff added more information as to the physical and social context not captured by the camera lens. The informal interviews with the parents provided information on, among other things, the backgrounds of the families, the language(s) used at home by different family members, and the language of any print (magazines, newspapers, letters, etc.) in their home.

An additional source of data for the study came from the teacher who, in a questionnaire and during conversations, described her linguistic background and her perspectives on several questions relating to the use of code-switching in the classroom. The questionnaire asked, for example, about the amount of code-switching done in her students' speech and on whether her own language use in the classroom was planned or spontaneous.

Work portfolios were kept on each child in the project. The writing samples in these portfolios provided another opportunity to examine the nature and frequency of English and/or Spanish as used individually by the children in written form. The information from all of the above data sources was combined in an effort to identify patterns which occurred in the class as the participants alternated languages.

This case study thus looks at code-switching in oral classroom discourse between teachers, parents and children as well as in the children's work samples. While examples of code-switching in writing occurred much less frequently than in conversation, we feel it is an important area of study given that so little information exists in the literature regarding this. We hope, then, that our work will add in some way to research which has been done (Barrera, 1983; Edelsky, 1986) in bilingual children's writing. A brief sociocontextual background of the case study follows.

### **The Setting: The Classroom**

As mentioned above, the study focuses on a classroom in which the participants were observed to exhibit a high degree of code-switching. This classroom is part of a large elementary public school with an enrollment of 1,148 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grades. The school is in an old, but well maintained lower middle class, established neighborhood in the center of the city with a population which is predominantly of Mexican origin. The class, which consisted of five families, was directed by a teacher with the help of an assistant who mainly took care of logistics such as setting up tables and distributing materials and snacks.

The dialogues presented in this study are based on the interactions between the teacher, the parents and their four children; Alex, Celia, Dora, Hilario.

### **The Teacher**

The teacher in this study was a middle-aged Anglo woman who had twenty-one years teaching experience--eighteen of those with first grade children--in "monolingual" classrooms. Her personality was quite pleasant; she always appeared to be full of exuberance and excitement, particularly when engaged in projects with her children. She had a sincere interest in all of the families and was very much loved by them.

Even though she would not admit to knowing but “a little bit” of Spanish, she was actually fluent enough to hold brief conversations in Spanish with parents and children at the school. This ability was acquired during her stays in Mexico and during the course of her teaching in bilingual communities. This teacher did not hesitate to use her Spanish as needed for teaching, for parent involvement or simply for building rapport with others.

When asked about her language use in the literacy classroom, she estimated using Spanish about 40% and English about 60% of the time. This instructor elaborated on her use of code-switching with the families by saying that it was mostly spontaneous, “Very often I would be talking in English. When I saw non-responsive faces, I knew I had to switch.” She added that if she did not code-switch there would be “...less rapport with teacher and students.” She felt that switching was “a natural way to communicate, especially for young learners.” The frequency and ease with which she, herself, switched languages indicated that she was certainly not new at this practice but was quite skilled in switching back and forth.

### **The Families**

The four families who participated in the class all resided within blocks of the school. The parents of the children all had more than the average years of schooling for most parents in the project. Mr. and Ms. H. (Hilario's parents) both finished “secundaria” or high school in Mexico as well as some college in the U.S. Mr. H. works as a maintenance man while Ms. H. is a homemaker. The family, consisting of both parents and Hilario, reported speaking predominantly Spanish at home. They tried using English at home once in a while for practice, however, it was mainly used outside the home. Mr. and Ms. J. (Alex's parents) completed two years of college in the U.S. and six years of school in Mexico, respectively. Mr. J. works as a driver while Ms. J. is a homemaker. Mr. J. is bilingual while Ms. J. has learned some English through use outside the home. The parents reported speaking only Spanish at home to each other and to their two sons. Their sons, however, use both languages with their parents and with each other. Ms. E. (Celia's mother) had six years of schooling in Mexico. She is a homemaker. Ms. E., Celia and her other daughter live with Ms. E.'s parents. The family speaks only Spanish at home. Ms. E. further stated that newspapers, magazines and other reading material which she

received at home was also in Spanish. Ms. E. was the least proficiently bilingual parent in the group; nonetheless, she understood English and occasionally used a few words in English.

All four families, moreover, faithfully attended the literacy classes throughout Year Two (academic year) of the project. Alex, Dora, and Hilario were kindergartners at the time, Celia was four years old and was still at home. Mr. and Ms. H. and Ms. E. continued with the classes into Year Three of the program. All of these families also had high educational aspirations for their children. Furthermore, while they all wanted their children to learn English, they also wanted them to further develop their Spanish. That is, they all expressed concerns that the home language should not be lost in the process of acquiring English. Thus, they were all quite comfortable being in a classroom where both languages were used.

### **Findings**

The findings from this study of code-switching follow. Each is discussed in further detail below.

1. The conversational functions of code-switching (i.e., the pragmatic information conveyed in conversation through switching) in the classroom on the part of the instructor were similar to those reported in the literature in a “regular” classroom context (Olmedo-Williams, 1983), and in family conversations among bilinguals at home (Huerta, 1978).
2. The teacher, despite having learned Spanish as a second language, code-switched effectively and in a native-like fashion in the classroom.
3. The parents maintained Spanish as the language used with their children in the classroom even when the parents were bilingual and when their children were speaking English.
4. The children used both languages freely in oral discourse as they responded to the teacher and their parents, thus communicating in a natural, effective way.
5. The children also communicated effectively and naturally in written form through the use of English and/or Spanish.

**Discussion of Findings: Functions of Code-Switching**

With respect to the first finding, the instructor used code-switching to elaborate, to emphasize, to specify an addressee and to clarify --- in short, for effective communication. This confirms what has been reported in the literature. Some of the more often cited functions of code-switching in conversation, for example, are to give emphasis, to elaborate, to clarify, to shift the mode of discourse, or to specify a certain addressee (Huerta, 1978; McClure, 1981; Silva-Corvalan, 1983). It is difficult to categorically type such complex bilingual behavior as language alternation because it may often serve more than one function on different levels. One may, for example, find it an impossible if not futile task to try to distinguish between clarification, emphasis and/or elaboration in any one instance of code-switching, not to mention that there may be other more subtle functions operating in response to the social context and/or to psychological or attitudinal factors. Yet, this perspective of looking at code-switching, which is holistic in that it takes the entire conversational and social context into account, is fruitful because it has the potential of providing more insight into the roles which language plays in effective communication in bilingual contexts. We have, therefore, looked at the functions which code-switching served in conversations in our classroom and have found that they are similar to what has been previously reported in the literature. The data appears to indicate, for example, that the instructor often switches languages to emphasize, clarify and/or elaborate or to address a certain person or persons in the classroom. These functions are exemplified below through excerpts of classroom dialogue. They are, furthermore, presented here only for the purpose of illustrating that code-switching conveys pragmatic information which enhances communication within a classroom context; the labels for these functions may be debatable and are not seen as significant.

**Elaboration**

Elaboration occurred when additional information/details on a topic were added in the alternate language.

(1)

[Teacher is sitting on a rug with children in a semi-circle and is sharing a book which she made on her family]

T: Maybe you'd like to make a book. This is my mother with grey hair, porque está poco vieja (because she's a little old). This is my sister, poco gorda, poquito, poquito. Ella no vive aquí por eso no va a saber esto (a bit fat, a little bit, a little bit. She doesn't live here so she's not going to know about this), but she's a little bit fat.

### **Emphasis**

Emphasis occurred when the teacher stressed or underscored a point in the alternate language, Spanish. This switch was also accompanied by a change in voice intonation which exhibited a higher pitch level.

(2)

[Class is getting ready to go to their tables to make monster faces with candy corn, raisins, etc. on some Halloween cookies.]

T: Each of you will get a cup. Now, no se necesita poner todo en esta cara, van a hacer dos, en alguno quiero poner éste y éste o éste, pero no se necesita poner todo, es demasiado (you don't need to put everything on this face, you're going to make two, on one I want to put this and this or that on, but you don't need to put everything on, it's too much), just put enough for the monster face.

### **Addressee Specification**

Addressee specification occurred when the teacher switched languages as she addressed, or directed her speech, to a different listener. In these cases she switched to Spanish as she turned, made eye-contact and addressed the parents after speaking to the children.

(3)

[Teacher is sitting with class around her in a semicircle, explaining the theme for the lesson to the class, and specifically directs some questions to the parents.]

T: Today we re going to talk about jobs and working... ¿Mamás, han tenido trabajo antes de casamiento? (Mothers, did you have a job before you got married?)  
¿...cuál trabajo recuerda? (what job do you remember?)

Ms.E: Yo en Juarez duré cinco años desde los trece hasta los diez y ocho años hasta que me casé. (I lasted 5 years from the time I was 13 until I was 18 when I got married).

- T: ¿Cómo?... y ya más trabajo en casa? (how?...now more work at home?).
- Ms.E: Sí. Ahora ya no, desde que me vine (Yes, not anymore, since I came...)
- T: ¿Y le gustó muchísimo o no? (Did you like it a lot or not?)  
¿De qué clase...? (what kind?)
- Ms.E: Hacíamos faldas de doctores para los hospitales (we made doctors' robes for the hospitals).
- T: ¿Y muchas horas cada día? (and many hours a day?)
- Ms.E: Entraba a las seis y salía a las tres y media (I went in at 6 and left at 3:30).

### **Clarification**

Clarification occurred when the teacher switched to Spanish as she repeated or paraphrased something she had just said in English.

(4)

[The parents and children are making surprise birthday gifts for each other at their work tables.]

- T: But let's pretend, a imaginar (imagine), let's pretend, vamos a imaginar (let's imagine) today is our birthday, vamos a imaginar que hoy es cumpleaños (let's imagine today's a birthday).. .We're going to make a present vamos a hacer un regalo para esa persona (we're going to make a gift for that person).

### **The Teacher as Non-Native Code-Switcher**

The second finding was that the instructor, despite having learned Spanish as a second language (she was Anglo), code-switched effectively and in the fashion of a native bilingual (excluding a few performance errors in grammar which did not detract from the message). Aguirre (1988) speaks of intuitive knowledge as the basis for teacher's capability of understanding bilingual behavior in the classroom. This knowledge, he states, is not merely the result of speaking two languages but also of the speaker approaching a state of balance in language use through participation in bilingual contexts. This intuitive knowledge (which he implies is only found in native bilinguals) then expands and allows the teacher to enhance teaching and learning activities for bilingual children through the construction of a sociolinguistic profile for each child which highlights global features of a child's

bilingual behavior. Our observations indicate that the teacher in our study, although not a native speaker of Spanish, exhibited intuitive knowledge of bilingual behavior. This was obvious not only through her understanding of the children's bilingual speech but through her own language alternation which, as stated above, was very natural and revealed the same features as have been documented in previous studies of code-switching among native Spanish-English bilinguals.

The teacher did not formally construct a sociolinguistic profile for each student of the type described by Aguirre. It is questionable if such a profile is even feasible given the high level of activities in the classroom and the physical and mental demands placed on the teacher during her teaching. Nonetheless, our teacher certainly used her perceptions of her children's behavior and proficiencies in each language to enhance communication, teaching and learning in the classroom as she used either or both of their two languages appropriately. As she did this, she was also carrying out a role of teacher as intellectual (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985) as she evaluated each child individually within the bilingual context and responded accordingly.

### **Teacher/Parent Code-Switching**

The third finding was that parents maintained their use of Spanish in the classroom even when they were capable of speaking English. This was true, with the exception of short phrases, when they spoke to the instructor (who was English dominant). This confirms previous findings that establish addressee as a determining factor for code-switching. Huerta (1978), for example, found that bilingual parents in two families studied always used Spanish with their children. Fantini (1985) found that his young son switched to Spanish when he spoke with his caretaker and certain other people.

The present study indicates that the person addressed determined the language choice and overrode other social context factors, such as the dominant English proficiency of the instructor who was directing the class. The use of Spanish between the instructor and the parents is illustrated above in example (3). In this example there is a change in the interlocutors (the speakers) as the teacher and parents turn to discussing past work experiences. This change is accompanied by a switch to Spanish which proceeds to be used as the teacher continues to question each parent on his/her job and job aspirations.

A switch was also seen when the parents addressed their children. All of the children were bilingual at least to the point of understanding and responding to simple everyday conversation in English. However, it was obvious that the families felt much more comfortable speaking to each other in Spanish--the language which came more easily and naturally to them. This is exemplified in the following dialogue excerpts.

(5)

[Class is discussing their families as all sit on the rug in a semi-circle.]

T: How about you, Teresa? ¿Quién vive contigo en tu familia en tu casa? (Who lives with you in your home)?

Dora: My mother, my father, my brother.

Ms.C: No tienes hermano, no tienes hermano tú (you don't have a brother, you don't have a brother).

T: . . . Quieres un hermano pero no hay--(You want a brother but there isn't one--). Would you like to have a brother? What about a sister?...

### **Children's Use of Code-Switching**

The fourth finding dealt with the children using both languages freely as they responded to the teacher. All four children in the classroom were Spanish dominant with varying degrees of proficiency in English. While no formal assessments were given, our observations and the parent interviews indicated that all were capable of understanding English and using it in informal conversations such as those held in the literacy classes. Yet, they still frequently used both languages in their responses. This supports findings in past studies which demonstrate that children code-switch for effective communication (Genishi, 1981; Huerta, 1980; Huerta-Macías, 1983).

This type of free language alternation can be seen not as a handicap but as an opportunity to develop the children's languages in a very viable way. The longitudinal effects of free language alternation in the classroom have been researched in a unique study (Mackey, 1977) in a setting where the teachers "continually alternate between languages throughout the teaching" (p. 337). This study, furthermore, lends support to the idea of developing bilingualism through code-switching: "...free language alternation in early childhood education can be used with mixed language populations

as a means to promote bilingualism in the kindergarten and primary grades” (p. 344).

We now turn to examples of children alternating between English and Spanish in the following dialogue.

(6)

[It is the beginning of the class and the children are doing a show-and-tell on the homework from a previous week. They drew gifts and wrote about gift giving for this assignment.]

- T: What color does she want?  
 Hilario: Red  
 T: And what is that one?  
 Hilario: A jacket.  
 T: What are you going to give grandma?  
 Hilario: Un anillo. (a ring)

[Later, same class as topic turns to community helpers and teacher is guiding the language experience part of the lesson.]

- T: Hilario, you tell mom what to say... ¿Qué hacen los bomberos? (What do the firefighters do?)  
 Hilario: Hechan agua (put water).  
 T: ¿En dónde? (Where?)  
 Hilario: On the fire.

### **Developmental Writing/Code-Switching**

The fifth finding was that the children also communicated effectively and naturally on paper through the use of either or both languages, thus confirming previous descriptions of code-switching in written discourse (Edelsky, 1986). Our children wrote and/or dictated “stories” during the language experience part of every lesson. This yielded a number of work samples from each student which comprised a portfolio of work done in Spanish and/or English. Code-switching in written form did occur much less frequently than in conversation. This is in agreement with past research on code-switching, including Mackey (1977) who reported that only one language was used in writing (except for occasional words in a different language which were put in quotes) even though two were used continually in oral discourse in the school. There is, thus, little data available on code-switching in writing and

consequently most all studies in this area concentrate on oral code-switching.

Furthermore, while some educators have come to accept code-switching in classroom discourse, they are reluctant to accept it in writing. Yet, we see the use of two languages, whether orally or written, as part of a holistic approach to the development of the writing process in children. It is an approach which values the child's past cultural and linguistic experiences.

Thus, our children were allowed to write freely as part of the literacy/biliteracy development process. We found, furthermore, that the children wrote and/or dictated very naturally whether in one or both languages. They appeared to be preoccupied with the message or meaning more than with the form--certainly a positive step in their learning the process of writing. Past research supports the notion of developing biliteracy through the use of two languages. Barrera (1983) writes about this with respect to bilingual children learning to read, "...bilingual teachers presenting reading in a meaning-centered fashion should not be preoccupied with rigidity separating first-language and second-language forms. Even bilingual children who are beginning readers can be provided with written material in both languages (or a mixture of the two) so long as the content is natural and meaningful to them. It is likely that in young children's minds reading is not differentiated by language" (p. 171). The children in our classroom did indeed read and shared their "stories" with the class in a natural way, whether they were in English, Spanish or both. Following are some samples of three of the four children's writing (the fourth child, Celia wrote only in Spanish). Their work shows a language alternation from class to class with occasional papers showing both Spanish and English within a single story. The samples were written as part of each lesson on a weekly basis. An effort was made to get the children to compose and write on their own. However, they were often hesitant to write, perhaps because of their experience in their regular classes which emphasized "correct" rather than creative, emergent literacy. In some cases, then, the child dictated his/her story and the parents were instructed to write exactly what the child said. In other cases, the parents set up a model by writing what the child said and then letting the child copy the writing.

## Work Samples--A.J.

- 11-29-89 [booklet about a cat]  
 the playful little cat  
 the cat spill the paint  
 the cat plays with the yam  
 the cat looks at the fish  
 the cat sits on the roof  
 the cat smells the cheese  
 the cat plays with the xmas tree
- 12-06-89 puse semillas para que salgan beans y  
 pumpkin
- 01-17-90 1. Burlap 2. Dirt 3. Seeds 4. wather  
 me gusta el verano porque puedo salir al  
 parque
- 02-07-90 estoy asustado cuando me inyectan

## Work Samples--H.H.

- [booklet] memory trips  
 my 1<sup>0</sup> trip was to oklahoma city by car  
 my 2<sup>0</sup> trip was to mazatlan by airplane  
 my 3<sup>0</sup> trip was to acapulco by bus  
 my 4<sup>0</sup> trip was to mazatlan by airplan  
 my 5<sup>0</sup> trip was rocky point by truck  
 en el future va a ir a la luna el cohete
- 11-29-89 es el cuento del gatito que se llama Santa  
 Claus
- 12-06-89 how to plan, put burlap, put dirt, put the  
 seeds  
 put water, put ? sun
- 01-10-90 el dinosaurio y yo somos amigos
- 01-17-90 winter is beautiful because of the snow

01-24-90	ayer Enrique y yo fuimos a las cavernas
01-31-90	mickey mouse is the name of my puppet
02-07-90	I feel happy in my birthday
	I am boring because I stay in home
02-14-90	voy a morder a paula porque es dia de valentine
Collective Language Experience Paragraph by the children	
10-25-89	We made a milk shake. First we put milk, then the ice cream. La batimos. We drink it. It's cold and good.

### **Related Issues**

Tukinoff (1985) addressed the use of two languages as a factor in effective instruction. Even though he distinguished between code-switching and language alternation, his conclusions are nonetheless pertinent to this study. He writes, "Effective teachers make use of every available resource--including knowledge of a limited English proficient (LEP) student's native language--to ensure that students learn. . . .The purpose for language alternation should be tied to achieving effective instruction" (pp. 19-50). We propose that the code-switching done in this study by the teacher was for the purpose of "effective instruction" even though its use was not limited to translating or presenting material which had just been presented in the other language. The use of code-switching enhanced instruction in this particular setting not only by insuring understanding and two-way communication between the instructor and the families, but also by building rapport with and building self-esteem on the part of the families who knew that they could participate in this class and let their voices be heard in whatever language(s) they could express themselves. Language was, in effect, secondary; communication of meaning as the families engaged in discussions of issues significant to their lives was primary. The focus, thus, was on the purpose of language use rather than on the process--a factor which has been identified as

critical to children's language learning (Smith, 1984), and which is also basic to the whole language approach.

The issue of the feasibility of using code-switching as a means of developing bilingualism/biliteracy is often raised, particularly when children are allowed to switch freely in the classroom. One needs to remember that the classroom is not the only place where the children are developing their language. In fact, children learn their language mostly outside of the classroom in other social contexts where they cumulatively spend more time than in school (at home, on the playground, at peer gatherings, etc.). Moreover, the influence of the media (radio, TV, movies) on their language development is also very significant. Children do, therefore, have the opportunity of developing their proficiency in either or both languages through exposure and use in social situations where either all Spanish or all English is obligatory because of different variables such as monolinguals being present or the formality of the situation. The media (which is usually in one or the other language) plays a principal role in the development of their languages. Hakuta (1990) in discussing bilingualism among children states, "There was no evidence of confusion between the two languages, even though in normal conversations with their bilingual friends, they engaged actively in switching between their two languages (code-switching)" (p. 8). Another concern deals with the ability of bilinguals to keep their languages separate at will. Research has shown that a child acquiring two languages simultaneously will make an effort to separate them (to the extent that his proficiencies allow at that particular point in development) when s/he perceives that is what the context requires (Fantini, 1985; Huerta-Macías, 1983; Vihman, 1985). It has also been shown that code-switching (to Spanish) in children's English discourse lessens as grade level increases (Garcia, Maez & González, 1983), perhaps because they are approaching a more balanced degree of bilingualism. Switching (to English) in Spanish discourse does not lessen but remains nearly constant across grade levels. This indicates a need for more use of and exposure to Spanish and/or, more significantly, a change to a more positive attitude towards Spanish by the general population. An increase in overall use would also encourage children to use it more, simply as a response to the social context. Most importantly, extended use of the children's native language would positively affect their self-esteem.

Bilinguals, as they grow into adulthood, do begin to code-switch more extensively again. This time, however, it is not due so much to lack of proficiency in one or the other language, but is rather indicative of a growing metalinguistic and pragmatic sophistication (Huerta, 1978; Valdés, 1981; Vihman, 1985) which prompts them to make use of both of their languages to communicate in a more exact way just what they want to say.

### **Implications**

The findings presented here simplify the process of using code-switching effectively in the classroom. We found, for instance, that code-switching was used by the children in both oral discourse and in written form in order to communicate in an effective way. Of significance is that either or both languages be used in a natural way as needed with each student in order to convey meaning. Another finding was that even though the teacher had learned Spanish as second language, she nonetheless code-switched in a native-like fashion in the classroom. This implies that one need not be a native bilingual nor highly proficient in both languages in order to do this. What is needed is sensitivity to each child's linguistic repertoire and an ability to use that as a starting point for further development.

Additionally, code-switching in the classroom can be seen as a viable way of facilitating the development of bilingualism/biliteracy in children. Code-switching serves to not only enhance communication in the teaching/learning process but can also help to maintain and develop the languages of a bilingual. This maintenance and development takes place through the use of both languages in meaningful activities which involve listening, speaking, reading and writing. That is, while one language will in all probability be used to a lesser extent than the other one in any given situation, its use can, nonetheless, serve as a stimulus for more extensive use and thus further development in the classroom. In addition, our finding that the parents maintained the use of Spanish with their children even when the children were speaking English, implies that code-switching might also be used as a stimulus for further development of Spanish in the home context.

### **Conclusion**

This case study has focused on different aspects of code-switching as it occurred among bilinguals in an intergenerational classroom context which included parents as well as children and an

instructor. Code-switching was found to enhance communication, in both oral and written form, within the group as the class participants strived to relate their thoughts to others who had varying proficiencies in Spanish and English.

Code-switching was also viewed in this study as part of the holistic approach to the acquisition of literacy in that it allowed each participant to use each of his/her languages in a natural, meaningful way as the various classroom activities were being implemented.

We have come a long way in understanding the nature of code-switching from the days when it was referred to as a speech mixture. However, there is more to be done. Future directions for research would be to focus on innovative, nontraditional methods that can be utilized with children in the classroom in order to capitalize on their linguistic repertoire in Spanish and English. Another task ahead of us is to work on changing the still all-too-common attitude among school personnel that code-switching leads to alingualism and should not be used in the classroom. This change in attitude is by far the biggest challenge facing us in this areas of study; one that we must undertake as part of our plan to meet the needs of our increasingly "minority" population in the United States.

### References

Aguirre, A. 1988. Code-switching, intuitive knowledge and the bilingual classroom. In H.S. García & R.C. Chávez (Eds.), *Ethnolinguistic issues in education* (pp. 28-38). Lubbock, Texas: College of Education, Texas Tech University.

Aronowitz, S. and Giroux, H.A.

85. *Education under siege: The conservative liberal and radical debate over schooling*. Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey.

Barrera, R.B. 1983. Bilingual reading in the primary grades: Some questions about questionable views and practices. In T.H. Escobedo (Ed.), *Early childhood bilingual education: A hispanic perspective* (pp. 164-184). New York: Teacher's College Press.

Edelsky, C. 1986. *Writing in a bilingual program*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Edelsky, C. 1990, November. Whose agenda is this anyway? A response to McKenna, Robinson, and Miller. *Educational Researcher*, 7-11.

Espinosa, A. 1917. Speech mixture in New Mexico: The influence of the English language on New Mexican Spanish. In E. Hernandez-Chávez, A.D. Cohen, & A.F. Beltramo (Eds.), *El lenguaje de los Chicanos* (pp. 99-114). Arlington, Virginia: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Fantini, A.E. 1985. *Language acquisition of a bilingual child: A socio-linguistic perspective (to age ten)*. Avon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Garcia, E.E., Maez, L. & González, G. 1983. *The incidence of language switching in Spanish/English bilingual children of the United States*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. BE015018)

Genishi, C. 1981. Code-switching in Chicano six-year olds. In R. Duran (Ed.), *Latino language and communicative behavior* (pp. 133-152). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Goodman, K. 1986. *What's whole in whole language?* Exeter, NH: Heinemann.

Hakuta, K. 1990, Spring. Bilingualism and bilingual education: A research perspective. *Focus: Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education*. Wheaton, MD: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

Hudelson, S. 1983. Beto at the sugar table: Code-switching in a bilingual classroom. In T.H. Escobedo (Ed.), *Early childhood bilingual education: A Hispanic perspective* (pp. 31-49). New York: Teacher's College Press.

Huerta, A.G. 1978. *Code-switching among Spanish-English bilinguals: A sociolinguistic perspective*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

Huerta, A.G. 1980. The acquisition of bilingualism: A code-switching approach. In R. Bauman & J. Sherzer (Eds.), *Language and speech in American society: A compilation of research papers in sociolinguistics* (pp. 1-28). Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Lab.

Huerta-Macías, A. 1983. Child bilingualism: To switch or not to switch? In T.H. Escobedo (Ed.), *Early childhood bilingual education: A Hispanic perspective* (pp. 18-30). New York: Teacher's College Press.

Mackey, W.F. 1977. Free language alternation in school. In W.F. Mackey & T. Andersson (Eds.), *Bilingualism in early childhood*, (pp. 333-348). Massachusetts: Newbury House.

McClure, E. 1981. Formal and functional aspects of the code-switched discourse of bilingual children. In R. Duran (Ed.), *Latino language and communicative behavior*, (pp. 69-94). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

McClure, E. & Wentz, J. 1975. Functions of code-switching among Mexican-American children. In R. Grossman, L. San & T. Vance (Eds.), *Functionalism* (pp. 421-432). Chicago, Illinois: Univ. of Chicago, Dept. of Linguistics.

Olmedo-Williams, I. 1983. Spanish-English bilingual children as peer teachers. In L. Elias-Olivares (Ed.), *Spanish in the U.S. setting: Beyond the Southwest* (pp. 89-106). Wheaton, Maryland: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

Poplack, S. 1981. Syntactic structure and social function of code-switching. In R. P. Duran (Ed.), *Latino language and communicative behavior* (pp. 169-184). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corp.

Quintero, E. & Huerta-Macías, A. 1991. *Family initiative for English literacy: A handbook*. El Paso, Texas: El Paso Community College Literacy Center.

Silva-Corvalán, C. 1983. Code-shifting patterns in Chicano Spanish. In L. Elias-Olivares (Ed.), *Spanish in the U.S. setting:*

*Beyond the Southwest* (pp. 69-88). Wheaton, Maryland: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

Smith, F. 1984. The creative achievement of literacy. In H. Gallman, A. Oberg & F. Smith (Eds.), *Awakening to literacy* (pp. 135-142). Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Tukinoff, W.J. 1985. *Applying significant bilingual instructional features in the classroom*. Rosslyn, Virginia: InterAmerica Research Associates.

Valdés, G. 1981. Code-switching as deliberate verbal strategy: A microanalysis of direct and indirect requests among bilingual Chicano speakers. In R. Duran (Ed.), *Latino language and communicative behavior* (pp. 95-107). Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex.

Vihman, M. 1985, June. Language differentiation by the bilingual infant. *Journal of Child Language*, 12(2), 297-324.

Zentella, A.C. 1978. *Code-switching and interactions among Puerto-Rican children* (Working papers in sociolinguistics). Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Lab.