itial

a	**Chapter 2**
	Chapter 3
e	**Chapter 9**
,	**Chapter 5**
:	**Chapter 5**
:	**Chapters 4, 5**
e	**Chapter 7**
f	**Chapter 7**
y	**Chapter 7**
,	**Chapters 6, 11**
e	**Chapters 10, 11**

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The Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development Handbook

A Complete K–12 Reference Guide

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Other communication strategies include avoiding sounds, structures, or topics that are beyond current proficiency; memorizing stock phrases to rely on when all else fails; asking a conversant for help or pausing to consult a dictionary; and falling back on the primary language for help in communication. The last strategy, often called *code switching*, has been studied extensively because it permeates a learner's progression in a second language. Code switching—the alternating use of two languages on the word, phrase, clause, or sentence level—has been found to serve a variety of purposes, not just as a strategy to help when expressions in the second language are lacking.

Baker (2001) lists ten purposes for code switching: (1) to emphasize a point, (2) because a word is unknown in one of the languages, (3) for ease and efficiency of expression, (4) as a repetition to clarify, (5) to express group identity and status and/ or to be accepted by a group, (6) to quote someone, (7) to interject in a conversation, (8) to exclude someone, (9) to cross social or ethnic boundaries, and (10) to ease tension in a conversation. Code switching thus serves a variety of intentions beyond the mere linguistic. It has important power and social ramifications.

According to Buell (2004), "Code-switching is a key marker of social identities, relations, and context. When a speaker uses or changes a code, she is signaling who she is, how she relates to listeners or readers, how she understands the context and what communication tools are available to her" (pp. 99, 100). Students' writing and other discourse practices are apt to be complex, multilayered, and sometimes contradictory. Understanding students in the full splendor of their code-switching and use of dialect, peer-influenced, or idio-syncratic language is part of the joy of teaching.

Example of Concept   *Code Switching*

Jennifer Seitz, a third-grade teacher, uses Alicia's primary language, Spanish, as a way to help Alicia learn English. A recent Spanish-speaking immigrant to the United States, Alicia has acquired whole phrases or words in English from a fellow student and intersperses these when speaking Spanish to gain access to her peer group. On the playground, she has been heard to repeat in Spanish something just said in English, perhaps to clarify what was said or to identify with two groups. She often uses English when learning concepts in the classroom, but uses Spanish when she is discussing the concept with another student or when the conversation involves a personal matter. The content of the instruction and the interpersonal link between speakers seem to be the main factors in her language choice.

Although language purists look down on language mixing, a more fruitful approach is letting children learn in whatever manner they feel most comfortable, so that anxiety about language will not interfere with concept acquisition. In fact, a teacher who learns words and expressions in the students' home language is able to use the students' language to express solidarity and share personal feelings when appropriate.

Direct Strategies. In contrast to indirect strategies, direct strategies tend to originate at a level of conscious performance and may or may not become unconscious, or automated, during operation. A person may be taught a strategy, try it, reflect upon