**Young, Vershawn Ashanti., Rusty Barrett, Y'Shanda Young-Rivera, and Kim Brian Lovejoy. *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2014. 192 pages. $32.95 ISBN 0807755559. Print.**

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In December of 1996, a controversial debate arose with the decision of the Oakland School Board to recognize African American Vernacular English or "Ebonics" as the primary language of African American children and include "Ebonics" in the Language Arts curriculum in the school district. Since then, we have learned a great deal about how teachers can include other English varieties in the classroom through the use of code-switching (Wheeler and Sword), bidialectism, and contrastive analysis (Rickford et al.). However, questions about how teachers can offer more equitable instruction in literacy that respects and values students' languages remain unanswered. *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy* makes a significant contribution to the debate about literacy, identity, race and language blend by providing us with a thorough discussion of the implications of code-switching as a pedagogical approach and the potential of using code-meshing as an alternative approach.

Drawing from linguistics, language arts education, composition and rhetoric, and African American studies, the authors, Vershawn Young, Rusty Barrett, Y'Shanda Young-Rivera and Kim Brian Lovejoy, bring different perspectives that make this book an invaluable source for writing teachers and educational researchers. The introductory chapter situates the book in the thorny question of how to advocate for African American English speakers who struggle in school because of their language. It defines the central concepts of code-switching and code-meshing that are the heart of conversations about more equitable ways to teach writing from K-

12 learners to college-level students. In their discussion, the authors focus on examining the implications of code-switching as a pedagogical approach where "students are instructed to switch from one code or dialect to another, that is, to switch from using African American English to Standard English, according to the setting and audience" (Young et al. 2). Although the adoption of code-switching in schools may be an effective strategy to improve the academic achievement of African American students and other racially minoritized learners or individuals of underrepresented status, the authors indicate an inherent risk of reinforcing negative attitudes among the students. For instance, scholars who reflected on language and racial identity report that although using code-switching facilitated integration and certain success in White environments, it did not alleviate the racial microaggresions they experienced or their struggle with race-related identity issues (Edwards, McMillon, and Turner). As an alternative to code-switching, Young and his colleagues propose code-meshing, a concept which "advocate[s] that African American English speakers be allowed to blend African American language styles together with Standard English at school and at work" (Young et al. 1).

The book further elaborates on code-meshing as a pedagogical alternative in four sections that examine different aspects of the conversation about literacy and equity. Part 1, written by Rusty Barrett, discusses issues related to language ideology and prescriptive grammar, giving the reader an accessible review of the extensive scholarly work on the linguistic structure of African American English. The main theme that emerges in this section is that language awareness and appreciation of language variation are connected. Language awareness implies understanding that all languages, including undervalued varieties of English, are systematic and based on rules. Being aware of the rules that govern the language varieties we speak should help us to understand forms of language ideologies and social prejudice against undervalued communities of speakers. From this perspective, Barrett revisits the teacher's concern about whether there is a "right" way to teach language in the classroom and how

students should learn about Standard English. The code-meshing approach stands out as a proposal that—although it includes explicit instruction in grammatical differences—urges students to "exploit and blend those differences" (43).

In part 2, Young argues that "code-switching is a racialized teaching method that manufactures linguistic segregation in classrooms and unwittingly supports it in society" (58). The theme that dominates is the linguistic double consciousness that comes with literacy practices that seek to transition towards White American language and culture while embracing Black language and culture. Young does not deny the benefits of teaching literacy practices of Standard English. However, his main concern is the emotional and academic consequences of cultural and linguistic assimilation when instructors avoid the conversation about literacy, race, and identity in schools. In this sense, code-meshing—as an alternative to code-switching—is a call to nurture students "who will challenge the hegemony of one-way assimilation with linguistic talents" (64-65). Young invites teachers to move from the question about how we as teachers, prepare African American students to participate in a still-prejudiced society to how we can change the course of racism and prejudice without asking students to renounce their language at any time or any place.

Parts 3 and 4 are dedicated to two experiences with code-meshing in the classroom. In Part 3, Young-Rivera, a former Chicago public school teacher and administrator, offers a personal discussion about moving from being against code-meshing to becoming a supporter, exploring the potential of code-meshing as a model of literacy instruction in the K-12 setting. The main theme of this section is about offering a responsible education as literacy school teachers. Young-Rivera also gives voice to the many concerns and doubts that naturally come to any literacy teacher concerned about the academic success of all students. For language teachers seeking to apply code-meshing as a pedagogical approach, this section offers a five-day unit for middle school teachers as an example of a possible way to include language

blending practices into a diverse classroom. For example, Young-Rivera organized a debate with her students to show them the connection between oral and written speech. Her classes were comprised mainly of bilingual/Spanish-speaking students and African American students, which gave her the opportunity to explore cognates in English and Spanish. The samples of students' work in the chapter and the author's reflection on the implementation of her lesson plans are productive resources for K-12 teachers.

In Part 4, Lovejoy explores code-meshing and culturally relevant pedagogy in a college-level writing course. One of the questions that this section explores is how writing teachers who work with minoritized students can empower them as learners and writers. The theme that defines this section is building a community of learners where code-meshing is one choice, among others, that writers can purposefully employ. Lovejoy connects code-meshing with Canagarajah's research on voice and identity in multilingual writers and expands this conversation about language blending to include strategies to motivate self-directed writing in multidialectal and, in certain cases, multilingual students. By building a community of writers, Lovejoy guides his students through the process of drafting, selecting, revising, editing, and sharing the writing produced for the course. One of the most interesting sections is the discussion about addressing and negotiating the use of taboo language in writing as part of experimenting with code-meshing in an English composition course. Lovejoy offers an example of how teachers can facilitate a dialogic writing process that seeks to use language consciously and effectively to co-construct meaning within the community of readers. Finally, the author also tackles the question about how to negotiate a new pedagogical approach with skeptical colleagues who are concerned about teaching code-meshing in a university writing class.

One of the strengths of *Other People's English* is that it gives the reader an accessible discussion of technical terms such as code-switching and code-meshing in a broader context that summarizes

scholarly work from the fields of linguistics and education. In addition, this book offers concrete examples of how a code-meshing pedagogy may look in action in a variety of classrooms. Each chapter starts with a question that echoes teachers' concerns about the viability of code-meshing and includes different tips and questions for teachers interested in including language blending in the classroom and reflecting as code-meshers themselves. The text also includes valuable reflections about dealing with language prejudice in the classroom and how to include discussions about language, race and identity in connection to literacy and effective writing.

However, the book also leaves some questions unanswered. Although the authors mention their concern with the current high-stakes test-taking culture in public schools, the question about how to prepare effective writers who can also score high in state-mandated testing still lingers for K-12 teachers. There are also unanswered questions about the possibility of using code-meshing not only with African American students but also with bilingual learners, one of which is related to other competing approaches to language mixing. For instance, how does code-meshing as pedagogical approach differ from translanguaging (García and Wei), a term that conceptualizes language mixing as discursive practices that teachers and students employ to communicate in multilingual classrooms and further language learning? Finally, another question that could have been explored more in depth is how teachers can address the difference between language errors and mistakes and the purposeful use of code-meshing in language learners' compositions.

Despite the questions that remain, *Other People's English* is an invaluable resource for all teachers. Although this book focuses mainly in African American learners, writing instructors working with multilingual students will also find this book helpful. As a Spanish and English as a second language teacher, I read with excitement examples of how to create a more inclusive and respectful learning community in a diverse classroom. I also found useful examples of how to include class discussions about language

that promote linguistic awareness and appreciation for language variety when working with both young and adult students. In addition, educational researchers and linguists interested in sociolinguistic justice (Bucholtz et al.) will find fresh ideas originally developed in the field of English composition and writing studies to create more equitable teaching practices.

To conclude, *Other People's English*, a title that echoes that of Lisa Delpit's influential *Other People's Children,* adds an important chapter to the discussion about language as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron) and expression of power. Continuing with the conversation started by Delpit and other scholars, Young and his colleagues do not deny that there exists a "language of power" (153). Instead, they urge educators and researchers to consider that any language variety "can and should be a valued contributor to any language of power" (155). This book also reminds us that the "Ebonics" debate of 1996 is not over, particularly in the current context of high-stakes standardized testing. Code-meshing not only offers a culturally and linguistically responsible alternative pedagogy but also constitutes a call for action against language prejudice to teachers of all levels.

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