I have long been a proponent of the pedagogy of code-switching, teaching students how they quite naturally move from one version of English to another by virtue of their context at the time. For example, one speaks differently when addressing a superior in a formal situation than a friend in an informal one. Code-switching has also been shown to be an effective way to help students who are fluent in African American English to add standardized English to their linguistic repertoires. The concept of code-switching has also helped me better understand my own linguistic development, as I’ve moved from primarily working-class to primarily academic social circles. Rebecca Wheeler’s work has been particularly influential.

There are those who find problems with code-switching and prefer code-meshing pedagogy: encouraging students to integrate different versions of English into single documents. I admit to having been confused by the idea of code-meshing and how a pedagogy based on it would assist students in developing linguistic competency across versions of English. Other People’s English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy has finally helped me understand and value code-meshing as an approach to teaching language, and I highly recommend that colleagues check it out.

**Code-Switching vs. Code-Meshing**

Composed by a group of linguists and teachers, Other People’s English is a clearly written and practically useful volume for teachers interested in a more expansive understanding of English language. Young’s introduction surveys the territory well, and the remainder of the book provides additional background and helpful analyses of real classroom scenarios.

According to Young, the pedagogy of code-switching—which encourages students to think of their home versions of English as legitimate, rule-bound languages (as they truly are)—also has the unfortunate effect of “segregating” home language and school language. And, he draws on a 2008 study by Erin McCrossan Cassar that found that code-switching, while benefitting students’ ability to use standardized English, also caused her students to develop negative feelings about themselves and how they use their language (Young 3).

What is code-meshing, really?

In his section of the book, Lovejoy draws a 40-year-old example from well-known linguist and long-time English Journal columnist Geneva Smitherman (144):

> First off, we got to start with some basics. This gon be a column bout the language aspect of English teaching. Since Black idiom is the “dialect of my nurture,” and since I believe in the legitimacy of ALL dialects of American English, ahm gon run it down in the Black Thang. (1974b, p. 16)

Smitherman, speaking to the EJ audience, uses both the language of standardized English and African American English. The power of the statement would be entirely diminished were it written only in standardized English. Why teach students to code-mesh? Young asks why English teachers wouldn’t: “Why not reduce, if not avoid, sociolinguistic and educational conflicts by allowing students and professionals to merge their Englishes, to produce the best prose from a combination of all their language resources?” (5)
A fair question, and one well informed, well-reasoned, and well answered in the chapters of Other People’s English.

**Code-Meshing in the Classroom**

*Other People’s English* is written in clear language, and though it necessarily includes specialized linguistics terminology, it is all carefully explained. The authors see new English teachers and veteran English teachers who may have little background in linguistics as one of their primary audiences. In his introduction, Young quickly outlines differences among terms such as “Standard English,” “standard English,” and “standardized English” (10). He also explains why the authors prefer calling dialects other than standardized English “undervalued English” rather than the “more pejorative nonstandard English” (10; italics in original).

In the first section of the book, Rusty Barrett gives history and background on African American English. In the second, Vershawn Ashanti-Young takes up code-switching pedagogy, explaining what he and the researchers he cites see as the pitfalls of the approach. In the fourth and final section, Kim Brian Lovejoy applies code-meshing strategies to college writing classes, and creative secondary teachers will find much of what he discusses readily adaptable.

I save the third section for last because it’s the section most likely to engage high school and middle school English teachers: “Code-Meshing and Responsible Education in Two Middle School Classrooms” (87–120). Here, middle school teacher Y’Shanda Young-Rivera describes in detail how she implemented a code-meshing pedagogy with her students, and she shows examples of their code-meshed writing. She describes her reservations and her hopes, and teachers will appreciate her journey. In the end, Young-Rivera finds that this new form of teaching produces students who “felt free to write and express themselves . . . weren’t fearful that what they wrote would be wrong . . . [and] felt empowered” (111).

*Other People’s English* offers a well-written, thoughtful approach to teaching English language in all its rich forms, taking into account the experiences and backgrounds of its users and learners. It would be an excellent addition to *EJ* readers’ libraries.

**Raising Race Questions: Whiteness and Inquiry in Education**


Ali Michael travels the country to facilitate “antiracism training.” She says many teachers react defensively to this, claiming, “But we’re not racist.” To this, Michael responds, “[T]he training does not assume they are racist. But it does assume that in order to create an antiracist classroom, it’s not enough to not be racist” (74; italics added).

This stance forms the heart of Michael’s book, and it signifies the revelation, the challenge, and the instruction this book provides. Not being racist is empty sentiment if the larger systems of oppression and inequity continue unabated and if teachers do not understand how we contribute to and/or resist those larger systems in our work.

According to Michael, a White woman, White people who seek to be antiracist must first develop, for themselves, a positive racial identity. Unfortunately, many White people are uncomfortable with this possibly because White supremacists have dominated the narrative of White ethnicity (3). In response, many well-intentioned White people have established a strategic “colorblindness”: Having a positive racial identity—for White people—does not mean feeling good about being White. It means having an understanding of what it means to be White in a society that historically, contemporarily, and systematically favored Whiteness above other races. It means acknowledging one’s racial privilege and the history of racial oppression in the United States, while recognizing and confronting the racism that
two recent rape cases; some friends said this inequity results from one bad judge (which is probably true) and from nothing more than that (which is certainly not true). That there is one PLE doesn’t mean there isn’t simultaneously a larger, systemic problem as well. PLEs too often end conversations that could otherwise further explore racial inequity.

**Not an Attack**

I am grateful for Ali Michael’s *Raising Race Questions* because it is an honest yet gentle approach to racial awareness and antiracism, especially for White readers. Readers will not feel attacked. In fact, in his foreword, Shaun R. Harper takes up the unproductive harm that occurs when one hurls what he calls the “R-word” (ix). Michael speaks equally to liberals and conservatives, showing that neither has cornered the market on antiracism. Not only is this book not an attack, it is barely an argument. It is written for those who are already prepared to work for real racial awareness, and who are ready to confront the role of racism in their classrooms, their schools, their cultures, and themselves. It is a useful, sensitive, authoritative resource for teachers who are already convinced that all educators must work to be antiracist.

If that’s you, read this book.

**Work Cited**


Ken Lindblom is dean of the School of Professional Development and associate professor in English teacher education at Stony Brook University, and he is a member of the Executive Board of NCTE’s Conference on English Education. Ken has been a member of NCTE since 1989 and was editor of *English Journal* from 2008–2013. Follow him @KLind2013.