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Vershawn Ashanti Young and Y'Shanda Young-Rivera

Imagine with us that day back in 1955, when Rosa Parks got on the bus
after a long, hard day of work. Abiding by the unjust Jim Crow laws of
the South, she headed toward the middle section where blacks were
allowed to sit. Grateful to be heading home, she breathed "Thank you,
Lord," as she settled into her seat. But it wasn't long before Ms. Parks was
jarred out of her peaceful moment by the bus driver who demanded that
she give her seat to a white man. Ms. Parks was expected to get up and
move to the back without hesitation. However, that day, whether it was
because of her work with the NAACP or because something deeper
burned in her belly, she decided not to move; and she respectfully defied
the law. She could have passively acquiesced, thinking: "Well, it is what
it is." But her actions decidedly spoke something louder, "It ain't what it
is; at least it shouldn't be. And if I can help it, it won't be anymore!"
She was undoubtedly aware of the consequences. She would be
arrested and jailed. Yet, she took the chance that her decision could be

a catalyst for change, not only for herself, but for a nation. And it was. Her stand became the pivotal point in strengthening the fight for civil rights.

We begin with this familiar story because before we can respond to anything else Wheeler and Thomas have said, we must address up front their sentiment: "We do not have the luxury of debating whether socially stratified dialects and dialect discrimination are right or wrong, just or unjust. Of *course* such stratification is unjust. But as educational consultant John Hodge observed: 'It is what it is'" (PAGE). Wheeler and Thomas' "it is what it is" attitude exemplifies what Joyce King speaks of as dysconscious racism: "an uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity . . . by accepting the existing order of things as given . . . a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges." (135). We are stunned by Wheeler and Thomas' lack of empathy and wonder how they can openly admit that language stratifications are unjust and then excuse that injustice by quipping, "It is what it is." Any fool, as our momma would say, knows that if something is clearly wrong, especially racism *(and, in this case, linguicism)* then it should be challenged. But Wheeler has said before that it's best to ignore race when talking about African American English.

But no matter how far Wheeler and Thomas try to run from race, hide from it, or bury it among a constellation of other concerns (saying, for instance, that code switching is about so much more than race), race will constantly rise up and bite their behinds, for they must explain why they, two White American celebrationists, are urging folks to ignore race while instructing teachers that their students' African American English ain't professional or academic enough to be blended with the official Englishes used at work and school. How can Wheeler and Thomas prove that their push for contrastive analysis ain't just another way to keep African American English and its users under restraint in public if they don't discuss racism? These scholars want to accrue academic capital by writing about African American children's language habits as they side step their responsibility to challenge racial stratification in English education. In short, they straight trippin.

Even former Chicago Public Schools CEO and current U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, acknowledges that "education is the civil

rights issue of our generation and if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start" (Ballasy). We take this to mean that every teacher must not only acknowledge the unfair practices that stem from socially stratified dialects and dialect discrimination but must also act, in our classrooms, toward eradicating, not dialects, but prejudicial practices and pedagogies. We must not preach or teach the segregation of dialects in any form—contrastive analysis included. But we must instead teach how to integrate Englishes. Period.

If Wheeler and Thomas truly want to give students like Tamisha an equal and fair chance, they need to allow these students to use their command of multiple Englishes and combine them for the greatest rhetorical effectiveness. Instead, they be telling African American students to switch from one variety of English to another, which is really a type of racial micro-aggression (see Wing, et al.).

Contrary to the perspective of Wheeler and Thomas, educators have to push for instructional practices that are inclusive, that do not ask students to divide their identities, forcing them to think their African American English must be separate from their academic English. How damaging! African Americans can have an academic identity that includes their African American English, and we argue that this can be done by promoting and teaching code meshing—a method that Wheeler and Thomas would have you believe "is beyond our reach." Not so!

Here is an abridged list of works that proves code meshing is not only in reach, but in hand:

Canagarajah, A. Suresh. "Codemeshing in Academic Writing: Identifying Teachable Strategies of Translanguaging." *Modern Language Journal* 95 (2011): 401–17.

——. "The Place of World Englishes in Composition: Pluralization Continued." *College Composition and Communication* (2006): 586–619.

Elbow, Peter. *Vernacular Eloquence: What Speech Can Bring to Writing*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

Fraiberg, Steven. "Composition 2.0: Toward a Multilingual and Multimodal Framework." *College Composition and Communication* (2010): 100–26.

Higgins, Christina, et al. "Beyond Contrastive Analysis and Codeswitching: Student Documentary Filmmaking as a Challenge to Linguicism in Hawaii." *Linguistics and Education* 23.1 (2012): 49–61.

Lee, Melissa E. "Shifting to the World Englishes Paradigm by Way of the Translingual Approach: Code-Meshing as a Necessary Means of Trans-forming Composition Pedagogy." *TESOL Journal* 5 (2013): 312–29.

Michael-Luna, Sara, and A. Suresh Canagarajah. "Multilingual Academic Literacies: Pedagogical Foundations for Code Meshing in Primary and Higher Education." *Journal of Applied Linguistics* 4.1 (2007): 55–77.

Mott-Smith, Jennifer. "Writing Proficiency Exams and the Internationalization of U.S. Higher Education." *CATESOL Journal* 23.1 (2011): 214–32.

Piccardo, Enrica. "Plurilingualism and Curriculum Design: Toward a Synergic Vision." *TESOL Quarterly* 47 (2013): 600–14.

Young, Vershawn A. "Should Writers Use they Own English." *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 12 (2010): 110–17.

Young, Vershawn A., et al. *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy*. New York: Teachers College P, 2014.

The last book listed, you'll note, is coauthored by us, along with a linguist (Barrett) and journal editor and professor of writing (Lovejoy). In this recent book, we promote code-meshing, not as a retreat to the feel good, no-failure, boost-your-self-esteem era of the past. Instead, we shed light on the simple truth that in our society people from all ethnicities, social circles, and academic levels use multiple dialects and registers of English in one context. We all code mesh.

What's more, we discuss in the book how contrastive analysis and code switching as employed by Wheeler is a linguistically reductive concept. We show this by simply pointing out that notable linguists who work on code switching define it as the use of several languages or dialects in the same conversation or sentence by bilingual or multilingual people. Check out the following short list of works for a real under-standing of code switching that's more in line with what we call code meshing:

Auer, Peter, ed. *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Gardner-Chloros, Penelope. *Code-Switching*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2009.

Sebba, Mark, Shahrzad Mahootian, and Carla Jonsson. *Language Mixing and Code-Switching in Writing: Approaches to Mixed-Language Written Discourse*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Young, Vershawn A. et al. *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy*. New York: Teachers College P, 2014.

And don't think we are the only ones who call Wheeler out on these shortcomings regarding race and the reductive version of code switching that she be pimping. Note these two works:

Baker-Bell, April. "'I Never Really Knew the History behind African American Language:' Critical Language Pedagogy in an Advanced Placement English Language Arts Class." *Equity and Excellence in Education* 46 (2013): 355–70.

Green, Lisa J. *Language and the African American Child*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011.

In the end, we want to point out that neither code meshing nor real code switching ignores race. Both concepts acknowledge how all languages are associated with ethnicities, races, regions, and classes. Code meshing in particular, though, stares linguistic prejudice squarely in the face. In the spirit of Ms. Rosa Parks, it offers a way for educators, through our everyday pedagogical actions of resisting racism and linguicism, to dismantle the complacent "it is what it is"syndrome of scholars and teachers who are comfortable with prejudice. Code meshing seeks to build a bridge among Englishes, one rung at a time, until the classrooms and our society are truly places that represent "justice for all."

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