**Diversifying Syllabi 2016 Text Summary and Teaching Tips**

SECTION ONE: to be completed by presenter

**Article/Essay Title: Cultural Code-Switching: Straddling the Achievement Gap**

**Author: Jennifer M Morton**

**Readability:** Easy/<mark>Moderate</mark>/Difficult
Somewhat jargony (political philosophy jargon) and sometimes dense

**Thesis:** "I argue that those who code-switch for the sake of better educational and career opportunities must subsume code-switching under a comprehensive normative perspective from which they confront and resolve value conflicts, if they are to avoid becoming ethically unmoored" (260).

**Key Definitions:**

Code-switching: "the ability to adapt one's behavior as a response to a change in social context much like bilingual speakers switch languages in response to a change in linguistic context"; more specifically, in the case of upwardly mobile minorities, code-switching involves "an ability to switch between comprehensive and potentially conflicting value systems" (259).

Non-cognitive disposition: "an umbrella term for the behavioral, social, and emotional dispositions, such as extroversion, aggression, assertiveness, and grit, that are distinguished from cognitive skills, such as those measured by IQ, reading, and mathematical ability tests" (262).

Valuing: involves both cognitive and non-cognitive components. The non-cognitive components are key here. Valuing involves dispositions to act a particular way.

**Brief Summary:**

Section I: The Non-Cognitive Challenge

Two commitments of a liberal egalitarian education system (i.e. equal opportunity and respect for diverse conceptions of the good) produce a problem, which she calls the "non-cognitive challenge":

- There is an achievement gap between white and non-white students (NB: the study she cites counts "Hispanic" as a non-white race category) in the US
    - This could be explained in part by differences in "non-cognitive dispositions" or "soft skills"
        - These are important to earning potential
        - Parenting affects how well kids learn these
    - If soft skills are so important, then schools should teach them to kids to "mitigate" any differences in education at home

- BUT liberal egalitarian education systems are committed to respecting diverse accounts of the good

- o No need to respect them all; if you can show that a particular account is unjust or racist, for instance—but a justification is needed to fail to respect them
- o The problem seems to be that by teaching students the soft skills needed to succeed in the workforce, teachers would teach children to value things that are valued by the market. And this is a substantive account of the good, which may conflict with the values students are taught at home (for example, collectivist values).
- o Can't appeal to the strategic value of the skills as justification, because it is a substantive account of the good: "appealing to the market value of a particular disposition does not constitute an appropriate justification, because it threatens to allow the state to use educational institutions as a vehicle through which economic and labor markets shape the diversity of conceptions of the good, in our society" (266).

In this context, code-switching emerges as a strategy to bridge achievement gaps without violating the commitments of the education system.
- "Code-switching can be seen as a strategy that could potentially allow liberal egalitarians to bypass the uncomfortable position of promoting equal opportunity only at the cost of failing to respect reasonable conceptions of the good" (267).


Section II: Four models of codeswitching.

1) Integration: Latina Julia, goes to law school, becomes a prestigious lawyer. She becomes more individualist, less collectivist as she goes along her career path. Prioritizes studying over family time and work over family care, moves closer to work, etc.
   • Integration is not assimilation because Julia maintains her family values, but she has added new values and rearranged and reprioritized.
   • Both integration and assimilation imply some sort of unified and coherent normative perspective has been reached (though in practice it may be messier).
   • Critique: integration isn't a good option for Julia because it just responds to market pressures, it doesn't substantively engage with her other values. Also, this wouldn't work in education because kids don't have fully developed accounts of the good yet and so are unable to effectively weight, rearrange, and reprioritize their values.

2) Pretense: Julia basically pretends to value what helps her succeed at work, while maintaining her "true" collectivist values; "undertaking a new non-cognitive disposition is compatible with withholding one's endorsement of an accompanying value" (271).
   • Critique: this would cause dissonance and emotional stress for Julia and potential conflict between her and her family. They may not believe Julia is truly committed to their values since she doesn't act like that at work. It's not good for kids because they may not be able to tell what a pretense is and what's not.

3) Compartmentalization: Julia does her work thing at work, and her home thing at home. "An agent can learn a new non-cognitive disposition and even accept the accompanying value, but only within a certain context" (272).
   • Someone might be worried that this undermines integrity, but Morton refers us to feminist work asserting that we might have good reasons to maintain normative conflict within ourselves.

- Critique: the compartmentalization of home values from work/school values may cause problems for children. They may not understand why the values they learn at home don't apply at school/work, and become "ethically unmoored": "The main challenge, however, is that in asking children to adopt a normative perspective guided by labor market pressures in a way that shields that perspective from the values they are learning at home, we run the risk of leading them to lose their moral bearings before these are even fully developed" (273).

4) Subsumption: You can make sense of all your various actions from within a coherent normative perspective. Acting a certain way doesn't mean you fully endorse the accompanying value, but that the action makes sense from within your overall normative perspective. "The agent adopts an overarching narrative or project that justifies code-switching from her full-fledged normative perspective, and subjects her behavior within the performance to normative scrutiny" (274).
   - So, for example, Julia could subsume her "market behaviour" under the value of helping her community: "She could see her competitive and individualist behavior as a kind of performance that will help her secure a position with enough power to help her community" (274).
   - A worry: what if you can't justify market behaviour under your account of the good?
   - Two conceptions of the good that might work well for this: the student's home culture or a non-neutral account of liberal education that espouses education for citizenship or autonomy.

Section III: Non-ideal conditions justify code-switching strategy

Codeswitching is a response to non-ideal conditions. We need to take these conditions seriously or else we won't understand why we need such a strategy and why we might be willing to compromise on our other commitments in the name of justice.
   - "To put the problem bluntly, under non-ideal conditions, educational institutions appear more justified in rectifying problematic inequalities, by fostering the non-cognitive dispositions rewarded by the market among children of impoverished disadvantaged minority communities, even if, in doing so, they are potentially undermining reasonable conceptions of the good, because the socio-economic prospects of those children are so dire" (280).

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**Possible Applications:**

- Moral psychology
- Political philosophy/ethics (especially, applied)
- Philosophy of education
- Philosophy of race
- Identity/authenticity classes
- Philosophy of language courses with a social/political focus
- Social epistemology

**Complementary Texts/Resources:**

- Morton's own, "The non-cognitive challenge to a liberal egalitarian education" in *Theory and Research in Education*; "Molding conscientious, hard-working, and perseverant students" in *Social Philosophy and Policy*.
- Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration*
- *NPR*'s "Code Switch" podcast
- Texts explaining/discussing standpoint epistemology
- María Lugones, "Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception"
- Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought"
- Key and Peele skit: 'Obama Meet & Greet' [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nopWOC4SRm4]

**Possible Class Activities:**

- Split up students into groups to outline the four approaches to code switching
- Pair with recent empirical work on children's cognition
- Reflection papers where students write about their own experiences of code switching, perhaps at college in particular.
- Fieldwork exercise: write down (e.g., as journal entries) all the times you feel like you code switch over a week.