

## Original Paper

# Teaching Reading Strategically to Black Academic

## Underachievers

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### **Abstract**

*In response to the academic achievement gap of black American students' vis-à-vis whites and Asians, Paul C. Mocombe developed his Mocombeian Strategy and Reading Room Curriculum, which posit a comprehensive mentoring program of educated black professionals and the restructuring of the linguistic structure of black American inner-city students via phonetic and language arts instructions, as the solutions to resolving the gap. The two approaches are based on Mocombe's hypothesis that the academic underachievement of black American students, vis-à-vis their white and Asian counterparts, on standardized tests is grounded in what he refers to as "a mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function." This work explores the theoretical, practical, and pedagogical relationships between Mocombe's "mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function hypothesis," The Mocombeian Strategy, and Reading Room Curriculum (published as Mocombe's Reading Room Series).*

### **Keywords**

*Ideological domination, linguistic structure, mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function, capitalism, underclass, social structure, African American*

### **1. Introduction**

The black-white test score gap is an empirical problematic that dates back to the 1940s. On many standardized tests the mean scores of black students on average are typically at least 1 standard deviation below the mean scores of white students. As Roland G. Fryer Jr. and Steven D. Levitt (2004) point out, "a wide variety of possible explanations for the test-score gap have been put forth. These explanations include differences in genetic make-up, differences in family structure and poverty, differences in school quality, racial bias in testing or teachers' perceptions, and differences in culture,

socialization, or behavior. The appropriate public policy choice (if any) to address the test score gap depends critically on the underlying source of the gap” (p. 447). For the most part, conservative thinkers emphasize the former two approaches, i.e., genetic make-up and differences in family structure and poverty, and prescribe standardization of curriculum, testing, extra assistance programs for blacks, school choice, and teacher training (in standards) as the basis for resolving the problem. Conversely, the latter three, differences in school quality, racial bias in testing or teachers’ perceptions, and differences in culture, socialization, or behavior, are emphasized by Afrocentric, postmodern, and liberal thinkers under the banner of identity politics and the opportunity gap, and as such they prescribe head-start programs, multicultural education, teacher training (cultural sensitivity and multicultural training), and equitable funding of schools and resources as the solution for the problem (Wilson, 1998; Mocombe & Tomlin, 2010, 2012).

Yet in spite of these public policy efforts, which have been dialectically recycled over the past forty-years in the US, blacks continue to academically underachieve vis-à-vis their white and Asian counterparts (Wilson, 1998; Gordon, 2006).

The problem for this continual academic underachievement, according to William Julius Wilson (1998), is based on the fact that both analyses are incomplete. One approach, the conservative position, places the emphasis for the problem on the individual, while the other, the liberal position, on societal or environmental factors. Neither position, however, are able to adequately demonstrate the dialectical interaction between the individual and the social or environment, which can eventually lead to better solutions to resolving the gap (Wilson, 1998). Paul C. Mocombe’s (2005, 2010, 2012, 2013) “mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function” hypothesis seeks to highlight this dialectic by emphasizing both the opportunities afforded to blacks in the American economy, i.e., the American social relations of production, and individual black responses to its reproduction, differentiation, and ideological apparatuses as the basis for understanding the origins and nature of the black-white test score gap. His *Reading Room* curriculum and *Mocombeian Strategy* are offered as solutions to resolving the gap based on the aforementioned dialectical processes.

## 2. Background of the Problem

Given the chants of racism against conservative arguments that emphasize black inferiority such as the ones prescribed by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein (1994) in *The Bell Curve*, postmodern and liberal approaches have dominated recent arguments regarding the black-white test score gap. Contemporarily, the public policy choices of equitable funding of schools, quality educational resources, multicultural education, multiple modes of teaching/intelligences, standardization of curriculum, mentoring, and after-school programs of school boards throughout the nation to resolve the black-white test score gap have been implemented in light of the predominance and influence of post-structural and postmodern theories of identity politics on education, John Ogbu’s cultural,

socialization, or behavior explanation, “burden of acting white,” and the opportunity gap hypothesis (Erevelles, 2000; Mocombe & Tomlin, 2010, 2012).

Postmodern and post-structural theories of identity politics on education highlight education as a “discursive space that involves asymmetrical relations of power where both dominant and subordinate groups are engaged in struggles over the production, legitimation, and circulation of particular forms of meaning and experience (Erevelles, 2000, pg. 30). As such, postmodern and post-structural theorists of education “examine the discursive practices by which student subjectivity (as intersectionally constructed by race, class, gender, and sexuality) is produced, regulated, and even resisted within the social context of schooling in postindustrial times” (Erevelles, 2000, pg. 25). Academic underachievement from this perspective is viewed as the by-product of marginalization, domination, and alienation based on identity and learning styles/multiple intelligences. The idea behind the postmodern/post-structural assumption is that different groups, ethnic, racial, and gender, have different learning styles, and the rational/logical basis of the schooling systems in postindustrial economies marginalize and discriminate against different groups and their learning styles, i.e., tactile, emotive, etc., learners, in favor of white middle class standards and auditory and visual learners. Be that as it may, pedagogically, the public policy choice of postmodern and post-structural theorists are for the most part multicultural education and multiple modes of learning and teaching, which addresses the intersection and diversity of subjective positions and multiple intelligences found among the diversity of students in schools (Asante, 1991; Erevelles, 2000; Mocombe & Tomlin, 2012).

In keeping with this postmodern/poststructural logic, Afrocentric scholars in the likes of Asa Hilliard, Jawanzaa Kunjufu, Molefi Asante, among many others, attempt, through kinesthetic pedagogy, the teaching/using of Ebonics, and African American history, to incorporate African-American inner-city linguistic and cultural identity into school curricula as a basis for offsetting the cultural marginalization they experience in the classrooms and closing the achievement gap. However, in under analyzing the capitalist relational (ideological) framework within which what they deem to be the Afrocentric paradigm/worldview of African people in America emerged they overlook the class origins and basis of that worldview, which has in-turn exacerbated black American academic underachievement. In other words, the Afrocentric worldview many scholars attempt to attribute to predominantly the cultures of the inner-cities have their relational origins in the capitalist ideological superstructures of the South and urban inner-cities, which they reify as black culture in an effort to use in classrooms throughout the nation so that black students can achieve economic gain, status, and upward mobility, via education, in the larger society. But the consequence of that reification process is that in the capitalist postmodern and postindustrial world-system within which the Afrocentric reification of Southern and black inner-city (underclass) culture as African culture has taken place, white finance capital, in keeping with the postmodern/poststructural logic of identity politics, equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution, has commodified that reification of inner-city black/Southern underclass culture as both a commodity and the means to status, economic gain, and upward mobility in the larger society for

young African American youth. As a result, efforts to achieve economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility amongst black American youth pales in comparison to their efforts to achieve those aims via what has been reified and commodified as black culture, i.e., speaking black English, playing sports, entertaining, hip-hop culture, etc., by Afrocentrists and finance capital. So whereas Afrocentric scholars attempt to use what they deem black culture and their history to instill pride and self-esteem among blacks to offset their underachievement in schools, finance capital utilizes that same culture as an alternative means for blacks to achieve economic gain, status, and upward mobility in the society through black athletic, entertainment, and street cultural productions for consumption in the American post-industrial economy.

Be that as it may, whereas Afrocentric scholars in the likes of Asa Hilliard, Jawanza Kunjufu, Molefi Asante, etc., with their emphasis on incorporating the Afrocentric worldview, i.e., African-American English Vernacular, history, and so-called culture, into mainstream curricula throughout the nation in order to offset the linguistic and cultural marginalization many blacks of the inner-cities experience, John Ogbu (1986) argues that it is due to that very culture blacks academically underachieve. In keeping with this postmodern/post-structural notion of identity politics, marginalization, and alienation, John Ogbu's burden of acting white hypothesis suggests that African American students academically underachieve for fear of being labeled "acting white" by their black peers. Ogbu posits that as a result of their marginalization and alienation in the larger society, African Americans have come to perceive academic success as the status marker of whites. Therefore, many African American students, especially black males, conceal their academic prowess for fear of marginalization and alienation, i.e., being labeled acting white, from their black peers. As a result, they are more likely to downplay their intellectual prowess, and identify with the inner-city street-life, athletic, and entertainment culture and language as the most authentic representation of black identity.

A more recent variant of this hypothesis is the oppositional culture theory approach as proposed by Bourdieuan reproduction theorists in the likes of James Coleman (1966, 1988), Prudence Carter (2003, 2005), and Karolyn Tyson (2005). Although Coleman and Carter are in agreement with Ogbu, and view the interplay between dominant, middle-class values and norms, and non-dominant "black" cultural capital as real, albeit from a sociological perspective. They do not view this new "blame the victim" paradigm as the overwhelming reason for the locus of causality for black academic underachievement and lack of mobility in mainstream American society. Carter and Coleman and many other liberal scholars, for the most part, emphasize the opportunity gap, i.e., lack of quality schools, teachers, resources, and standards, as the basis for the black-white test score gap. Whereas Carter highlights the latter processes, Coleman emphasizes social segregation.

Contemporarily, the opportunity gap with its emphasis on equitable funding of schools, quality teachers, resources, and teaching standards, etc., postmodern and post-structural logic of identity politics, marginalization, and alienation in school based on ability, learning styles, and subjective positions coupled with John Ogbu's hypothesis, which suggests that black Americans intentionally academically

underachieve vis-à-vis their white and Asian counterparts for fear of being labeled “acting white” by their black peers who view academic achievement as the status marker of whites, virtually dominate how teachers, educators, and school administrators address the black/white academic achievement gap. Teachers, educators, and school administrators throughout the American nation prescribe equitable funding of schools, teacher training, multicultural education, multiple learning and teaching styles, standardization of curriculum, mentoring, and after-school programs as appropriate policy prescriptions to combat the marginalization, alienation, and effects of the opportunity gap, identity politics, and the burden of acting white on the academic achievement of black American students. The intent behind these policy prescriptions is based on the assumption that equitable funding of schools and resources, the representation of educated blacks in school curriculums through mentoring programs and multicultural (Afrocentric) curriculum materials coupled with kinesthetic pedagogical approaches to teaching black American students, the standardization of curricula, and added assistances, head-start and after-school programs, offered to blacks will increase their academic achievement vis-à-vis their white and Asian counterparts.

### **3. Theory and Method**

More than 40 years have passed since the opportunity gap, postmodernism and post-structuralism made identity politics fashionable, and Fordham and Ogbu initially gave credence to the “burden of Acting white” and the “oppositional peer culture” hypothesis in their essay “Black Students’ School Success: Coping with the “Burden of Acting White” (1986). Although social scientists have produced very little empirical evidence to substantiate either the correlation between identity politics and academic achievement on standardized tests or the validity for a “burden of acting white”, there is still strong public support and belief in their assertions for explaining the academic underachievement of black American students and the black/white achievement gap (Wilson, 1998). In fact, as Tyson et al further observed in their assessment of eight North Carolina secondary public schools, “the acting white theory significantly influences how schools address problems related to black underachievement, which, in turn, helps to determine whether these solutions ultimately can be effective” (2005, p. 582). Schools and school boards have introduced multicultural education (Afrocentric materials in the case of blacks), head start programs, mentoring and counseling programs, and black achievement in education has been stressed above all things else in the school curriculum in order to combat the effects of black marginalization in school and the burden-of-acting-white. Moreover, to offset the opportunity gap, funding of inner-city schools, head-start, after-school, and in-school programs, standardization of curricula (The Common Core State Standards) across the nation, and teacher training programs have dominated public education over the last 40 years.

Yet in spite of these efforts, the black/white academic achievement gap has widen since the 1980s, and blacks everywhere on average score disproportionately poorly on standardized tests compared to their white counterparts. In the United States, for example, just 12% of African-American 4<sup>th</sup> graders have

reached proficient or advanced reading levels, while 61% have yet to reach the basic level. In a national assessment of student reading ability, black children scored 16% below white children. Forty-six percent of black adults, compared with 14% of white adults, scored in the lowest category of the National Adult Literacy survey. The results indicate that blacks have more limited skills in processing information from articles, books, tables, charts, and graphs compared with their white counterparts (Gordon, 2006, p. 32). More perplexing, the students who lose the most ground are the higher-achieving black children. “As black students move through elementary and middle school...the test-score gaps that separate them from their better-performing white counterparts grow fastest among the most able students and the most slowly for those who start out with below-average academic skills” (Viadero, 2008, p. 1). The numbers among British Caribbean blacks are far worse in places like the United Kingdom (Mocombe & Tomlin, 2010, 2013).

Given this continual reliance on the opportunity gap, identity politics, or a burden of acting white hypothesis to explain the academic underachievement of black students and the black-white achievement gap in the face of persistent black academic underachievement on standardized tests, further assessment of this cultural incompatibility hypothesis is critical to understanding and addressing the problem. Using longitudinal Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) data from a Florida after-school program covering the periods 2003-2007, Paul C. Mocombe analyzed and evaluated the origins and nature of the black/white achievement gap. Demonstrating and concluding that the origin of the black/white academic achievement gap is not a result of a lack of opportunities to adequate schools and resources, black marginalization, or a burden of acting white. But is grounded, for the most part, in what Mocombe (2005, 2008, 2013) refers to as a “mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function,” which is an epiphenomenon of capitalist racial-class divisions and social relations of production. That is, Mocombe argues that the data suggests that black American students academically underachieve vis-à-vis their white and Asian counterparts because of two epiphenomena of the American capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality. First, early on in their academic careers black American youth academically underachieve on standardized tests because of comprehension, which is grounded in the generative grammar of their linguistic structure, African American English Vernacular (AAEV). Lastly, they underachieve due to the social functions associated with their over-representation in social roles as criminals, athletes, and entertainers in the American capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality as speakers of AAEV.

Black American students, contemporarily, have more limited skills in processing information from articles, books, tables, charts, and graphs, and the students who lose the most ground vis-à-vis their white and Asian counterparts are the higher-achieving black children because of two epiphenomena of American capitalist racial-class structural reproduction and differentiation, according to Mocombe. Early on in their academic careers the poor black social class language game, “black American underclass” (who have become the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for black youth the world over), created by ideological apparatuses, i.e., prisons, poor schools, the streets, athletic and

entertainment industries, of the social relations of capitalism in the US, produces and perpetuates a sociolinguistic status group that reinforces a linguistic structure (Black/African American English Vernacular—BEV or AAEV), which linguistically and functionally renders its young social actors impotent in classrooms where the structure of Standard English is taught. Thus early on (k-5<sup>th</sup> grade) in their academic careers, many black American inner city youth struggle in the classroom and on standardized test because individually they are linguistically and grammatically having a problem with comprehension, i.e., “a mismatch of linguistic structure,” grounded in their (Black or African American English Vernacular) speech patterns or linguistic structure (Mocombe, 2007, 2009, 2010; Mocombe & Tomlin, 2010, 2013). This mismatch of linguistic structure argument is not a reiteration of the “linguistic deficit” hypothesis of the 1960s and 70s, which suggested that working-class and minority children were linguistically deprived, and their underdeveloped slangs’ and patois’ did not allow them to critically think in the classroom (Bereiter & Englemann, 1966; Whiteman & Deutsch, 1968; Hess, 1970). On the contrary, as Labov (1972) brilliantly demonstrated in the case of African American youth they are very capable of analytical and critical thinking within their linguistic structure/system (BEV/AAEV). What Mocombe posits through his Chomskyan mismatch of linguistic structure hypothesis is that the pattern recognition in the neocortex of the brains of many poor African American inner-city youth is structured by and within the systemicity or “generative grammar” of Black/African-American English Vernacular (BEV/AAEV), which is a distinct linguistic system from Standard American English (SE). As a result, when they initially enter school, which is an ideological apparatus for bourgeois (cultural and linguistic) domination, there is a phonological, morphosyntactical, and semantical mismatch between BEV/AAEV and the Standard English (SE) utilized in schools to teach and test them. Given the segregation and poverty of blacks growing up in the inner-cities of America, they acquire the generative grammar of Black English and early on in their academic careers lack the linguistic flexibility to switch between BEV/AAEV and SE when they take standardized tests. As a result, many black American youth have a syntactical problem decoding and understanding phrases and sentences on standardized tests written in Standard English (Kamhi, 1996; Johnson, 2005; Mocombe, 2010; Mocombe & Tomlin, 2010, 2012, 2013).

Later on in their academic careers as these youth become adolescents and acquire the linguistic flexibility to code switch between BEV/AAEV and SE, the test scores close dramatically and then widen again by the time they get to middle and high school. This widening of test scores from middle school onward, Mocombe posits, is not due to a lack of access to quality educational resources. But is a result of the opportunities afforded to blacks by the capitalist social structure of class inequality. Black American youth are further disadvantaged by the social class functions (a mismatch of function of the language) the power elites of the black American underclass, reinforces against those of middle class black and white America. That is, success or economic gain and upward mobility amongst the “black underclass,” who speak BEV/AAEV, is not measured by status obtained through education as in the case of black and white American bourgeois middle class standards. On the contrary, athletics, music,

and other activities not “associated” with educational attainment serve as the means to success, economic gain, and upward economic mobility in the US’s postindustrial society. Thus given the choice black adolescent students make to pursue other means, i.e., athletics, the streets, and entertainment industries, to economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility in the society, effort in school in general suffers, and as a result test scores and grades progressively get lower. Grades and test scores are not only low for those who grow-up in poor inner-cities, it appears to have also increased as academic achievement and/ or social-economic status (SES) rises. “In other words, higher academic achievement and higher social class status are not associated with smaller but rather greater differences in academic achievement” (Gordon, 2006, pg. 25).

It is this epiphenomenon, “mismatch of linguistic social class function,” or the social bases of class-specific forms of language use (Bernstein, 1972) of the “mismatch of linguistic structure” many scholars (Ogbu, 1974, 1990, 1991; Coleman, 1988; Carter, 2003, 2005) inappropriately label “the burden of acting white” or oppositional culture amongst black adolescents, who as they get older turn away from education, not because they feel it is for whites or identify more with the cultural capital of the black poor, but due to the fact that they have rationalized other racialized (i.e., sports, music, pimping, selling drugs, etc.) means, financed by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives, to economic gain for its own sake other than status obtained through education (Mocombe, 2005, 2007, 2011; Mocombe & Tomlin, 2010). In America’s postindustrial economy, black American youth (black boys in particular) identify with and look to athletes, entertainers, players, gangsters (criminals), etc., many of whom are from the black urban underclass, as role models over professionals in fields that require an education. Historically, Mocombe concludes, this is a result of racial segregation and black social relations to the mode of production in America, and not their cultural ethos, which is no different from white America, or the so-called opportunity gap.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

Although, paradoxically, Mocombe views education as an ideological apparatus for capitalist domination which ought to be eliminated along with the state, to correct this mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function structural phenomenon and help close the academic achievement gap, in 1999 Mocombe, as part of his doctoral work, developed *The Mocombeian Strategy* and Reading Room Curriculum for the Russell Life Skills and Reading Foundation, Inc., an after school reading and mentoring program located in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The latter, Reading Room Curriculum, is a reading curriculum of seven books, published as *Mocombe’s Reading Room Series*, developed by Mocombe based on the theoretical cognitive linguistic assumptions of Noam Chomsky. Against the behaviorist approach to the acquisition of language, Noam Chomsky’s cognitive linguistics, “generative grammar,” suggests that the syntactical structure of a language is an innate tool hardwired in the brain that helps human beings experience the world and communicate with others. By assuming, as William Labov building on the theoretical linguistics of Chomsky posits in his seminal work



*Language in the Inner-cities*, BEV/AAEV of inner-city black American students to be a distinct linguistic system with its own deep and surface structure, i.e., generative grammar, through which many black Americans of the inner-cities comprehend and make sense of the world, Mocombe concludes that African or black American students should be assessed and taught as though they are ESOL (English Speakers of other Languages) students when they initially enter school. In other words, Mocombe suggests, because young black Americans grow up knowing and speaking a distinct linguistic system (BEV/AAEV) with its own syntax, lexicon, phonetics, semantics, etc., generative grammar or syntactical structure in Chomskyan terms, which is distinct from the generative grammar of Standard English (SE), when African American or black American students enter school, teachers should attempt to restructure their linguistic structure from BEV/AAEV to SE, by teaching them reading via phonics and language arts, the rules/syntax of Standard English, and using reading passages as practice so as to demonstrate their mastery of the new language system. In other words, teach them the rules of Standard English with a heavy emphasis on phonics, language arts, and use reading passages as practice to demonstrate that they can comprehend in, and have acquired the mastery of the second language, in this case, Standard English. *Mocombe's Reading Room Series* books of the curriculum attempt to do just that restructure the deep and surface structure of speakers of BEV/AAEV to that of SE through the phonics, language arts, and reading activities of the workbooks so as to increase their comprehension levels on standardized tests.

Essentially, Mocombe's Reading Room Curriculum offers an analytical phonetic approach to teaching black American students reading, over a whole language approach, in order to teach them the generative grammar of a new language, Standard English, and match their linguistic structure with that of the Standard English utilized on Standardized tests to assess their academic abilities. In the whole language approach to reading, which grew out of Ken Goodman's (1967) attempt to apply Chomsky's generative grammar hypothesis about language acquisition to reading, the assumption is that reading, like language, is an innate ability that can be improved upon without placing much effort on phonics, spelling, and learning the grammar rules of a language outside of its pragmatic usage. As such, whole language approaches, i.e., culturally-diverse literature, integrating literacy into other areas of the curriculum (math, science, etc.), frequent reading, reading out loud, and embedded phonetic learning, to reading and understanding is usually juxtaposed against analytical phonetics, language arts, and spelling approaches to reading, writing, and understanding. That is, in teaching students how to read in the whole language model, the emphasis is on meaning and strategy instruction to develop knowledge of language including the graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of it that the students bring with them to and in the learning process. Language is viewed as an innate complete meaning-making system, which students improve upon in sociocultural context beginning in their early socialization with their parents and other young people. Be that as it may, reading involves the entire components of a language system, and students because they already know it innately rely more so on taught strategies, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic cues that make it possible to understand a passage

meaningfully. Essentially, students when they read guess meaning and understanding based on their grasp of the phonetic, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic cues of a language system, which they know innately, to comprehend.

Conversely, an analytical phonetic approach to reading emphasizes learning the syntactical, grammatical, semantical, and phonetic parts of a language system in order to string them together to grasp meaning and understanding within a language system. Whereas the latter, phonetic approach to reading, approaches reading through the acquisition and building the parts of a language in the brain to grasp meaning and understanding holistically, whole language approaches reading and language holistically and attempts to understand its parts contextually and via cues, strategies, taught and learned.

Mocombe's Reading Room curriculum builds on the former, phonetics and language arts, and utilize some of the Vygotskian sociocultural techniques and tools, reading aloud, vocabulary development, culturally diverse reading passages, etc., of whole language to assess for mastery of the rules of the language system. In other words, Mocombe suggests teaching reading to black American academic underachievers through the building of the language system, through its lexical, phonetic, semantic, and syntactic rules, to restructure the linguistic structure of inner-city black American youth from BEV to SE, as though they are foreign speakers of the language, in order to increase their comprehension when they take standardized tests.

Mocombe's theoretical assumption behind the intent of the Reading Room curriculum workbooks is to combat the mismatch of linguistic structure hypothesis he views as the initial basis for the black/white achievement gap. That is, per Mocombe, when black American inner-city students initially (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade) enter school many of them struggle in the classroom and on standardized test because individually they are linguistically and grammatically having a problem with comprehension, i.e., "a mismatch of linguistic structure," grounded in their (Black or African American English Vernacular) linguistic structure and speech patterns (Mocombe, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010). In other words, their brains are preprogrammed with the generative grammar of BEV/AAEV. As such, there is a phonological, morphosyntactical, and semantical mismatch between the generative grammar of BEV/AAEV and that of the Standard English (SE) utilized in schools to assess them. Given the segregation and poverty of blacks growing up in the inner-cities of America, they acquire the systemicity of Black English and early on in their academic careers lack the linguistic flexibility to switch between BEV/AAEV and SE when they take standardized tests. As a result, many black American youth have a problem decoding and understanding phrases and sentences on standardized tests, which explains their poor test scores vis-à-vis their white counterparts (Kamhi, 1996; Johnson, 2005; Mocombe, 2005, 2010; Mocombe & Tomlin, 2010). Teachers, for the most part, because they view the BEV/AAEV of black American students as broken English/slang as opposed to a distinct linguistic system, do not view them as speakers of another language, and assume that they are English speakers. As a result, in the contemporary education system in which multiculturalism and dialogical processes, cooperative group

works, projects, etc., to learning are taught and emphasized, few emphasis is place on teaching African American students to learn, via rote memorization, the rules and grammar of SE so as to restructure their linguistic structure (BEV/AAEV), which is viewed, by Afrocentric theorists, as their multicultural contribution to the American melting pot. The Reading Room Series books attempt to restructure the linguistic structure of black American students through a phonetic and syntactic approach to teaching reading in order to increase their comprehension levels when they take standardized tests written in Standard English.

Coupled with the reading room curriculum, Mocombe also offers the Mocombeian Strategy as a pedagogical tool to combat the black/white achievement gap. *The Mocombeian Strategy* (2005), published under the title of the same name, suggests that if the education and professionalization of black American students via education is the *modus operandi* of American bourgeois society as opposed to the capitalist emphasis on money, class, status, economic gain, and upward social mobility, school systems should also invest, in conjunction with the Reading Room Curriculum, in a comprehensive mentoring program that pairs black American students (especially black boys), throughout their academic careers, with educated professionals in the fields of science, mathematics, medicine, teaching, and other professions that require an education. Contrary to the position of many Afrocentric scholars, Mocombe does not assume African Americans to have a distinct identity and worldview from their white counterparts. That is, there are no distinct Afrocentric ideological apparatuses African Americans are socialized in to prescribe to them a distinct worldview and purposive-rationality from that of their European counterparts in the larger society. The distinguishing factors for Mocombe are the racial-class position of blacks in the society, the economic opportunities they are overrepresented in, and the different ideological apparatuses the different classes are predominantly socialized in, i.e., schools, churches, the streets, prisons, and athletics and the entertainment industries, in order to achieve the overall economic gain, status, and upward mobility prescribed by the society. Whereas the bourgeoisie, whether black or white, once prescribed education as the means to status in the society, the black underclass emphasized the streets, i.e., hustling, athletics, and the entertainment industries. Today, postindustrial capital has reified and commodified the latter as viable means to economic gain, status, and upward mobility, which is paradoxically leading to black academic underachievement as black youth are less likely to place much effort on achieving in school due to other avenues or social roles and opportunities that are opened to them in the larger society.

So the issues for Mocombe, contrary to the opportunity gap, oppositional culture, and identity politics positions, are ones of linguistic system, visibility, achievement, and social roles as opposed to cultural identity and opportunities or the lack thereof afforded to them by the larger society, i.e., cultural incompatibility theory. Identification with the social roles of the black underclass is not cultural it is structural or sociocultural in the Vygotskian sense. Be that as it may, the logic here is that by having Standard English speaking educated black American professionals as social role models for young black American students to interact with and learn from throughout their academic careers, school

systems will be able to combat the effects of the visibility, achievements, and social roles associated with the social class functions of the power elites of the black American underclass and BEV/AAEV in the society. The logic behind this approach is grounded in Mocombe's theoretical assumption that later on in their academic careers black American students academically underachieve because of what he refers to as a mismatch of linguistic social class function, which is tied to the aforementioned mismatch of linguistic structure construct.

As previously mentioned, for Mocombe two dominant black American social class language games, for the most part, dominate the American capitalist social landscape, a Standard English-speaking black middle class of educated professionals, and an African American English-speaking underclass of workers and unemployed blacks living in the inner-cities of America. Whereas, status, economic gain, and upward social mobility for the Standard English-speaking black middle class are for the most part measured via their class, status, economic gain, and upward social mobility obtained through education and professions that require schooling. Class, status, economic gain, and upward social mobility amongst the power elites, i.e., gangstas, rappers, athletes, and entertainers, of the "black American underclass," who speak BEV/AAEV, is not measured by status and professions obtained through education as in the case of black and white American bourgeois middle class standards; on the contrary, the streets, athletics, music, and other professional activities not "associated" with educational attainment serve as the means to social class, status, economic gain, and upward economic social mobility in the US's postindustrial society. Thus effort in school in general suffers, and as a result test scores and grades progressively get lower as black American adolescent youth place more effort in achieving economic gain, status, and upward social mobility via the social functions and roles, i.e., the streets, athletics, entertainment, and hip-hop culture, tied to the BEV/AAEV linguistic structure and social function of the black underclass, over ones tied to the Standard English linguistic structure and function of the black and white middle class. Contemporarily, the former social class language game, the black underclass, has become the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination in black America and the world-over via their over-representation in the media industrial complex of corporate capital. *The Mocombeian Strategy* suggests combating this impact of the linguistic structure and social class function of the black underclass through a comprehensive mentoring program that pairs educated professionals with young black American students (black boys in particular) who are more likely to identify with and look to young rappers, athletes, and entertainers, the power elites of the underclass, as social role models over their more educated counterparts. *The Mocombeian Strategy* and Reading Room Curriculum, published as *Mocombe's Reading Room Series*, Mocombe suggests, together are two effective practical and pedagogical tools that can be implemented through after-school programs and school systems to help close the black/white academic achievement gap in the American capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality.

Future research must continue to explore this relationship between class, linguistic structure, and social class roles as the basis for understanding and finding solutions to the black-white test score gap. Albeit

for the pan-African Marxist-anarchist Mocombe, this ought to be done within an “enframing” ontology in opposition to the capitalist social structure of class inequality.

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