

The Black/White Academic Achievement Gap and Mocombe's Reading Room Series Curriculum

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By

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Paul Camy Mocombe, May 3, 2019

INTRODUCTION

Sociologically speaking, structural differentiation is a concept associated with evolutionary theories of history and structural functionalism. Societies are seen as moving from the simple to the complex via a process of social change based on the increasing specialization of different subsystems, institutions, and persons within the society. In this work, I explore the concept of structural differentiation, within my evolutionary theory of phenomenological structuralism, through the analysis of black American socialization within American society, the emergence of the black/white academic achievement gap as a result of their socialization, and my solutions to the gap (The Mocombeian Strategy and Mocombe's Reading Room Series). I argue that black Americans do not have an identity-in-differential to their white counterparts. Instead, their practical consciousness, in areas where it diverges from white American practical activity, is a product of structural differentiation, which gives rise to the black/white academic achievement gap. In the end, I highlight how my Reading Room Curriculum and Mocombeian Strategy resolves the gap.

In 1999, as part of his doctoral work, Paul C. Mocombe 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 Fort 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 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*, Black/African American English Vernacular (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 black Americans experience, comprehend, and make sense of the world, Mocombe hypothesized that the initial black/white academic achievement gap is a result of two structurally differentiated epiphenomena of the American Protestant

capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality, “a mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function” between BEV/AAEV and Standard English (SE) and the social functions associated with them in the American capitalist relations of production (2005, 2008, 2010, 2012).

According to Mocombe, the initial black/white academic achievement gap is a result of the language structure of many black American students of the inner-cities. They are socialized with the neocortex of their brains syntactically pre-programmed with the phonetic, syntactic, and semantic structure, i.e., generative grammar, of BEV/AAEV. As a result, when they initially enter school, and are tested, they have trouble comprehending and analyzing data because of the mismatch between the lexical, phonetic, syntactic, and semantic structure of BEV/AAEV and that of SE. Later on they are hindered by the social functions or social class roles of their linguistic structure, which are determined by their social relations to the means and modes of production in the American Protestant capitalist social structure and its ideological apparatuses.

To offset this mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function, Mocombe suggests 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 posits, because young black Americans of the inner-cities grow up knowing and speaking a distinct linguistic system (BEV/AAEV) with its own syntax, lexicon, phonetics, semantics, etc., generative grammar in Chomskyan terms, which is distinct from that of Standard English (SE). When African American or black American students enter mainstream schools, teachers should attempt to restructure their linguistic structure from BEV/AAEV to SE, by teaching them reading via vocabulary development, phonics and language arts (grammar) instruction, the rules or syntax of Standard English, and use culturally-specific reading passages and novels as practice so as to demonstrate their mastery of the new language system. In other words, teach black American students the rules of Standard English with a heavy emphasis on phonics, language arts instruction, vocabulary development, and cultural specific reading passages and novels 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, vocabulary, and reading activities of the workbooks so as to increase their comprehension levels on standardized tests. Essentially, teach black American students Standard English as a second language.

Coupled with the reading room curriculum series, 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 society as opposed to the capitalist emphasis on 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. In other words, by having Standard English speaking educated black American professionals ("more knowledgeable others") as social role models for young black American students throughout their academic careers, school systems will be able to combat the effects of the social roles associated with the social class functions 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. Blacks go on to underachieve past their academic careers because of their racial-class differentiation or stratification within the American capitalist social structure of class inequality wherein they are associated with certain social roles tied to their reified racial-class positions within the society.

This work explores the theoretical origins of, and basis for, Paul C. Mocombe's (2005, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012) *The Mocombeian Strategy* (2005) and Reading Room Curriculum, published as *Mocombe's Reading Room Series* (2007), as pedagogical tools available to educators and school administrators for closing the black/white test score gap in the United States vis-à-vis the concept of structural differentiation within Mocombe's theory of phenomenological structuralism.

Background of the Problem

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 American students on average are typically at least 1 standard deviation below the mean scores of white and Asian students. The test scores indicate that on average black American students have more limited skills

in processing and analyzing information from articles, books, tables, charts, and graphs compared to their white and Asian counterparts. 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” (447). Contemporarily, the public policy choices of equitable funding of schools, adequate resources, school integration, standardization of curriculum, multicultural education, mentoring, and after-school programs of school boards throughout the nation have been implemented in light of the predominance of postmodern and post-structural theories of intersectionality, John Ogbu’s cultural, socialization, or behavior explanation, “burden of acting white” or oppositional culture hypothesis, and opportunity gap theories (Carter, 2003; Fryer and Levitt, 2004; Tyson et al, 2005; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2010, 2012; Wright, 2013).

Postmodern and post-structural theories 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, p. 30). As such, postmodern and post-structural theorists “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. 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 students in schools (Mocombe and Tomlin, 2012; Wright, 2013; Mocombe, 2016). This latter position assumes that the stratified, imputed, and oppressed consciousnesses, i.e., race, sex, gender, etc., as determined by the power structure are associated with distinct practical consciousnesses that their respective members recursively (re) organize and reproduce as their practical activities.

John Ogbu's burden of acting white hypothesis or oppositional culture theory suggests that African American students academically underachieve for fear of being labeled "acting white" by their black peers. Academic success is viewed as the status marker of whites. Therefore, many African American students conceal their academic prowess for fear of marginalization and alienation from their black peers who view academic achievement as the status marker of whites. Building on Ogbu's hypothesis, other variants of Ogbu's theory as expressed in the works of Prudence Carter (2003; 2005), view the conflict between black cultural capital and dominant mainstream middle-class cultural capital as the basis for black underachievement. Whereas Carter assumes that many black youth have a distinct cultural identity, cultural capital, from that of mainstream white America, she favors the opportunity gap position as the basis for the academic achievement gap. That is, blacks academically underachieve not due to the cultural incompatibility between their cultural capital and their white counterparts, but because they attend schools that are poorly funded with inadequate resources compared to the schools attended by their white and Asian counterparts. As such, these latter theorists tend to promote not only the equitable funding of schools and resources, but school integration as desirable measures for resolving the black/white academic achievement gap.

Contemporarily, postmodern and post-structural logics of marginalization and alienation in school based on ability 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, and the opportunity gap position dominate how teachers, educators, and school administrators confront and address the black/white academic achievement gap. Teachers, educators, and school administrators throughout the nation call for equitable funding of inner-city schools, adequate resource materials, school integration, multicultural education, multiple learning and teaching styles, standardization of curriculum, mentoring, and after-school programs to combat the inadequate funding of inner-city schools, the cultural marginalization and alienation of blacks in the classroom, and the effects of the burden of acting white on black adolescents. The notion behind these policy prescriptions is based on the assumptions that the appropriate funding of inner-city schools, representation of educated blacks in school curriculums through mentoring programs and multicultural 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.

More than 40 years have passed since 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 students and the black/white achievement gap. 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, 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 the burden-of-acting-white. Moreover, although school integration helped close the academic achievement gap during the 1960s and 70s, thus the outcry of liberals such as Prudence Carter for more integration, contemporarily, funding of inner-city in and after school programs have increased to attempt to rectify the opportunity gaps between predominantly segregated black inner-city schools vis-à-vis their white counterparts in the suburbs.

Yet in spite of these efforts, blacks everywhere on average score disproportionally poorly on standardized tests compared to their white counterparts. In the United States, for example, just 12% of African-American 4th 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 in integrated well-off school districts. In fact, “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).

Theory

Given this continual reliance on the opportunity gap position, identity politics, and 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 these hypotheses is critical to understanding and addressing the problem. Against the opportunity gap position, identity politics, and Ogbu's oppositional culture theory, Paul C. Mocombe (2005, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2016) has offered his structural argument, "mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function," as to the origins of the black/white academic achievement gap. According to Mocombe, the cultural and social conditions of blacks in America are a product of class divisions and their social relations to the mode of production in the society, i.e., structural differentiation. What identity politics and oppositional culture theorists have done is to culturalize the structural reproduction and differentiation of capitalist class divisions and social relations of production through Bourdieuan conceptions of cultural capital as seen in the works of James Coleman (1988) and Prudence Carter (2003, 2005). In doing so, they under analyze the origins of, and basis for, the black/white academic achievement gap, which for Mocombe begins with the distinct linguistic structure, and its functions, produced in black America as a result of their initial socialization and differentiation within the American capitalist racial-class divisions of agricultural social relations of production and continues under contemporary postindustrial capitalism.

That is to say, in regards to the latter position, it is not the case that blacks have an identity that disparage education, is different from white America, or lack opportunities (whether in education or elsewhere) in the society; instead, blacks are American in culture and identity just like their white counterparts. The differences or so-called cultural incompatibility differences found in black America vis-à-vis their white counterparts are a product of their structural differentiation within the American Protestant capitalist social structure where their opportunities and efforts are directed towards social class roles (i.e., entertainers, athletes, hustlers, etc.), which do not require education as means to status, prestige, upward mobility, and economic gain.

Hence for Mocombe, the black/white achievement gap is an epiphenomenon of racial-class divisions and the social relations of capitalist production in America. That is to say, the gap is a result of black socialization within the structural reproduction and differentiation associated with the American Protestant capitalist social structure and its ideological apparatuses. Black American students academically underachieve vis-à-vis their white and Asian counterparts because of two factors, “mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function”: 1) comprehension, which is grounded in their linguistic structure, black/African American English Vernacular (BEV/AAEV), and 2) the social functions and roles associated with their linguistic structure and differentiation in the American capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality as speakers of AAEV.

Mocombe (2005, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012) and his evaluation of Florida Comprehensive Assessment Reading Test (FCAT) data demonstrates that the reasons that black American students 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 their linguistic structure and social class roles in the society. Early on in their academic careers the poor black social class language game, “black American underclass,” who, contemporarily, have become the bearers of ideological and linguistic domination for black youth the world over, created by the social relations of capitalism in the US, produces and perpetuates a sociolinguistic status group, what Mocombe refers to as a “social class language game,” that reinforces a linguistic structure (Black/African American English Vernacular—BEV or AAEV) among black American students in the inner-cities, which linguistically and functionally renders its young social actors impotent in classrooms where the structure of Standard English (SE) is taught. Thus early on (k-5th 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) linguistic structure and speech patterns (Mocombe, 2007, 2009, 2010). In other words, 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 test them. Given the segregation and poverty of blacks growing up in the inner-cities of America, they acquire the systemicity, i.e., generative grammar, of Black or African American

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 explain their low-test scores vis-à-vis their white and Asian counterparts, when they initially enter school (Kamhi, 1996; Johnson, 2005; Mocombe, 2010).

Later on in their academic careers as these youth become adolescents and acquire the linguistic flexibility (given their immersion in the middle class culture of school) to code switch between BEV/AAEV and SE, the test scores close dramatically, but widens again by the time they matriculate to middle and high school. For Mocombe, this latter problematic is due to the fact that black American students are further disadvantaged by the social class functions (a mismatch of function of the language) this status group, black American underclass, reinforces against those of middle class black and white America. That is, whereas many black girls go on to achieve academically, black boys tend not to (Mocombe, 2016). This for Mocombe is a result of the relation of blacks to the social relations of the means and mode of production in the American Protestant capitalist social structure and its ideological apparatuses. Success or economic gain and upward mobility amongst the “black American underclass,” who speak BEV/AAEV, within the American capitalist social structure of racial-class inequality are not measured by status or professions 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, 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: 25).

It is this epiphenomenon, “mismatch of linguistic social class function,” 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 American adolescents in urban and suburban areas, who as they get older turn away from, or place less effort on, education, not because they feel it is for whites, but due to the fact that they, and the society, have rationalized

other racialized (i.e., sports, music, pimping, selling drugs, etc.) means or professions, 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 and Tomlin, 2010). In America's postindustrial economy, black American youth (especially black boys) look to athletes, entertainers, players, gangsters, etc., many of whom are from the black American underclass and speak BEV, as role models over professionals in fields that require an education and speak SE. Historically, Mocombe concludes, these two phenomena are a result of racial segregation and black social relations to the capitalist mode of production in America, i.e., structural reproduction and differentiation, and its ideological apparatuses (Mocombe, 2012).

According to Mocombe, ever since their arrival in America two dominant social class language games/groups, a black underclass and a black bourgeois class, created by the structural reproduction and differentiation of capitalist processes, practices, and ideological apparatuses, have dominated black America. In agricultural slavery beginning in the early eighteenth century, black America was constituted as a racial caste in class dominated by the social class language game of the black bourgeoisie (E. Franklin Frazier's term), the best of the house servants, artisans, and free blacks from the North, which discriminated against the practical consciousness and linguistic system (social class language games) of field slaves and newly arrived Africans, working in agricultural production, who constituted the black underclass. Black English emerged among the field slaves.

Deagriculturalization and the industrialization of the northern states coupled with black American migration to the north from the mid-1800s to about the mid-1950s, gave rise to the continual racial-class separation between this urban, educated, and professional class of blacks and former house slaves whose practical consciousness and linguistic system mirrored that of middle and upper-middle class whites, and a Black English speaking black underclass of former agricultural workers seeking, like their black bourgeois counterparts, to be bourgeois, i.e., economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility, through education and industrial work in Northern cities. However, racial discrimination coupled with suburbanization and the deindustrialization, or outsourcing of industrial work to Third World countries, of northern cities left the majority of blacks as part of the poor black underclass with limited occupational and educational opportunities. Consequently, contemporarily, America's transition from an industrial base to a postindustrial, financialized service, economy beginning in the 1970s positioned black American underclass

ideology and language, hip-hop culture, as a viable means for black American youth to achieve economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility in the society over education. That is, finance capital in the US beginning in the 1970s began investing in entertainment and other service industries where the segregated inner-city language, entertainment, and athletic culture of black America became both a commodity and the means to economic gain for the black poor in America's postindustrial economy, which subsequently outsourced its industrial work to semi-periphery nations thereby blighting the inner-city communities.

Blacks, many of whom migrated to the northern cities from the agricultural south looking for industrial work in the north, became concentrated in blighted communities where work began to disappear, schools were under funded, and poverty and crime increased due to deindustrialization and suburbanization of northern cities (Wilson, 1993). The black migrants, which migrated North with their BEV/AAEV from the agricultural South following the Civil War and later, became segregated sociolinguistic underclass communities, ghettos, of unemployed laborers looking to illegal, athletic, and entertainment activities (running numbers, pimping, prostitution, drug dealing, robbing, participating in sports, music, etc.) for economic success, status, and upward mobility. Educated in the poorly funded schools of the urban ghettos, given the process of deindustrialization and the flight of capital to the suburbs and overseas, with no work prospects, many black Americans became part of a permanent *social class language game*, AAEV speaking and poorly educated underclass looking to other activities for economic gain, status, and upward economic mobility. Those who were educated became a part of the Standard-English-speaking black middle class of professionals, i.e., teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. (the black bourgeoisie), living in the suburbs, while the uneducated or poorly educated constituted the black underclass of the urban ghettos. Whereas, status, economic gain, and upward economic mobility via education were stressed by the black educated bourgeoisie and working classes; illegal activities, athletics, and the entertainment industry were emphasized by the black underclass.

Thus, beginning in the late 1980s, finance capital, in order to avoid the oppositional culture to poverty, racism, and classism found among the black underclass, began commodifying and distributing (via the media industrial complex) the underclass black culture/social class language game for entertainment in the emerging postindustrial service economy of the US over the ideology and language of the black bourgeoisie. Be that as it may, efforts to succeed academically among black Americans, which constituted the ideology and language of the black bourgeoisie, paled in

comparison to their efforts to succeed as speakers of Black English, athletes, “gangstas”, “playas”, and entertainers, which became the ideology and language of the black underclass living in the inner-cities of America. Authentic black American identity became synonymous with black American underclass hip-hop ideology and language as financed by the upper-class of owners and high-level executives of the entertainment industry over the social class language game of the black middle class.

Hence, contemporarily, in America’s postindustrial service economy where multiculturalism, language, and communication skills, pedagogically taught through process approaches to learning, multicultural education, and cooperative group works in school, are keys to succeeding in the postindustrial service labor market, blacks, paradoxically, have an advantage and disadvantage. On the one hand, their linguistic structure growing up in inner-cities are influenced by the black American underclass who in conjunction with the upper-class of owners and high-level executives have positioned athletics and the entertainment industries as the social functions best served by their linguistic structure in the service economy of the US, which subsequently leads to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility for blacks in the society. This is advantageous because it becomes an authentic black identity by which black American youth can participate in the fabric of the postindustrial social structure. On the other hand, their linguistic structure inhibits them from succeeding academically given the mismatch between their linguistic structure and the function it serves in the postindustrial labor market of the US, and that of Standard English and the function of school as a medium to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility for blacks in the society.

School for many black Americans, especially black boys, in other words, is simply a place for honing their athletic and entertainment skills and hip-hop culture, which they can subsequently profit from in the American postindustrial service economy as their cultural contribution to the American multicultural melting pot. Many blacks of the inner-cities in America enter school speaking Black or African American English Vernacular. Their linguistic structure in schooling in postindustrial education, which values the exchange of cultural facts as commodities for the postindustrial economy, is celebrated along with their music and athletics under the umbrella of multicultural education. Therefore, no, or very few, remedial courses are offered to teach them Standard English, which initially leads to poor test scores on standardized tests because the phonology, morphology, and syntax, or the way its expressions are put together to form sentences, of BEV/AAEV juxtaposed against that of

Standard English (SE) prevents many black Americans early on in their academic careers from grasping the meaning or semantics of phrases and contents of standardized tests, which are written in Standard English. As blacks matriculate through the school system, with their emphasis of succeeding in music and athletics, those who acquire the systemicity of Standard English and succeed become part of the black professional class celebrating the underclass culture, from whence they came, of those who do not make it and therefore dropout of school constituting the black underclass of poorly educated and unemployed social actors looking to the entertainment industry (which celebrates their conditions as a commodity for the labor market) and the streets as their only viable means to economic gain, status, and upward social mobility in blighted inner-city communities. Given that the opportunities for black girls, as opposed to the boys, are limited in illegal activities, athletics, and the entertainment industry, they are more likely to go on to academically achieve and earn advance degrees as means to status, economic gain, and upward mobility in the society.

Discussion

To correct this mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function and help close the 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 Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The latter, Reading Room Curriculum, is a reading curriculum of seven books, published as *Mocombe's Reading Room Series*, developed by Paul C. 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 black Americans of the inner-cities comprehend and make sense of the world, Mocombe concluded 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 that 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 (grammar) instruction (i.e., the rules/syntax of Standard English), vocabulary development, and use culture-specific reading passages as practice so as to demonstrate their mastery of the new language system. In other words, teachers must teach inner-city youth as though they are speakers of another language. *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 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, vocabulary development, 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 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 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 in order to grasp meaning and understanding holistically; whole language approaches reading and language holistically and attempts to understand its parts contextually and via cues taught and learned. Mocombe's Reading Room curriculum series builds on the former, vocabulary development, spelling, phonetics and language arts, and utilize some of the techniques and tools, reading aloud, culturally diverse reading passages, etc., of the latter, whole language, to assess for mastery of the rules of the language system. In other words, Mocombe suggests teaching reading to black American students through the building of the language system, through its lexical, phonetic, semantic, and syntactic rules, in order 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, according to Mocombe, when black American inner-city students initially (K-5th 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, 2007, 2009, 2010). In other words, their brains are preprogrammed with the generative grammar of BEV/AAEV. BEV/AAEV is a distinct linguistic system, which stems from the Africans initial encounter with Europeans in the agricultural mode of production, which dominated the colonial era. It is a syncretism between African languages and English. Hence, 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, 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 as their multicultural contribution to the American melting pot (albeit with the advent of the common core state standards with its emphasis on phonetics, grammar instruction, and literature this is changing). 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 society as opposed to the capitalist emphasis on 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 pair 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. In other words, in having Standard English speaking educated black American professionals as social role models for young black American students throughout their academic careers, school systems will be able to combat the effects of the social roles associated with the social class functions 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 as a result of black socialization and capitalist structural differentiation 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 "black American underclass," who speak BEV/AAEV, are 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, 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., 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 pair educated professionals with young black American students (black boys in particular) who are more likely to look to young rappers, athletes, and entertainers 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 amidst its deleterious effects, i.e., climate-change, environmental degradation, and class differentiation.

Conclusions

In sum, this work explores the origins and nature of the Mocombeian Strategy and Reading Room Curriculum vis-à-vis Paul C. Mocombe's mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function hypothesis as the locus of causality for the black/white achievement gap within the concept of structural differentiation and his theory of phenomenological structuralism. Chapter one commences the work by highlighting the oppositional gap position, postmodern/post-structural approaches, and John Ogbu's "burden of acting white" or oppositional culture hypothesis, which have dominated how social scientists and educators, contemporarily, explore the black/white achievement gap. The chapter, theoretically and methodologically, evaluates the oppositional gap position, postmodern/post-structural approaches, and Ogbu's burden of acting white hypothesis vis-à-vis Mocombe's mismatch of linguistic structure and social class function hypothesis, which is tied to his theory of phenomenological structuralism. Concluding that postmodern/post-structural approaches underemphasize class for identity politics and marginalization as the locus of causality for the black/white academic achievement gap, and Ogbu's hypothesis is unable to account: 1) for why and how underachieving benefit blacks in the American capitalist social structure of class inequality; 2) for the achievement gap, which precedes the adolescent years; 3) for the relationship between the inability to process information from articles, books, tables, charts, and graphs and the burden of acting white; and 4) for why it is that the achievement gap is wider among black students with more ability and black boys. The chapter further concludes by arguing that the opportunity gap position is problematic because it under analyzes the opportunities afforded to blacks in other industries, which divert their efforts from education as means to status, prestige, economic gain, and upward mobility in the society. In light of the problematics of the aforementioned theories, chapter two offers Mocombe's theory of phenomenological structuralism as the more appropriate framework to assess the origins and nature of the constitution of black consciousness/identity and the black/white academic achievement gap. Chapter three goes on to highlight the constitution of modernity and black identity within Mocombe's theory of phenomenological structuralism.