EDUCX 425.02 Assignment: Advocacy and Equity in Education - Maria Kang

In the corporate world, there are many factors that contribute to the “glass ceiling” so a dedicated and qualified employee may not ever make it to the corner office. Apart from racial or sexual discrimination, there are other biases that prevent someone from getting equal opportunities, such as having an accent. In a survey of 3,850 business travelers in 25 markets, 18% of men and 16% of women felt they were passed over for business trips because of their accent. (SAP Concur report cited in CNBC “Passed Over for Another Business Opportunity?” June 26, 2023).

This inequity occurs more often than we think and companies justify their position by relying on the qualifications required for a certain business trip, position, or promotion. At the top of the list is “the ability to communicate effectively” and having an accent is a severe handicap. I have witnessed this type of judgment where a qualified colleague did all the work on a project only to have someone else present the work on her behalf. The management decided that the presentation was too important for the company to risk having the colleague present it with her accent.

When I was invited by a company to be one of the evaluators for their English Proficiency Assessment, I prioritized clarity, organization, and proper use of industry terms over accent and grammar. In my evaluation sheet, I justified my score by explaining how despite the accent, I was able to understand the answer. Most importantly, the people that received high scores were those who actually answered the question and their response was effectively structured.

That is why the skills I focus on in my business and legal English training sessions are: 1) providing a direct answer to the question; 2) organization of information; 3) communication clarity; and 4) use of key industry terms. I also introduce alternative terms that are easier to pronounce and provide constant encouragement.