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Case Study Project

Education Doesn't Mean Empowerment

Ingrained in our society is the belief that education equals empowerment. Through education and hard work, anyone can achieve success. Imagine an individual who gets through K-12 schooling and then attends and successfully completes college. Many would see this individual as someone on the brink of empowerment. A college education is the ticket to a bright and fulfilling future, right? In reality, this college-educated individual enters the job market only to find that her degree from the local state college is not as desirable as the same degree from an Ivy League institution. She also finds that as a woman, employers consider her less qualified than her male peers. In light of this, her ability to make a comparable salary and to be promoted is limited. Contrary to popular opinion, education does not always lead to empowerment. Lack of access, limited employment opportunities, and potential discrimination can hinder the success of educated individuals.

One reason that education does not always lead to empowerment is that everyone does not have access to a quality education. As illustrated in Jean Anyon's (1980) article, "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work," American schools are set up to fully educate students from upper-class backgrounds and to give a limited education to students from lower-class backgrounds. She conducted studies of several public schools in the New Jersey area, and she found that wealthier schools prepared the students for high-paying careers, while schools in poorer areas prepared students for low-wage work. This was accomplished by giving the wealthier students exposure to advanced math and science courses, along with language arts

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courses that really taught the students how to read, write, think, and speak in ways required for success in college and in professional life. Student in less wealthy schools were taught only very basic math and very basic grammar, which makes it almost impossible to get into college or find a well-paying job. Anyon (1980) concluded that this how the rich stay rich and the poor stay poor. Without access to a quality education, it is impossible to have opportunities for success.

Unfortunately, even when someone does achieve higher education, in today's economy, there is a reality that limited employment opportunities await many college graduates. College graduates still do better in our economy than someone who has just a high school diploma.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), the employment rate for college graduates is 86 percent, compared to a 72 percent employment rate for those who have a

high school diploma. However, these statistics do not address issues of underemployment for many college graduates. Sometimes, just having a job is not enough for someone to support themselves, a family, and pay off student loans. In the article "Underemployment Persists Throughout College Graduates' Careers," Cooper (2018) explains that 43 percent of college graduates are underemployed for their first job out of college, landing jobs that do not require their degrees or utilize their education and skills. Most alarming is the fact that of those 43 percent, half of them are still underemployed after five years. Even STEM majors are impacted by limited opportunities. According to Cooper (2018) three in ten Engineering majors are underemployed after graduating college. A college education is not necessarily a path to empowerment in our culture, and, for many, underemployment coupled with educational debt can lead to a lifetime of struggle.

Finally, discrimination is an obstacle that many educated people face, which keeps them from experiencing empowerment in our culture. One issue women and minorities face is pay

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An APA citation is provided for this paraphrased evidence.

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discrimination. In America, on average, women make 79 cents for every dollar men make.

According to a 2019 article published in *Time* magazine, this wage gap between men and women equals about “\$900 billion in annual lost earnings for women holding full-time jobs” (Gefland & Choi, 2019, para. 1). But that is not the end of the discrimination some people can face at work.

According to Gefland and Choi (2019), women, especially minority women, are more likely to face punishments at work for doing the same things their male colleagues do without punishment, such as coming into work a little bit late. They write, “One of the most overlooked forms of discrimination is unequal discipline, and our research indicates that females employees responsible for trivial to small missteps are subject to far worse penalties than males” (para. 2). The reality is that the obstacles to empowerment can be greater for women and minorities, even those with college educations.

In addition to the reasons discussed above, the core values of equality, justice, and truth inform the perspective that education does not always lead to empowerment. Some may consider the perspective that education does not equal empowerment to be pessimistic, but it is a truth that must be faced. Pretending that anyone with an education will be successful is dangerous because it hides the truth. If there is to be equality and justice, there must first be truth.

By acknowledging that education does not always equal empowerment, light is shed on the roadblocks and inequities that many face. Roadblocks, such as lack of access, limited employment opportunities, and potential discrimination are real for many people and must be acknowledged. Once these roadblocks and inequities are identified, working towards equality and justice is possible. Working towards equality and justice in the area of education will hopefully make the connection between *education and empowerment a reality for everyone*. When a culture provides a path to empowerment for its people, everyone’s lives are improved.

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Commented [CDS8]: In the conclusion, the author reminds her readers of her thesis statement without repeating it verbatim.