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# The Equity Model

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Keywords: equity; model; exclusion; inclusion; gender

**Abstract :** The Equity Model, developed in 1998 in order to unveil inequity and to bring up equity in educational settings, is build around four axes, each presenting an inequity dimension and its opposite. The axes are: 1) Silence / Speech; 2) Omission / Inclusion; 3) Powerlessness / Empowerment; 4) Passivity / Active participation.

Since the 1980s, I have been developing tools to improve teaching and learning in order to address the issue of inequity in adult learning settings. My journey into equity issues in adult education started with my work in university continuing education which brought me to focus, during my doctoral research, on the knowledge required to undertake a feminist transformation (Solar, 1988) in those years where the International Women's Decade was encouraging the development of the Women's movement and of Women Studies. Since that time, I have been involved with women's groups and with both community issues and academic development. While I acted as Advisor to the Rector on the Status of Woman at Concordia University, we produced a training manual and a video, *Inequity in the classroom* (Solar, 1992b), designed to help university professors and adult educators to become inclusive in their teaching practices. In 1992 also, I responded to Linda Briskin and Rebecca Coulter's request for articles for the special edition of the *Revue canadienne de l'éducation/Canadian Journal of Education* on feminist pedagogy. For this production (Solar, 1992a), I did an comprehensive literature survey and analyzed equity issues through feminist, liberatory and antiracist pedagogies. With those tools at hand, I then organized a conference on feminist pedagogies which gave rise to dynamic discussions and exchanges among feminist activists, researchers and university professors. These exchanges were further formalized in the publication of a new book, *Pédagogie et équité* (Solar, 1998b). For my own chapter in this book, I completely restructured the information gathered in order to construct a new categorization simpler to use. This process gave rise to a model for detecting inequity and inducing equity strategies in order to dismantle the domination process induced through educational practices.

## The Equity Model

As mentioned, the Equity Model draws from feminist, liberatory and antiracist pedagogies. These teaching and learning approaches share the assumption that thought and action, theory and practice, as well as experience and education are linked together, like Freire's praxis (Freire, 1974). Pedagogy, on its side, "deals with knowledge as well as its transmission, and can be viewed as a generic expression which defines the field of inquiry dealing with educational situations (Best, 1988)" (Solar, 1995b, p. 313).

The literature review conducted both in French and in English aimed at extracting the factors contributing to the subordination and exclusion of women and minorities and at

identifying the practices supporting inclusion and social change.

After identification of the factors inherent to the inequity process and those building educational equity, a categorization was done to narrow them down from twelve to four. This process gave rise to the Equity Model that spreads itself according to four dialectical paradigms: 1) Silence/Speech; 2) Omission/Inclusion; 3) Powerlessness/Empowerment; 4) Passivity/Active participation.

**Silence** is a recurrent theme in works addressing marginalized social groups. Those belonging to these groups have no right to speak and, if they do, their words are deemed to be not heard. It leads to invisibility (Belenky, Clinchy, Golberger, & Tarule, 1986; Benguigui, 1996; Camilleri et al., 1990; De Beauvoir, 1949; Freire, 1974; Mernissi, 1997; Solar, 1998a; Spender, 1978). Because of this silence, **omission** of these groups occurs within disciplines, practices and common concerns. The study of this omission is particularly well developed in feminist critiques of the academy (Mura, 1991, 1998). Omission, in fact, plays a very important role in the construction of the identity of members of those groups (Memmi, 1968, 1973). "The history of dominated groups is erased<sup>1</sup>" (Taboada-Leonetti, 1990, p. 57). **Passivity** is attributed by the dominant people to the dominated; it can also be viewed as the one resulting from an education that excludes people from power (Crafts, 2006; Davies, 1975; Freire, 1974; Friedan, 1964). Finally, silence, omission and passivity are conducive to **powerlessness** (Arnot, 1985; El-Saadaoui, 1991; Freire, 1974; Lorde, 1984a, 1984b; Memmi, 1968, 1973; Stengers, 1997).

On the opposite side and to counter the domination paradigms:

"the pedagogies of equity aim to replace silence with **speech**, omission with **inclusion**, passivity with **active participation**, and powerlessness with **empowerment**. "Speech occupies a central position in the definition of identity" according to Lipiansky (1990, p. 184). At the personal level, speech allows the person to exist; at the social level, speech allows the social group to express its existence and to make its wishes known. Inclusion seeks to give girls and women their place in the past, the present and the future, in all the areas of human activity, in order to break the stereotypes that originate in silence. Active participation comes from the need to do something in order to learn, retain and understand, if one's knowledge is to make sense and if one is to develop confidence in one's abilities. Active participation counters subordination and subjection. Empowerment, first of all at the individual level, allows one to structure one's life to bring about social change and the elimination of inequity (Solar, 1995a, p. 16)."

To best remember the four dimensions related to equity, the anagram **EASI** (Empowerment-Active participation-Speech-Inclusion) makes it easy (sic!) to use in order to introduce equity in teaching, intervention and research. For those on the side of inequity, one can use **POPS** (Powerlessness-Omission-Passivity-Silence) as a reminder of the four spaces created by inequity and subjection.

## Discussion

The Equity Model (Solar, 1998c) has been used for more than a decade in the French, English, Spanish and Portuguese-speaking world in university teaching, health personnel training, community intervention, and research. It is easy to use with its four paradigms and insures a better understanding of the foundations of inequity to better empower adults. We will

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<sup>1</sup> Free translation by the author.

further develop links with pedagogy, research and international cooperation.

### *The Equity Model and pedagogy*

The Equity Model was build upon a variety of writings on exclusion and omission, cultural diversity, identity building and pedagogical issues. Among influential authors not yet mentioned, let us refer to Bunch and Pollack (1983), Butler (1984, 1985, 1990), Culley and Portuges (Culley & Portuges, 1985), hooks (1984, 1992, 1994), Maher (1984, 1987), O'Brien (O'Brien, 1990), Spender (1978, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1985), Weiler (1988, 1991), Yaguello (1978, 1989). It is therefore with no surprise that the Equity Model links with pedagogy. However, it is possible to further develop connections with pedagogy if it is defined as dealing “with knowledge as well as its transmission, and [if it is] viewed as a generic expression which defines the field of inquiry dealing with educational situations (Best, 1988)” (Solar, 1995b, p. 313). In this perspective, pedagogy is concerned with the teaching, the learning, the knowledge and the educational environment (Solar, 1992b). This allows for the construction of a cross table between the four paradigms of the Equity Model and the four dimensions of pedagogy. This frame of reference was used in an analysis of mathematics education from a feminist point of view and gave rise to table 1 below. It clearly can be adjusted for other minority groups and for other disciplines or field of knowledge.

As far as I know, this work has been reprinted (Solar, 2005) and has been used as the theoretical framework of a Ph.D. dissertation (Anderson, 2002).

### *The Equity Model and Research*

The Equity Model can also be used as a tool for assessing the equity value of a research design. Like the links established with pedagogy, it allows checking each section of a research with the four paradigmatic axes. The usual sections of a research concern the problem setting, the theoretical approach, the conceptual framework, the methodology, the data gathering, their treatment and analysis, followed by the discussion and the conclusion (Table 2).

### *The Equity Model and International Cooperation*

I have used the Equity Model in different international cooperation interventions, be they research or training. The way it can be used has already been discussed. Let us add that its use was successful among researchers and very significant for those without previous contact with minority groups' invisibility or with the consequences of socio-economical discrimination.

**Table 1 – The Equity Model and Mathematics education (Solar, 1995b, p. 326)**

<p><i>Teaching</i> Using inclusive language Forbidding sexist and racist humour Using pedagogical settings that make it easier for students to speak Limiting extended conversations with male students</p>	<p><i>Teaching</i> Having high expectations for all women Using pedagogical approaches that encourage participation Introducing cooperation Asking women high cognitive-level questions</p>
<p><i>Learning</i> Speaking about the learning of mathematics Giving time for women to respond</p>	<p><i>Learning</i> Sharing the thinking process Sharing the understanding of mathematics Learning cooperatively</p>
<p><i>Curriculum</i> Explaining the construction of mathematics and its use in society</p>	<p><i>Curriculum</i> Having women participate in defining the content</p>
<p><i>Educational environment</i> Valuing women's contributions and concerns Setting school goals which include women Using inclusive language</p>	<p><i>Educational environment</i> Allowing women to participate in defining their learning process Having women participate in defining the goals of the school Addressing the issue of gender differences</p>
<p><b>SILENCE / SPEECH</b></p>	<p><b>PASSIVITY / ACTIVE PARTICIPATION</b></p>
<p><b>POWERLESSNESS / EMPOWERMENT</b></p>	<p><b>OMISSION / INCLUSION</b></p>
<p><i>Teaching</i> Avoiding stereotypes Naming differences and explaining them Giving women the time and means to learn Letting women solve problems by themselves Praising women's achievements Sharing power</p>	<p><i>Teaching</i> Paying attention to all students regardless of sex, race, age, etc. Monitoring speech in order to include women Using examples which relate to women Describing mathematicians and scientists as both males and females Valuing intuition and emotions</p>
<p><i>Learning</i> Demystifying mathematics: more than one solution and more than one process Receiving appropriate feedback and instructions Learning about women's participation in mathematics and science</p>	<p><i>Learning</i> Solving problems that deal with women's situations Receiving feedback and learning from mistakes</p>
<p><i>Curriculum</i> Demystifying mathematical construct Mathematics as a process, not a set of rules Including the lives of women scientists Including women's perspectives</p>	<p><i>Curriculum</i> Referring to the contributions of women Using situations related to women's lives Using non-stereotypical material Including ethnomathematics Revealing the omission of women</p>
<p><i>Educational environment</i> Creating a warm and supportive climate Working out beliefs about men and women Denouncing stereotypes</p>	<p><i>Educational environment</i> Including and valuing women Making women visible</p>

**Table 2 – The Equity Model and Research**

Equity Model's Axes	Powerlessness/ Empowerment	Passivity/ Active participation	Silence/ Speech	Omission/ Inclusion
Research components				
Problem setting				
Theoretical approach				
Conceptual framework				
Methodology				
Data Gathering				
Data Treatment and Analysis				
Discussion				
Conclusion				

As for training, I used this model among vocational professionals in the health domain both in Salvador and in Brazil. While doing so, I realized that the powerlessness/empowerment axis was a difficult one to grasp. I also realized that the degree of literacy of the people involved might induce some difficulties in understanding the correct meaning of omission/inclusion, as I usually explain it by insisting on the fact that we have to construct a memory for those groups which have been deprived of their past, their culture and their knowledge. Blending those experiences with a combination of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's framework and levels of literacy helps to understand the situation in the sense that those two axes are more complex to understand, and therefore to apply, than the other two axes.

### **Further Discussion and Conclusion**

To connect with what precedes, let us take a new look at the four axes.

#### *Silence/Speech*

This axis might be the easiest to understand and use. Its labeling belongs both to scientific knowledge and common sense. Giving a voice is a popular expression echoing the need to listen to what groups have to say. In a recent publication on *Feminist Pedagogy* (Crabtree, Sapp, & Licona, 2009), Bauer challenges the notion of "authorized speakers" to address the issue of authority in the classroom and to reconsider which knowledge is to be discussed. Wood focuses on the ways to bring the different voices to express themselves. Riger, Brecke and Wiederhold offer a bibliography for teaching in a pluralistic classroom categorized according to different perspectives among which the diversity of women which together are making the new majority of students in university settings. Those writings give voice to African American Women, Asian Women, Latinas, Lesbians, Native American Women, Women Reentering the Academy and Working Class Women. These three references however were first published in 1991, 1993 and 1995 respectively, for the book is presenting a selection of "theoretical and empirical articles, critical essays, and personal reflections on classroom practices published in the NWSA Journal

from 1989 to 2002” in order *to move forward* (Crabtree, et al., 2009, p. 6).

Even if many writings are from the 1980’s and 1990’s, they still address an important issue for implementing equity. In a synthesis of Hayes and Flannery (2000), Ollagnier (2010) insists on the need to speak in order to reveal internalized oppression and begin a transformation. Giving a voice is also at the heart of popular education (Crowther, Martin, & Shaw, 1999). In fact, in her synthesis about gender and adult education, Ollagnier recognizes the central aspect of silence and speech.

My own research in developing the Equity Model includes different elements under this heading of Silence/Speech. It calls for using an inclusive language, for revealing the omission and, of course, for giving the right to speak.

### *Omission/Inclusion*

As just mentioned, speech permits the consideration of experience of members of marginalized social groups, and, by valuing experience, the individual experiences lead to collective experience (Merrill, 2005). Emotion and intuition are also valued, for marginalization leads to anger, and intuition, as Jane Baker Miller has stated it as early as 1976, results from extended knowledge of a situation. It is even recommended to build on intuitive knowledge (Ruth-Sahd and, Tisdell, 2007, in Ollagnier, 2010).

In the axis Omission/Inclusion, sharing knowledge and constructing a collective memory related to the different groups that claim equity is an important dimension. Members of those groups often encounter difficulties with knowledge, in particular with knowledge that make them invisible.

### *Powerlessness/Empowerment*

Knowledge is an important dimension in this axis. Demystifying the construction of knowledge and transmitting intellectual tools that allow its dismantlement empower the people in discriminatory situations. It is by sharing power, be it in the teaching and learning relationship or in the process of gathering data for new knowledge building that we instrument people for social change.

### *Passivity/Active participation*

In order not to continue to transmit knowledge that excludes the reality of marginalized social groups and their members, men and women, education needs to be transformed in such a way that learners can evolve in an appropriate and secure learning climate. Cooperative learning methods and strategies are conducive to active participation if, like Cohen (1994) stated it, it takes into account the heterogeneous composition of the group of learners.

To conclude, the Equity Model offers a response to the need for an inclusive framework in order to give women and members of minority groups an equal opportunity to education and training, an access to relevant knowledge, tools for individual or group social action and for the production of inclusive new knowledge.

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