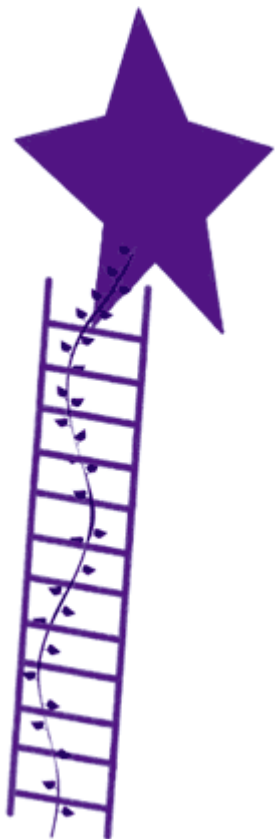


*Where There is Life,
There is Hope*



Where There is Life, There is Hope

Woman Literacy
Students and
Discrimination

The Samaritan House PAR
Group

Written by:

The Samaritan House PAR Group

Della, Susan, Blanche and Cynthia.

© 1995

Literacy and Continuing Education Branch. Department of Education and Training, Province of Manitoba

Material contained in this workbook may be reproduced for training purposes providing that the source is acknowledged and the training is free of charge.

Additional copies of *Where There's Life There's Hope* can be obtained for \$5 each by contacting the Literacy and Continuing Education Branch, Department of Education and Training. Rm. 107 - 340 Ninth St. Brandon, Manitoba, Canada R7A 6C2

or by calling

1-800-262-3930, or

(204) 726-6027

(204) 726-6583 fax

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	
About This Book	Section A
PAR: What Is It?	Section B
PAR: How Does It Work?	Section C
Discrimination	Section D
Our Stories	Section E
Analyzing Discrimination	Section F
Taking Action	Section G
Final Thoughts From The Coordinator . . .	Section H
Appendix	Section I
Glossary	Section J
Resource List	Section K
Agencies and Organizations	Section L

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the following people and organizations for making this book possible:

- ✓ **Each other:** the group of students (the PAR Group) that helped one another write our stories;
- ✓ **Literacy tutors:** Marcia Hamm-Weibe, Anna Schroeder, Judy Carr and Project Coordinator Janet Smith for helping us with the organizing and writing of our stories;
- ✓ **Samaritan House Literacy Program** for bringing the group together;
- ✓ **The Coalition For Brandon Literacy Services (CBLs)** for sponsoring the Project;
- ✓ **The National Literacy Secretariat** for funding the Project;
- ✓ **Kady Denton** for showing us how a book is put together;
- ✓ **Jennifer Howard** and **Janet Smith** for helping us analyze discrimination during the Ah-Hah workshop;
- ✓ **The Brandon Public Library** for the library tour;
- ✓ **The National Film Board** for making the video, "Ellen's Story";
- ✓ **Brian Hydesmith** for the book design and layout;

Section A

Introduction: About This Book.



Section A

About This Book

This book is about people struggling with discrimination* It is about our own stories: how we have experienced discrimination and how we have overcome it.

We are literacy* students and women. As women we have all experienced discrimination. This is the topic we decided to research for our book.

We researched our book using a method called PAR. PAR stands for participatory action research.* It is a way of finding out how ordinary people experience a problem or problems in their own lives and how they can take action for change.

We wrote the book for many reasons...

We wrote the book to open people's eyes.

We wrote the book to help other people and to make them aware of what discrimination does to a person.

We wrote the book to get our stories out.

We wrote the book to help other literacy students so that they will know that they are not alone.

We now know that others have had to deal with discrimination and it is helpful to hear about their experiences. We hope our stories will also help you.

We used PAR to better understand our own experiences with discrimination. We talked about our experiences with the other women in our group, we made collages,* watched videos, and read books about discrimination. We also interviewed others of all ages and backgrounds to find out about their stories. The most important part of the PAR project however, was sharing our own stories and experiences. Working together on PAR gave us the courage to stand up for our rights, and not let people step all over us, using us as doormats.

We hope our book can be used to educate people about discrimination so that they will have more understanding and compassion.* We hope this book will be used in libraries, literacy, programs, by professionals,* and the general public.

This book is also for us. We accomplished something for ourselves that we were told we never could. By sharing our stories we hope that others will be encouraged to see that nothing is impossible. As one of our group pointed out: "Where There's Life There's Hope".*

Section B

PAR

What is it?



Section B

PAR: What Is It?

What is PAR?

Participatory Action Research, or PAR, is a way of finding out how ordinary people experience a problem or problems in their own lives. It works with people who are oppressed* and have in many ways been left out of history: women, the poor, minorities*, etc. PAR is research that is based on people's real life experiences.

Our group used these words to describe what PAR is:

PARTICIPATORY is:

- getting involved
- being open to learn new ways
- having a voice

ACTION is:

- watching and learning
- doing
- change

RESEARCH is:

- putting new information together
- evaluating
- investigating
- analysing
- thesis



The researcher and the group members work together to investigate* problems the group members want to change. It is also an educational process* for both the researcher and the group members. By studying the underlying causes of problems, both the researcher and the group members build new skills, confidence, and knowledge. Most importantly, the PAR process helps groups and individuals to become empowered to take action for change.

Section C

PAR: How Does it Work?

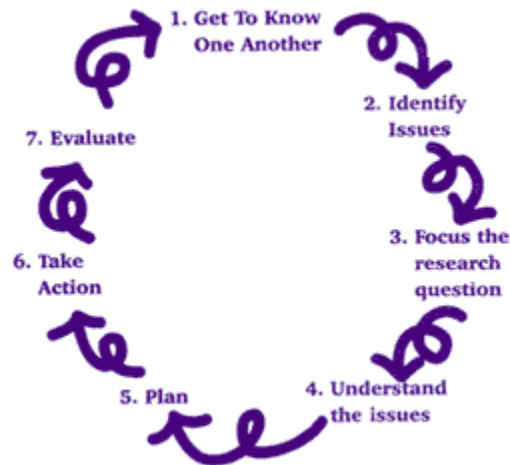


Section C

PAR: How Does It Work?

We drew a picture of the process we used to get from start to finish in our PAR project. The curly arrows in the following drawing mean that it is important to stop at each step and think about how we are doing, and plan for the next step.

The arrows also mean that the steps do not always go neatly from one to another. For example, our group sometimes needed to lump ahead and look at planning and action before going back to the step we were on at the time.



Description of the steps we used:

Step 1. **Get To Know One Another:** During this step the researcher (Janet Smith) and the group members got to know one another and built trust. The goals of the PAR Project were discussed, and everyone got a chance to take part in decision-making. The following "Golden rules" were set by the group:

- ✓ Everything said stays in this room
- ✓ Everyone gets a say; everyone can be involved
- ✓ Everyone's opinions are respected
- ✓ There's never a winner or a loser
- ✓ We will let each other finish our thoughts; we will not interrupt
- ✓ We will try to solve conflict in a positive way
- ✓ We can stop the process at any time and talk about things
- ✓ It's OK to talk about your personal problems with someone you trust

Step 2. **Identify the Issues:** During this step, issues important to the group members' lives and experiences were discussed. Through group discussions, drawing, and writing in our journals, a number of important issues were noticed which were written down and analysed by the group.

Step 3. **Focus the research question:** This was perhaps the most difficult part of our research project. During this step, we tried to narrow down the many issues that were discussed, and decide on one question to look at. We knew that the focus question should be rooted in our own life experiences. It should be of interest to us, and should not be too broad. We should be able to get information and answers to our focus question. In the end we decided to focus on discrimination. Our research question had two parts: "What does discrimination mean to us?" and "How has discrimination affected our lives?"



Step 4. **Understand the Issues:** During this step we attempted to make sense of the focus question and better understand the issue we decided on. We talked within our group, watched videos, made drawings of our experiences, wrote in our journals, and interviewed others about their experiences with discrimination. We also took part in a workshop in which we analysed the root causes of discrimination. (See analysis* in [Glossary](#)).



Step 5. **Plan:** Before we put our ideas and new understandings about the issue into action, we had to plan what action we wanted to take. We discussed making a video, doing a play, leading a workshop for professionals on our experiences with discrimination, and writing a book. Before making our decision, we asked ourselves these questions:

- ✓ What do we want to do?
- ✓ What would be the most effective action to take on the issue?
- ✓ How could the action plan be put into place? Who will be affected by our action?
- ✓ What do we have the time, energy, and money to do?



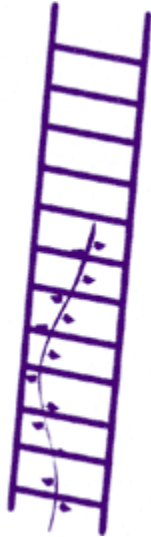
Step 6. **Action:** The next step is the action: doing something positive with the information we have gathered. Our group decided to write a book, because we felt it would help ourselves and other people who are discriminated against. We also hoped that it would educate people, and help to change negative ways of thinking and acting toward others.



Step 7. **Evaluation:** the last step in the process is the final evaluation: asking ourselves what worked, what didn't, and how could the project be improved? Our group evaluated the project all along the way (remember the curly arrows?), but we also did a final evaluation at the end of the project.

Section D

Discrimination



Section D Discrimination

Focussing the question

Coming up with a focus question didn't happen overnight. Our group discussed many issues before we saw that discrimination was the main problem we kept coming back to. We then formed the following research questions: "What does discrimination mean to us?" and "How has Discrimination affected our lives.?"

Discrimination

"the act of making or recognizing differences of distinctions based on prejudice."

Prejudice

"Injury or disadvantage resulting from another's action or judgment that ignores one's rights."

Defining Discrimination

We looked up the dictionary definition of discrimination and wrote it down on flipchart paper. Discrimination means: "The act of making or recognizing differences or distinctions based on prejudice"*. Prejudice is: "Injury or disadvantage resulting from another's action or judgment that ignores one's rights".

We then added our own definition of the word discrimination to the list so that it would be in our own words. Discrimination is:

- ✓ put downs;
- ✓ not listening to others' opinions;
- ✓ being judgmental

We listed various kinds of discrimination, including negative treatment of others because of their race (racism); their sex (sexism); their cultural background; their age (ageism); their sexual orientation* (homophobia*); their income level (class discrimination), their physical, mental, or emotional abilities; and their education level.

Our experiences

We talked about how discrimination makes us feel as women, as literacy students and as people on welfare. We said that discrimination makes us feel:

- ✓ Angry ✓ aggressive ✓ depressed ✓ sad
- ✓ disappointed ✓ bitter ✓ pain ✓ grief
- ✓ makes me feel like "I can't do it"
- ✓ discouraged/low self esteem.

We discussed some of the ways each of us has experienced discrimination:

- ✓ "the guy at the bank talks down to me because I am a woman";
- ✓ "People look down on me because I'm on welfare";
- ✓ "People put down the literacy program I attend";
- ✓ "Government people (especially welfare workers) put me down and make me feel small"

Other people's experiences with discrimination

We also researched how others have experienced discrimination to see how their experiences compared with ours. We each asked several people we knew these research questions: "What does discrimination mean to you?" and "How has discrimination affected your life?"

One of the members of our group asked people in her apartment block about their experiences with discrimination. She found that one of the people she interviewed had been discriminated on the basis of language. Another person experienced discrimination based on his disability; another was discriminated against because of her age; and the fourth person because of his Métis* background.

One group member decided to ask her husband about discrimination. He said he had been discriminated against at work because of his disability.

Another member of our PAR group talked to customers at her workplace about discrimination. Several of her customers told her about racism they have experienced over the years (see story in [Appendix](#)).

"Interviewing other people was a little bit scary at first, then I didn't want to stop!"

The last group member talked to her boss, who told her that his experience as a white, middle class male meant that he had not experienced any discrimination that he was aware of.

Doing this kind of research was a new experience for most of us. It helped us to find out how other people understand and experience discrimination and how their stories are sometimes similar and sometimes different from our own. As one group member put it: "Interviewing other people was a little bit scary at first, then I didn't want to stop!"

Understanding our own discrimination

By looking at ourselves, and seeing how our thoughts and behaviors affect others, we realized that we can begin to change. Education and awareness are the first steps!

Another discussion that came out of our brainstorming was ways in which we also discriminate against others. We each recognized that we all, at one time or another, have labeled other people. This can be very negative and harmful to others as well as to ourselves. By looking at ourselves, and seeing how our thoughts and behaviors affect others, we realized that we can begin to change. Education and awareness are the first steps!

So, why does discrimination happen?

Once again, by talking about our own experiences and those of others, we were able to understand some of the reasons discrimination exists in our society. Some reasons we came up with at this stage were fear, the attempt to control or change others, anger, lack of understanding, power over others, and seeing ourselves in another person.

What can we do about discrimination?

The first action step we took was to increase our own understanding of the issue of discrimination. We learned about what it is, how it makes us feel and how we and others have experienced discrimination. We also learned about how we have discriminated against others, and some of the reasons discrimination exists. We then started to think more about what we wanted to do about the issue.

Some of the things we said we wanted to do included

- ✓ speak up for ourselves
- ✓ make people understand me
- ✓ learn how to get off the fast track
- ✓ stop letting others set the scene (family, men, authority figures,* etc.)
- ✓ get rid of the guilt
- ✓ stop dumping in the wrong place
- ✓ change thinking - stand up to authority in a positive way, and not feel threatened or intimidated; keep defenses down
- ✓ educate others (particularly professionals) about the issue so they change the way they treat us.

We discussed ways we felt we could let other people know about our experiences and also build up our own skills and self-confidence.

We felt that a book would be the best way for us to speak up for ourselves and tell our own stories. We felt that our stories might help other people who are being discriminated against and also educate the public about the harmful effects of discrimination.

Section E

Our Stories

How we have experienced discrimination in our lives.



Section E Della's Story

My story is about discrimination and how it affected my life. Discrimination is a put-down. Discrimination makes you feel you can't accomplish things because of the way people treat you.

I have been discriminated against as long as I can remember. It started in school. I've lost some friends. My reading skills are not good and relationships have fallen apart because of that.

Discrimination happens when your reading skills are poor. Employers don't want to hire you because you can't read up to standards. They don't even want to give you a chance. They say they want you to have experience, but they won't give you a chance to show that you can do the job.

"I'm not different than they are. I'm capable of talking and feeling; it's just that some of my skills are different."

Bureaucrats* are the worst! They think they know it all. They might be better educated, but it doesn't mean they are better. I've got feelings just like they do. I'm not different than they are. I'm capable of talking and feeling; it's just that some of my skills are different.

For example, I'm good at organizing myself so that everything gets done, and I don't get behind. In my new job, in the kitchen, that's what I have to do. I can learn a new routine without having to be told more than once. Once I know what there is to be done I just do it. I have past experience in the kitchen work so it is common sense to me.

The way I keep organized is to catch up with the dishes and then help with the cooking. Toward the end of the day I clean the washrooms and wash the kitchen floor and clean up the dishwasher, wipe the counter, cover the food, wash the shelves in the fridge, and empty the garbage. Its the same thing as it is in your own home.

Working is tiring. Cement floors are hard on my legs. Getting in the routine of being back at work is also tiring. Its hard to come to class after working late in the evening. Its really difficult. I am mentally tired from dealing with people. You don't know what reaction you'll get if you make a mistake.

Susan's Story

My discrimination started when I was at school. I went to a country school. The students used to make fun of me. They used to push me around and make trouble and hurt my feelings.

"learning how to stand up for myself is hard, because every time I am told to shut up and be quiet."

I have been married for 13 years. There are also two children involved in my story of discrimination. Trying to keep things in order or cleaned up and nice and tidy is hard. Every time my husband comes home from work he asks, "What did you do all day?" It is very difficult to handle this situation in my life. Sometimes I just feel like packing my bags and leaving everything behind me.

Making supper late at night for my husband is very hard on me because sometimes it is very late before I can get to bed. Then I feel grumpy in the morning when I am still tired.

There are times that are very hard to deal with in my family. Especially when we want to do something together. Also, learning how to stand up for myself is hard, because every time I am told to shut up and be quiet. Making decisions is something else, because I don't work.

Cynthia's Story

My meaning of discrimination is people labeling you and not giving you a chance because of your religion, culture or background.

Yes! I feel I have been discriminated against; first by my parents, by my school and by Social Services. I have also experienced discrimination as a mother, and as a mental health consumer.

When I was growing up as a child, I was taught "children should be seen, and not heard". My mom and dad were very abusive toward me. When I did something wrong my mom would scream at me or hit me when I wouldn't do what she wanted. So I tried my hardest to please her. The whole thing left me frustrated. Dad would hit me too. When he had a fight with Mom, he would take it out on me.

My meaning of discrimination is people labeling you and not giving you a chance because of your religion, culture or background.

When I started to go to school I felt this was life: adults yelling and hitting me when I did something wrong. I felt so alone, with this big weight on my shoulders, and I had nobody to talk to about things.

I can remember one teacher in grade 3 hitting me. I was tired of people hitting me, so I tripped her and she fell on the floor but never got hurt. I quit school as soon as I could at age sixteen. After that I was rebellious towards adults and people in authority in general.

There was a lot of stress in my life and I handled it by using alcohol. At one point I took an overdose of pills and ended up at the Brandon Mental Hospital. This is where I learned what discrimination really is. The workers put me on a program where I had to sit in a corner from 9 am until 10 pm with only bathroom breaks. Nobody was to talk to me and I ate my meals separately. This went on for six months before I got any privileges. I was up there for awhile.

I got married after I got out of the hospital and my husband was also abusive. The marriage lasted for six months.

Another boyfriend dropped me when he found out I had been in the Brandon Mental Hospital. I had his child, a boy. Raising him was a struggle because I had too much advice from people. When I asked for help from Child and Family Services they took him away from me.

To support him and myself I had to go on Income Security. So I got called a welfare bum or was told I was abusing the system. That just added to how I felt about myself, which was not very good at this point.

"Getting into a literacy program was a great help. Now I am finished with the old messages in my head and on with the new ones!"

I made a commitment to God when my son was six months old and he was on his death bed. Even in my faith there have been troubles and struggles. I eventually found a church and pastor that believed in me and supported me. I feel this is my new family; one that I never had growing up.

When I decided to deal with some of the things that have happened to me I started counseling. This helped me to feel better, about myself and take what comes my way. The hardest part of this was forgiving the people who have hurt me.

Getting into a literacy program was a great help. Now I am finished with the old messages in my head, and on with the new ones! I feel that whatever comes my way I am confident I can deal with it with God's help.

Blanche's Story

When you're a child, being put down and called stupid follows you into adulthood. My parents and other people in my life put me down and made me feel very small. My father was the biggest problem. He drank a lot and would tell me that I wasn't worth the time of day; that I was good for nothing. But I was the one who cooked, cleaned, and raised his kids until the time I was married.

"My attitude had to change a lot from thinking I was worthless to knowing that I am not stupid and that I can do it."

I got married just to get out of my parents' house. I quit school at this time, just before I had my grade 12. I couldn't keep a job because I thought I wasn't worth anything.

I have been back in school for one year now trying to get my grade 12. My attitude had to change a lot from thinking I was worthless to knowing that I am not stupid and that "I can do it". I am now able to stand up for myself and only give in when I feel it is right to do so.

The power of the message: "Where There's Life There's Hope" gives me the ability to be a better parent and a better person. I see a great deal of hope for my life and my husband's life. There is hope.

Section F

Analyzing Discrimination



Section F **Analyzing Discrimination**

After writing our own stories, of how we experienced discrimination in our own lives, we decided we should know something about the underlying causes of discrimination: why discrimination exists in the first place, who it hurts, and who benefits from it. We asked Janet Smith and Jennifer Howard to help us analyse* the issue of discrimination, using a drawing technique called Ah-Hah!* This is what happened in the Ah-Hah workshop:

We started by going around the circle, introducing ourselves to Jennifer (some of us had never met her before) and telling each other how we were feeling that morning. The Opening Circle is something we did each time we met. Usually we passed around an object, like a pen or stone or feather and gave each person a chance to speak. It helped to start the day and got us focused on the tasks ahead.

Individual experience

Next, Janet asked us each to draw a picture of ourselves, including our experiences with work, family, church, volunteering, neighbourhood, school, housing, social services, or anything else that affects our daily lives. We each took crayons and a piece of paper and headed for a comfortable space in the room to think and draw. When we had all finished, we shared our drawings with the group and posted them on the wall.

Group experiences

We then looked at the individual drawings and tried to see what we had in common as a group. Jennifer drew our ideas on a large sheet of paper on the wall as we called them out. We all agreed that family was in the centre of, all our lives, so we put a symbol for the family in the centre of the page. We are also all women and are attending a literacy program. We all work - some of us earn an income and some of us don't. We all enjoy recreational activities.

We all feel pulled in many different directions, at times and find it hard to maintain a balance in life. Each of these ideas was drawn into the centre of the picture.

The ladder also became a symbol we used for our book's cover.

After seeing ourselves as a group of women literacy students, Janet asked us to think about what barriers we face as a group and what some of our goals are. We drew both a wall and a ladder to symbolize that some barriers are harder to get over than others.

Barriers

The main barriers we face are: money, the "System" having few choices, being weighed down by too many responsibilities, our past, other people's negative attitudes, mixed messages from people, and the legal system.

Goals

Our regain goals are: getting a job, studying and learning, having positive relationships with people, and feeling better about ourselves.

Underlying causes

We then looked at the underlying causes of discrimination. While discrimination often shows itself through people's attitudes and actions toward us, these attitudes and actions are actually symptoms* of a bigger issue: power. We drew pictures of some of the institutions* that have power in our society including the government, big business, the media,* professionals, schools, and the church. Power can be either positive or negative. We felt that when power is combined with control it becomes a negative force. We each had experiences when one or more of these institutions were a controlling factor in our lives.

"Attitudes and actions are actually symptoms of a bigger issue: power."

"We felt that when power is combined with control it becomes a negative force."

Linkages

Next, we drew lines between these institutions symbolizing how they are linked. For example, we recognized that big business owns most of our major media sources and gives money to political parties as well. We talked about how this can affect the messages we get from the media.

"We showed this as a net with a hole in it, and the net getting smaller and smaller."

Ways in which these structures are connected to our experiences as women were shown by connecting lines between our lives and the structures of power and control. Some of the barriers we face in terms of getting into education programs, social programs and job's, for example, are directly related to government cut-backs. We showed this as a net with a hole in it, and the net getting smaller and smaller. As women, we often count on the social safety net to help us with things like child care, job access programs, social security, and unemployment insurance.

We feel that these policies of cut-backs discriminate against us as women and as literacy students.

Action for Change

"We also drew a clock, indicating that the process of change takes time."

Finally, we looked at ways of changing the present situation of discrimination that we, as women literacy students, experience. We drew pictures of people getting angry and talking with others about how discrimination affects them. We drew pictures of people working together to learn more about their rights and how to organize for action. We also drew a clock, indicating that the process of change takes time. In the end, we want people to respect and listen to one another. One of us finished the workshop with a message of: "I'm worth more than this!"

Section G

Taking Action



Section G Taking Action

When things are unfair, and you are fed up with being treated a certain way it usually means that something has to change. Sometimes, your own attitude or the attitude of other people needs to change. Sometimes the system itself need, to change. Whatever the reason, people need a strategy for change to happen.

A strategy is a plan for action. We talked about two kinds of strategies: *Individual* and *Group Strategies*.

Individual strategies

Individual strategies means that people plan and take action on their own to solve a problem. This kind of strategy is usually used when there is a conflict between you and another person. We talked about examples of when individual strategies have worked for us, and what we did to make them work. Here's what we said:

I needed to get more information from literacy programs, community agencies, libraries, and talk to other people about their experiences. This is research!;

- ✓ I needed to accept myself for what I am and know I was worth something;
- ✓ I had to change my thinking from: "they have all the knowledge and they can fix things for me" to: "I can go to people for advice, go home, weigh the pros and cons, and then make my own decision";
- ✓ I had to own my anger and take responsibility to use it positively;
- ✓ I needed to get more information from literacy programs, community agencies, libraries, and talk to other people about their experiences. This is research!;
- ✓ I had to learn about how the system works, and my rights and responsibilities;
- ✓ I wrote down my questions and practiced saying them before I went in;
- ✓ I had to go through the right channels of authority. Sometimes this means going to the (social worker's) boss or supervisor to

-
- ✓ I wrote down everything that happened (including phone calls) and dated it. This was really helpful when I needed to go to court;
 - ✓ I needed to have someone to support me;
 - ✓ I looked for positive friends who encourage me to communicate my needs in a clear and positive way;
 - ✓ I practiced saying NO!;
 - ✓ An advocate helped me get what I needed.

Individual actions sometimes work and sometimes don't. Sometimes, they change things for one person and not others. Sometimes our individual actions make small changes, but don't really change the problem itself.

Group actions

Why then, do people often choose group actions over individual actions? Our group felt that some of these reasons could be that:

- ✓ there is more power in a group;
- ✓ you can get personal support from a group, and know that you are not alone;
- ✓ you are able to share ideas and experiences, and find out what strategies have worked for other people and what haven't;
- ✓ you are able to take on a bigger project in a group;
- ✓ you don't get burnt out as quickly because you can share the workload;
- ✓ united we stand, divided we fall!

We recognized that there are some problems in working with a group however. Some of these problems include:

- ✓ too many ideas;
- ✓ personality differences and clashes;

Ways to overcome these problems include:

- ✓ talking about the problems and taking the time to work them out;
- ✓ deciding on what is really important and sticking to it;
- ✓ having a goal or vision that is more important than personality differences;
- ✓ setting up Golden Rules at the beginning of the process;
- ✓ sharing the leadership;
- ✓ having fun! Serious work can still be fun most of the time.

We discussed several *steps to take in group action*:

1. talk to others who share the same problem or issue;
2. set up meetings with these people;
3. research the issue and learn about the real source of the problem;
4. focus the issue;
5. prioritize - examine people's time, resources, commitments, and what people really want to work on and choose a project;
6. plan your actions (strategize);
7. take action!
8. evaluate the process and make any changes needed

We began to realize that the steps to group action we had listed were essentially the same steps we had taken in our PAR Process! It was exciting to see how things had come full circle and how we, as a group, had learned some important steps to organizing. These are skills that we will take with us wherever we go.

Section H

Final Thoughts From The Coordinator



Section H Final Thoughts From The Coordinator

It has been an amazing year for all of us. As the coordinator for the PAR Project, I have had the good fortune of working and learning with a wonderful, diverse and strong group of women who have shared their lives with me. It is an experience I will never forget.

The PAR process had a profound effect on all of our lives. While it is true that PAR did not eliminate the underlying causes of discrimination, the PAR group did gain a higher sense of self-esteem and feelings of empowerment through the process. By discussing their life experiences and analysing issues, the participants also increased their level of critical consciousness. The writing of this book was an important step toward changing oppressive structures and relationships.

In many ways, the powerful words contained in this book stand on their own. I have nevertheless included this section for people wanting to do research, using the PAR process. It includes information on the history of participatory action research and what is needed to make a PAR project work.

Participatory action research developed in the 1960's and 70's as a result of changes occurring within the field of adult education. During this time, the popular education movement emerged. This alternative approach viewed the goal of education as the development of critical consciousness, or "conscientizacao" for the purpose of social change (Freire: 1970). The traditional power relationship between teacher and student was also transformed into a more equal partnership based on mutual trust and true dialogue.

One of the methods used by popular educators is participatory action research. Unlike traditional academic research, PAR involves people as the subjects not the objects of research. The PAR process creates an atmosphere in which both researcher and participants work together, in an equal relationship. Most importantly, participatory action research is committed to the "creation of a more accurate and critical reflection of social reality, the liberation of human creative potential and the mobilization of human resources to solve social problems" (Maquire: 1983, 39). In short, the strength of PAR lies in the fact that it, is action-oriented.

There are a variety of factors that influence the degree of success of any participatory action research project.

(Popular education) has emerged, anchored in the experiences of the poor. It uses people's knowledge and disseminates it. It recognizes the value of people's life experiences and opens up spaces for real participation. It promotes solidarity and cooperation, which are the bases for popular organization" (Francisco Vio Grossi in Training for Empowerment, 1985).

Partnership building: It is important that projects seek to establish partnerships. Roles and responsibilities should be reviewed between all parties early on in the process. Trust must be built, and principle partners must feel committed to the project goals and objectives.

✓ Project structure and processes: The project must be structured in such a way that everyone has an equal voice. Within this structure people play different roles, but those roles are non-hierarchical and non-controlling. The process must be seen as important as the end product. In the case of the PAR Project, I believe that the process of empowerment received as much emphasis as the basic skills training (reading, writing and oral communication).

✓ Time: This is one of the most important, and most often overlooked element, in any participatory action research project. Every phase of a PAR project takes time and commitment on the part of the principle players. The process does not take place in a neat linear fashion but rather in a more "organic" or creative manner (remember the curly arrows?). It is sometimes difficult to explain this to those who are used to seeing results in the traditional fashion. You may have to spend time at the beginning of the process discussing this aspect with the principle partners.

✓ Skills: participatory researchers often have to juggle the roles of organizer, facilitator, and researcher. In the PAR Project, I was fortunate to have assistance from the literacy coordinator, the program tutors, as well as the participants themselves. This commitment to participant control over the process makes the participatory researcher's job much easier and also helps "flatten" the power relationships.

✓ Resources: a comfortable, non-threatening working space is an essential ingredient to any PAR project. This could mean a coffee shop, a classroom, or someone's living room. For many women, a safe meeting place does not include the presence of men. Other groups will have their own definition of a "safe" space. More tangible resource's such as money for staff, support services (child care, transportation, signing, wheelchair accessibility, etc.), as well as materials such as flip chart paper, markers, etc. are also helpful.

✓ Participant commitment: This is also an essential element. If the participants are not committed to the project, there is little point in continuing. Commitment is usually strongest when the level of participant control is high, supports are in place, and action is an integral component of the project.

✓ Fun: Yes, fun! Social change work is challenging, time-consuming, and often "messy", but it should also be enjoyable. If you can build fun into the process, the work will happen.

I hope that this book will be read by anyone who is interested in learning more about the experiences of women literacy students. I also hope that it will be used as a resource by groups and organizations that are committed to social change.

Sections I – L



Section I **Appendix**

One of the members of the PAR group obtained this story from someone she interviewed while researching how discrimination affects others.

"As a minority in this country, one is led to believe that it does not matter what race or colour you are, but that is not necessarily true. There are many hate groups and closed-minded people that never let you forget that you are in 'their' country.

I remember wanting to play ice hockey, but a group of males took it upon themselves, or felt the need to represent all the caucasian population in telling me that it was a white man's sport.

In my job, I have found a few males who will never let me forget that even though I've worked very hard, it was the white population that gave me the position. I feel this would instill anger and resentment in anyone faced with such a situation.

I have learned to deal with this persecution by ignoring such people because they do not directly affect my way of life or life with my family. I have also learned that just as all Germans were not Nazis, all whites are not racists.

Section J Glossary

Ah-Hah!:	An exclamation of surprise or triumph, or sudden understanding. The Ah-Hah Workshop helped us to understand both the underlying causes of discrimination and how we could work to change it
Analysis:	Studying something by dividing it up into parts
Authority figure:	People who use power or command
Barriers:	A limit or boundary that's hard to cross
Bureaucrats:	Government officials
Collages:	Pictures made by pasting, cut-out pieces of cloth, newspaper, magazines etc. together on a page.
Compassion:	Understanding for another person, wanting to help
Discrimination:	The act of making or recognizing differences based on prejudice.
Homophobia:	Fear of homosexuality
Institution:	An organization with a social, educational or religious purpose like a school, church or hospital
Investigate:	To study, to take a close look at
Literacy:	The ability to read and write
Media:	Television, newspapers, magazines, radio, etc.
Métis:	Someone with one French parent and one Aboriginal parent
Oppressed:	Governed harshly; kept down unjustly or with cruelty
Orientation:	Position, lifestyle (as a 'sexual orientation', specifically, straight or gay).
Participatory:	Participatory Action Research, or PAR, is the collection and analysis of information by a group of people for the purpose of taking actions and making change.
Prejudice:	Injury or disadvantage resulting from another's actions or judgment ignoring people's rights

- Process:** A way of doing something using a number of steps
- Professional:** Someone who has much experience, skills and training
- Symptom:** A sign or signal
- Synthesis:** Putting together two or more parts to form a whole; opposite of analysis

Section K

Resource List

These are resources we used to research participatory action research and discrimination:

Video: **Ellen's Story**, available from The National Film Board, 1992. Available from the NFB (catalogue No. 1-9192-020) Call 1-800-267-7710 for information. Also available at The Brandon Public Library (no charge).

Books: **Ah-Hah!: A New Approach to Popular Education**, by Gatt-Fly. Between The Lines, 1983. Available at Manitoba Action Committee on the: Status of Women (MACSW) (204) -725-29S8.

Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach, Patricia Maguire. The Centre For International Education, U. of Massachusetts at Amherst, 1987. Available at the Literacy and Continuing Education Office (204) 726-6027.

The Dance of Anger, by Harriet Goldhar. Lerner, Harper, and Row, 1985. Available at The Brandon Public Library and Samaritan House Community Resource Centre, (204) 726-0758.

Enough Is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out, as told to Janet Silman. The Women's Press, Toronto, 1987. Available at The Brandon Public Library.

Experience Research Social Change, Methods From the Margins, Sandra Kirby, Kate McKenna. Garamond Press, 1989. Available at the Literacy and Continuing Education Office.

No Way To Live: Poor Women Speak Out, by Sheila

Organizing, by Si Kahn. McGraw-Hill, 1982. Available at MACSW.

Pedagogy of The Oppressed, Paulo Freire, Herder and Herder, 1970. Available at the Literacy and Continuing Education Office.

Recipes for Political Action, Beat The Street Women's Committee, Toronto, 1993. Available at the Literacy and Continuing Education Office.

Research for Change, Jan Barnsley, Diana Ellis, The Women's Research Centre, 1992. Available at the Rural Literacy Office.

Strategies, Craig Shields. Human Services Press, 1987. Available at Samaritan House.

Training for Empowerment: A Kit of Materials for Popular Literacy Workers Based on An Exchange Among Educators From Mozambique, Nicaragua and Brazil. Judith Marshall. Doris Marshall Institute For Education & Action, Toronto. Available at the Literacy and Continuing Education Office.

Women & Illiteracy, The Need For Gender Specific Programming In Literacy Education, Nancy A. Carmack, Adult Basic Education, Vol. 2, No. 3, Fall, 1992, 176-194. Available at the Literacy and Continuing Education Office.

Women In Literacy Speak, Betty Ann Lloyd with Francis Ennis and Tannis Atleinson. Fernwood Publishing, Halifax, 1994. Available at the Literacy and Continuing Education Office.

Section L

Agencies and Organizations

These are some of the community resources that we think may be able to help someone who is dealing with discrimination all their lives:

- ✓ Addictions Anonymous
Brandon MB, (204) 727-7112 (24 hour)

- ✓ Addictions Foundation of Manitoba -
510 Fredrick St. Brandon MB, (204) 729-3838

- ✓ Brandon Friendship Centre -
303–9th St. Brandon MB, (204) 727-1407

- ✓ Child and Family Services -
340 Ninth St. Rm. 206 Brandon MB,
(204) 726-0030

- ✓ Citizen Advocacy -
801 Princess Ave. Brandon MB, (204) 727-6017

- ✓ Legal Aid -
1239 Princess Ave. Brandon MB, (204) 729-3484

- ✓ Local Church groups

- ✓ Manitoba Action Committee On the status Of
Women - 202-107 7th St. Brandon MB,
(204) 725-2955

- ✓ Manitoba Anti-Poverty Organization (M.A.P.O.),
Inc. - 365 McGee St. Winnipeg, MB, R3G 3M5, (204) 786-
3323

- ✓ Manitoba Métis Federation -
656 - 6th St. Brandon MB, (204) 727-0759

- ✓ Manitoba Housing Authority -
253 - 9th St. Brandon MB, (204) 726-6455

- ✓ Provincial Social Services Income Security -
(Provincial Welfare) Brandon MB,
(204) 726-6438

- ✓ Samaritan House Ministries

- ✓ Community Resource Centre -
110-6th St. Brandon MB, (204) 726-0758.

- ✓ ' Society for. Manitobans with, Disabilities -
340 - 9th St. Brandon MB, (204) 726-6157

- ✓ West Man Women's Shelter -
Brandon MB, (204) 727-3644/ 1-800-862-2727

- ✓ Women's Advocacy/ Child Witness Support
Program - 1011 Rosser Ave. Brandon MB,
(204) 726-6SIS

- ✓ Worker Advisor, Office -
340-9th St. Brandon MB, (204) 726-6480