Introduction to
The Anti-discrimination Response Training (A.R.T.) Program: An Active Witnessing Approach to Prejudice Reduction and Community Development

A Skills Development Program Using An Active Witnessing Training Method for Prejudice Reduction, Human Resource Enhancement, and Organizational and Community Development

by

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This booklet describes the Anti-discrimination Response Training (A.R.T.) Program and explains its witness-centered training approach, called “active witnessing method” developed by Dr. Ishu Ishiyama

This document is based on the following copyrighted sources:


If we are to have peace on earth, our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation.

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**A.R.T. Development and Institutional Support**

The Anti-discrimination Response Training (A.R.T.) Program was developed by Dr. Ishu Ishiyama at the University of British Columbia (U.B.C.), and has been pilot-tested in Vancouver and adopted at educational institutions and various community-based and government organizations in the Province of British Columbia and other Provinces in Canada and overseas. The initial development of the Program was sponsored by Multiculturalism B.C. grants (1998-2001) and the U.B.C. David Lam Chair in Multicultural Education research endowment grants (1998-2001).

**Racial Discrimination Experiences**

Racial discrimination may mean “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, social, cultural or any other field of public life” (*1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism*).

Racially prejudiced or stereotyping attitudes, the act of racial discrimination, and systemic racism all contribute to divisions among people on the basis of race and ethnicity. Interpersonal racism often disturbs individuals’ identity, sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and enjoyment of social life in general. Minority children’s painful experience of being teased, scapegoated or socially excluded can deeply upset their sense of emotional safety and damage their self-image. Racial discrimination in the workplace can lower the morale of the workers and their motivation. Systemic discrimination against certain ethnic minorities can effectively prevent such individuals from having equal access to opportunities and privileges.

Here are some examples of racial and ethnic prejudice encountered at work.

1. My colleagues were making ethnic jokes and laughing loudly. As I walked by them, they suddenly stopped their laughter and waited for me to pass. I felt hurt and angry.

2. My supervisor said that she could not give a strong recommendation for me because I was too soft-spoken and too gentle to confront others. She said I was not tough enough to survive and succeed in a competitive setting.

3. A visitor made a very offensive comment on the Aboriginal people in a meeting. He didn’t realize I was one of the people, probably because of my less Native-looking appearance. He felt safe to air his racist view to his non-Native audience. I was shocked and couldn’t speak out my objection. None of my colleagues who had known my Native status stood up for me or for my people. I felt totally alone.
4. I didn’t get a promotion. My boss told me that our company executives preferred someone else who spoke English with no ethnic accent. I got an ‘A’ for my work habits, but an ‘F’ for my racial background.

5. When I first came to this company, people were curious about me. They used to say, ‘Where are you from?’ or ‘Are you Chinese or Korean or what?’ I said, ‘I’m a Canadian. I’m from here.’ They were not satisfied with my answer, and asked me again, ‘No, no. Where are you originally from?’ It was obvious that they wanted to peg me down to a specific alien minority group. I realized that my Canadian identity was not enough or acceptable to them.

**Various Forms of Racial Prejudice and Discrimination**

Racial prejudice and discrimination can take various forms of expression, including: racial/ethnic superiority, negative stereotyping, use of derogatory racial terms, social exclusion, blocking access to opportunities and power, scapegoating, ethnic jokes, attacking or questioning cultural heritage, among other things.

**Silent Bystanders**

It is not uncommon that bystanders do not know what to say and how to respond, and cannot think of the appropriate thing to say immediately, when faced with racially discriminating situations where someone else is victimized. Some people get shocked to silence and get immobilized, while some others simply walk away from the situation to avoid direct involvement or further engagement in such situations. As the result, many bystanders become passive and ineffectual, and fall victim to their own silent reaction. Silent bystanders, who do nothing to confront the situation or to attend to the victim and show support, also perpetuate the vicious cycle of racial prejudice and discrimination. Victims of racism are thus abandoned by the silent bystanders, while the offender gains more social power to continue intimidating and harassing the innocent victim and walking away uninterrupted and unchallenged by the others.

**Witness-centered Training (Active Witnessing Training)**

The A.R.T. Program uses a group-based social skills training approach to help participants learn and practice a wide range of verbal and behavioral responses to interpersonal racism and other types of discriminating situations from a witness perspective. The active witnessing model assumes that there may be five parties involved directly and indirectly: (a) victim, (b) offender, (c) self as witness, (d) other co-witnesses, and (e) those that are not present at the witnessed scene but can be involved in addressing racism. Anti-racist witness responses can be directed to any of these parties.
Four Levels of Active Witnessing

1. **Dis-witnessing** (blocked awareness, disengagement, avoidance, dismissal, denial, inner conflict)

2. **Passive witnessing** (covert responding, silenced witnessing, preparation for active witnessing)

3. **Active witnessing** (overt behavioral responding, immediate or delayed responses)

4. **Ethical witnessing with social action** (ethical social action, recognizing social injustice and taking action at social level for confronting and educating others, becoming an agent for societal and institutional change)

The A.R.T. Program is designed to help participants develop their “response-ability” or readiness to respond to racism. They learn a wide range of verbal and behavioral responses that they can choose as witnesses when someone is being victimized by an offensive and disrespectful remark or an inequitable treatment. In short, this training helps people move from being passive bystanders to active witnesses, and to mobilize community members’ ability to fight racism both at personal and collective levels.

**Training Protocol**

The protocol for the A.R.T. Program uses a one-day (6 hours) experiential training format. Its variations include a 3-hour session and a series of shorter sessions. It uses written and videotaped scenarios for practicing anti-racist and anti-prejudice responses. Participants also have an opportunity to generate their own scenarios and produce role-play scripts for videotaped group performance.
The A.R.T. Program has the following features:

1. Action-focused and skills-based
2. Practical and specific
3. Skills easily and quickly learnable
4. Experiential and fun
5. Group-based
6. Transferable to other situations
7. Promotes empathy for victims
8. Heightens awareness of racism
9. Self-empowering
10. Stimulates critical thinking
11. Mobilizing societal change

**Active Witnessing Model and A.R.T. Cue Cards**

The A.R.T. Program is based on a conceptual model of "active witnessing" which proposes the following four levels of witnessing: (a) dis-witnessing, (b) passive witnessing, (c) active witnessing, and (d) ethical witnessing with social action; see brief descriptions of the four levels on a later page.

Participants receive an assortment of cue cards with short sample responses (about 100 cards of various response types). There are eleven conceptual categories, eight of which are different ways of responding to the offender, and the rest to victims, co-witnesses, and others not present at the scene. Participants use a stack of cue cards to choose the most appropriate or preferred ones as their responses to given scenarios. The list of the active witnessing response categories with sample responses is shown on the last page of this booklet.

**Learning Activities**

A.R.T. participants receive an assortment of response cue cards, and use what they consider appropriate as their preferred responses to given scenarios. They are also invited to add their own words or come up with unique responses. Learning activities include: (a) watching and discussing videotaped interviews with persons talking about their own experiences of racial discrimination, (b) studying cue cards and using various expressions and sentence stems, (c) role-playing racist or discriminating situations, and (d) debriefing and sharing personal learning and reflections.

**Benefits**

Through the active witnessing training, participants increase their awareness of racial discrimination, understand the experience of it from the victim’s perspective, and develop concrete and practical skills and self-confidence for responding to racist and other discriminating situations. Participants’ anti-discrimination competency improves quickly as their anti-racism vocabulary expands through the repeated use of almost 100 cue cards prepared for the training purpose. This training also heightens participants’ sense of social responsibility and their collective commitment to fighting racism and creating a safer and inclusive community.
Organizational Maturation and Community Development

When members of an organization participate collectively in this Program, the new ethical standard of active witnessing will begin to take place and will enhance positive organizational norms of supporting each other and not tolerating any type of discrimination and prejudice. People at workplace and community residents will become actively engaged in eradicating racial discrimination and appreciating diversity at work and in their community. Put simply, raising people’s awareness and commitment to active witnessing will increase individuals’ social responsibility and the organization’s accountability, and contribute to societal change.

Summary and Conclusion

The primary focus of the A.R.T. Program is on cultivating a self-identity as an active witness, and developing, expanding, and refining verbal and non-verbal skills and cognitive competencies, in responding to racial, ethnic, and cultural discriminations in interpersonal contexts. The unique feature of this social competency building method is its strong emphasis on “active witnessing.” The Anti-discrimination Response Training is designed to expand participants’ response repertoire and vocabulary to help them learn how to respond to various types of prejudice and discrimination from a witness perspective.

Needless to say, the training designed for bystanders will also be effective to prepare potential victims of discrimination to respond actively and to prevent the participants from becoming offenders. Also, active participation in the training is enhanced by the participants’ altruism (i.e., their positive desire to help others and contribute to the betterment of society and workplace). Further, it includes practice scenarios wherein prejudice is expressed from a minority group to the majority and between minorities, which reduces the development of a win-or-lose sentiment. The majority group is not set up to be always “bad guys.” Regardless of the ethnicity of the victim, participants learn to be effective, responsive, and active witnesses through the training. Societal improvement and organizational maturation can thus be achieved by both collective and individual effort to confront and correct prejudice and discrimination within us and in society.

The Power of Ten

Active witnessing is everyone’s choice and responsibility. It can help build a better community of the human race, based on mutual respect and commitment to humanity. If one active witness can encourage and empower ten other individuals to also become active witnesses in one year, it is the power of ten each year. Imagine that one individual can show the right direction to ten others, and that each of these ten individuals can do the same, and so on. We can start such a chain reaction leading to positive social change from right where we are, with a small action and a big heart in our daily life.

Based on Dr. Ishu Ishiyama’s presentation
(2000-5-30, Halifax Conference; revised 2002-8-18)
Appendix: Active Witnessing Response Categories with Examples

1. Assertive interjections (interruptions):
   • Stop it.
   • Wait a moment.

2. Expressing personalized emotional reactions:
   • I can’t believe you are saying this.
   • I’m surprised to hear you say such a thing.

3. Calling it racism or discrimination:
   • That’s racist.
   • It’s not fair.

4. Disagreement:
   • I disagree.
   • I don’t think it is true.

5. Questioning the validity of a statement or an over-generalization:
   • Always?
   • Everybody?

6. Pointing out the hurtful and offensive nature:
   • It’s a hurtful comment.
   • Ouch! That hurts.

7. Putting the offender on the spot:
   • What?
   • Could you repeat what you have just said?

8. Empathic confrontation:
   • You sound really annoyed.
   • Would you mind telling me how you are feeling?

9. Approaching and supporting the victim:
   • You are not alone. I’m with you.
   • This is a terrible thing. I’ll come with you. So, let’s get help.

10. Approaching externals (teachers, administrators, other third party members):
    • You are one of the teachers I can trust. Can I talk to you about something very serious?
    • I need to talk with you about what happened today.

11. Approaching co-witnesses:
    • Did you hear what I have just heard?