

## **‘DISCOVERY’, a Transformative Learning Tool to awaken the spirit of Self-enquiry.**

*J.M.Sampath*<sup>1</sup>

*Arpitha Associates Pvt Ltd, India*

*‘Discovery’ is a Values Clarification Transformative Learning Tool aimed to introduce basic human values to a person and to initiate a process of self-enquiry, which takes care of the need to learn to learn. The tool is presented in the form of a game using ‘snake and ladder’ with hundred parables/stories forming the backbone of the game. The eleven theme-based spirally evolving charts are included to inquire into specific dimensions like team building, creativity, self-esteem, leadership, etc. With exploration as the key methodology, the players are taken through three levels of learning – beginning with Explicit learning to Experience sharing to an Abstract conceptualization process. This leads the player towards a belief level change that is transformative in nature. Having been used over a decade and half, this tool has multiple uses in schools, organizations, and communities - both at the self-level as well as the group level.*

Key Words: Values Clarification; Self-enquiry; Transformative learning tool

### **Introduction**

In this information era, knowledge is accessed easily. Though everything is defined to the last detail with remarkable clarity and certainty, often learning becomes mindless due to our inability to absorb the essence, by getting caught with the certainty of the form. With speed and life’s innumerable variables, the coping mechanism seems to be through monotony rather than sensitivity, resulting in loss of learning opportunities.

This paper aims to describe a learning tool that has kindled the ‘Transformation’ process over a decade and a half amongst adults, youth and children at varied levels. The tool titled ‘Discovery’ has been designed in an easy to use game format with a reflective process built into it. The paper is aimed towards providing a clear understanding of the methodology of the tool, the theoretical basis on which the tool is built, the sharing of some of the users at an experiential level, and the multiple uses of the tool to initiate a process of ‘Transformation’ in the users.

### **Theoretical Construct**

#### *Learning – It’s meaning*

‘As the level of consciousness enhances it will no longer be the survival of the fittest, but the survival of the wisest (Sampath J.M. 2004). Learning, as noun, is meant to be ‘The process of acquiring knowledge and skill’ (Webster’s dictionary p.312) and Wisdom is meant to be ‘the ability to make right use of knowledge’ (Webster’s dictionary P.625). Smith (1982) refers learning to

1. The acquisition and mastery of what is already known about something.
2. The extension and clarification of meaning of one’s experience or
3. An organized, intentional process of testing ideas relevant to problems (P.34).

The concept of change is inherent in the concept of learning (Crow and Crow, 1963). Learning has also been seen as a change in the individual, due to the interaction of that individual and his environment, which fills a need, makes him more capable of dealing adequately with his environment (Burton, 1963 P.7). In the last two decades, there has been a keen interest in learning that brings in deep change and transformation. In the last fifty years there have been many research aimed at understanding adult transformative learning methodologies.

#### *Transformative Learning:*

A thorough or dramatic change in the form, character etc., is the meaning of the word ‘Transform’ as given in the oxford dictionary. The roots of exploration on transformative learning emerge from Adult learning theories. The inquiry had two streams. The scientific stream propounded by Edward. L. Thorndike through his publication ‘Adult Learning’ in 1928.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sampath.J.M, Arpitha Associates Pvt Ltd, [sampathjm@vsnl.com](mailto:sampathjm@vsnl.com) Presented at the Sixth International Transformative Learning Conference, Michigan State University, Oct. 6-9, 2005.*

The other was the artistic or intuitive / reflective stream propounded by Edward. C. Lindeman (1926) through his publication 'The meaning of Adult Education'. Lindeman was strongly influenced by the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Lindeman has stated that the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner's experience. 'If education is life, then life is also education. Too much of learning consists of vicarious substitution of some one else's experience and knowledge...Experience is the adult learner's living textbook' (P.9-10).

Located in the intuitive/reflective stream, the transformative learning tool described in this paper is titled '**DISCOVERY – an instrument that can make you look deep within**'.

#### *Theoretical construct of the Tool cum Game:*

For learning to be transformative in nature, it has to facilitate a 'Deep Change' (Quinn 1996). The change has to be at the core level of the individual and reflect in the behaviour of the person. If change has to be at a core level it should question the values/beliefs of the individuals. Consistent behavioral change cannot be effected without clarifying the values of the individuals (Sampath, 1999).

A value is a type of belief, centrally located within one's total belief system, about how one ought or ought not to behave, or about some end-state of existence worth or not worth attaining (Rokeach, 1968). Values are also termed as global beliefs that transcendently guide actions and judgments across specific objects and situations (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952).

The meaning of values, based on which 'Discovery' has been built is arrived through facilitating over 500 groups globally in gaining clarity on their personal values in the last decade. The meaning of values that has evolved during these processes has been – 'My Values are the beliefs I hold within myself that governs my behaviour in any given context. Some of these beliefs are known to me while others are not' (Sampath, 1999). People build their values and other cognitive maps out of their own personal experiences. A person's values are rooted in his / her personality, and also in the norms of reference groups and of the society to which the individual belongs. People interrelate their values and form value systems, which indicate their choices in their affairs. 'Even the acts and concepts that we apparently 'share' with others are at bottom individual and idiomatic' (Allport 1961 P.29).

Values Clarification process, since it works at a self-level, have been classified into 'Spiritual growth processes' in the past. In the East, the transformative learning processes have been focused towards questioning the past conditioning, through reflection and deeper level of introspection to expand the individual spectrum of consciousness. But largely, these processes have been directed towards understanding self through clarifying one's values. The evidences for these are from the Indian ancient scriptures, writings on Kriya yoga (Paramahansa Yogananda 1998) Zen philosophy, Buddhist teachings etc.

In the background of above review of literature, the process that most works in clarifying values as an ongoing learning process leading to transformative learning draws a direct connection to experiential learning process. It is also believed that as individuals mature, their need and capacity to be self directing, to use their experience in learning, to identify their own readiness to learn, and to organize their learning around life problems increases steadily from infancy to pre-adolescence, and then increases rapidly during adolescence (Erickson, 1950, 1959, 1964; White, 1959; Iscoe and Stevenson, 1960; Getzels and Jackson, 1962; Bower and Hollister, 1967; Cross, 1981).

## **The Approach**

### *Experiential learning*

Experiential learning begins with the experience followed by reflection, discussion, analysis and evaluation of the experience... From these processes come the insights, the discoveries and the understanding... All this is then conceptualized, synthesized and integrated into the individual's system of constructs which he imposes on the world through which he views, perceives, categorizes, evaluates and seeks experiences (Wight, 1970). Learning as a cycle begins with experience continues with reflection and later leads to action which itself becomes a concrete experience for reflection (Rogers, 1996). 'Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas and none of my own ideas are as authoritative as my experience. It is to experience that I must return again and again, to discover a closer approximation to truth as it is in the process of becoming in me' (Rogers, 1961 P.23). Kolb's model had made significant contribution to adult learning (Kolb, 1939). Jarvis (1987) comments that the belief that adult teaching should be grounded in adult's experiences and that these experiences represent a valuable resource, is currently cited as crucial by adult educators of every conceivable ideological hue.

This transformative learning material 'Discovery' uses 'Reflection' and 'Clarification' with 'Abstract Conceptualization' as key processes to stimulate transformation in individuals.

## Description Of 'Discovery'

### Aim / Objective

The primary objective of this tool is to introduce basic human values to a person and to initiate a process of self-enquiry, which takes care of the need to learn to learn. It also aims at giving the multiple facets of a 'Value' and in the process enhance our understanding of each value or value related attribute, quality or trait.

### Contents of 'Discovery'

'Discovery' is packaged in the form of a kit containing one general play chart, eleven theme-based play charts, a Story album and a User's guide.

### Rationale behind the use of the contents

#### The Story Album

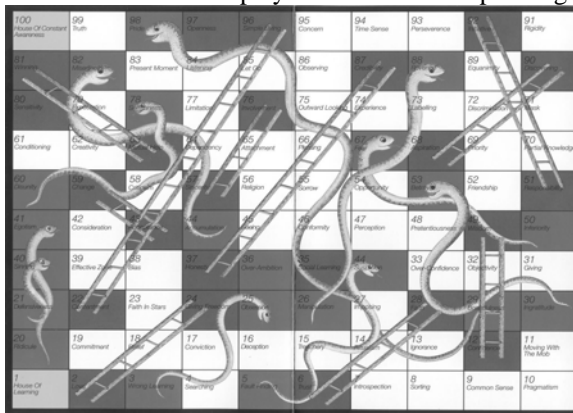
Discovery is built in the form of a game using parables and stories to initiate the thought about a value or attribute or quality, which are important to understand how to be a human. The Story Album contains 100 parables / stories that bring forth powerfully a value or an attribute or a trait that one needs to understand to be human. Values clarifications have been the outcome of the processes of reflection, enabling cognitive and moral development (Brookfield 1986; Schon, 1987; Senge, 1990; Mezirow, 1991).

Using stories / parables for values clarification is nothing new. Ancient stories and parables have been storehouses of learning. The Zen, Sufi, Biblical stories, Jatakas, Panchatantra, Hindu mythology, Aesop's fables and Chinese literature have used stories to facilitate better human understanding and thereby a deeper enquiry into the values. The Panchatantra, famous for stories on values was originally in Sanskrit language written anytime between 100 BC and 500 AD. They were formulated by a teacher called Vishnu Sharma, to teach worldly wisdom to the four dull-witted sons of a king in South India. Later it came to be known as the fables of Bidpai in Europe. Others like Aesop of ancient Greece, Phaedrus of ancient Rome and Jean de La Fontaine also collected and wrote many tales.

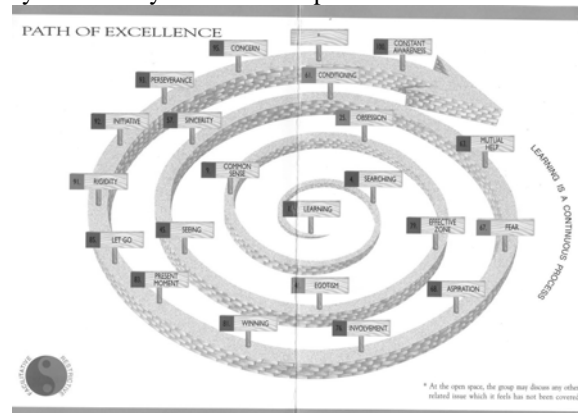
'The human heart seeks the truth in which alone it finds liberation and delight. Alas, the first reaction to truth is hostility and fear. But, caught in the trance of 'Once upon a time' the message gets across to listeners, because one can oppose the truth, but who can resist the story?' Vysya, the author of the Epic Mahabharata says, "If you listen carefully to a story you'll never be the same again. It is because a story will worm its way into your heart and break down the barriers to reality" (Mellow 1987 P.xxi). Richard Bandler and John Grinder who are pioneers in the area of Neuro-Linguistic programming in their book 'Frogs into Princes', prefer using metaphor artistically. 'I don't have to listen to clients' woes, and I get to tell very entertaining stories. Clients are usually bewildered, and often infuriated, that they have to pay me to listen to my stories. But the changes they want occur anyway...another way to make sure there is no dependency. You do things covertly that they don't have the faintest idea what you are doing and the changes they want occur anyway' (Bandler, 1979).

### Rationale behind the General play chart:

Discovery is primarily built as a Snake and Ladder game given in the General play chart. The chart has 100 boxes each of which represents a value / trait / quality or an attribute. The chart has 10 ladders and 10 snakes. While the ladders represent the values tending to be more positive, the snakes represent the values tending to be more negative. Each box on the play chart has a corresponding story in the story album that is provided in the kit.



(Fig1: A snap shot of the General Play Chart)



(Fig2: A snap shot of the Theme-based Play Chart)

The familiarity with the game is at once a comforting feeling for the Learners. This lets the Learners dwell into the deeper part of their selves from this comfort zone. Once the individual feels motivated from within to use the game, the process thereafter empowers the individual and the learning starts taking place at a subtle level. The visual symbol of snakes and leaders provide a clear picture of the effects of the positive and negative sides of life.

The stories in box 1 and box 100 have been made compulsory to all learners. Story 1 titled 'House of Learning' gives an insight into the process of learning and removes any kind of dependency by the learner on the teacher. The intension is that individuals who use this tool may see it from their own point of view and learning is not forced towards any conclusions. The story no. 100 is titled 'House of Constant Awareness' and it conveys the need to make learning a constant process. The purpose is that every learner needs to continue his/her learning and also be constantly aware of the process inside and outside the learner.

#### *Rationale behind the Theme – based play charts*

The 'Discovery' tool contains eleven theme-based play charts, related to Team-building, Leadership, Creativity, Excellence, Inter-personal relationship, Let go, Self-esteem, Change, Learning, Success and Communication. (Refer Fig.2)

The purpose of these theme-based play charts are to enable the individual to gain deeper insights of the various factors that facilitate and restrict development of these competencies. By providing focused exploration of a specific theme, the learners get to explore deeper into themselves through the parables/stories and discover the realities from varied angles while also building themselves based on their own reality. The themes have been chosen based on the need expressed by varied groups of people from different spheres of life and also the author's own bias.

The process in the theme-based charts opens with 'House of Learning' and branches into specific theme, depending on the subject under focus. The process comes to a completion when the group or the individual reaches the 'House of Constant Awareness'. The empty space that is provided before reaching this last house is given to allow the individual or the group to ponder over any issue, which they feel, has not been covered on the theme under focus. The visual layout of the play-chart lays emphasis on the supportive and restrictive factors in each of these themes.

#### **The Methodology Used To Initiate Transformative Process**

The process of using parables/stories to convey values has existed for long. But there was always a facilitator and a context around which the parables/stories were narrated and were left to the individual to process the learning at a later date. The extent of learning depended on the Individuals and the ability of the facilitator to carry across the message. Therefore over a period of time they got restricted to moral development. Over a period of time the ability of the parables to connect to real life diminished. This tool cum game process aims to bridge the gap between 'Learning in story' and "Learning in Life". When looked with a microscopic view, every specific event in our life is a story by itself.

The parables / stories in 'Discovery' are explored and processed at three different levels –

Level 1: Level of Explicit learning

Level 2: Level of Experience Sharing

Level 3: Level of Abstract Conceptualization through Introspection

##### *Level 1: Level of Explicit learning*

In this level there are three simple statements given which bring out the central theme of the story. While there is a fine difference among these statements, each of them carry the central theme of the story in it. Learners should choose one statement which each of them think is most appropriate.

##### *Level 2: Level of Experience Sharing*

In this level there are three options for a learner to share their own experience from their life, related to the character's experience in the story or share an experience of someone known to them. At this level, the parable/story goes into the background and the real-life story of the Learner comes into foreground. On one side it acts like a deep connectivity to self and on the other recapturing life's experiences enables a re-audit of the experience in the light of the value discussed. This process deepens the integration of the discussion into self and makes the process inside-out.

##### *Level 3: Level of Abstract Conceptualization through Introspection*

In this level, deep fundamental questions based on the value abstract as well as value related to one's self have been raised. From experience sharing the Learners move on to abstract conceptualization through deeper level of introspection. Significant personal learning entails fundamental change in Learners and leads them to redefine and reinterpret their personal, social and occupational world. In the process, adults may come to explore affective,

cognitive and psychomotor domains that they previously had not perceived as relevant to themselves (Brookfield, 1986, p.213-214)

*An Illustration of the three levels -  
Searching*

A neighbour found Nasruddin on his hands and knees near a lamp post, searching for something. The neighbour asked, “What are you searching for?”

“My key”,

Now, both men got on their knees to search. After a while the neighbour asked, “Where did you lose it?”

“At home”,

“Good Lord! Then why are you searching here?”

“Because it is bright here”.

**Level 1**

- A. We generally end up searching for things in the wrong places.
- B. Quite often we look for solutions in the wrong places.
- C. Solutions are always to be found where the problems crop up.

**Level 2**

- A. Share an incident wherein you found yourself searching for the solutions to your problem in the wrong place.
- B. Share a similar experience of someone whom you know.
- C. Share what prevents you from going to the root of a problem.

**Level 3**

- A. What is the nature of “Searching”?
- B. Where do I look for my solutions?
- C. How do I discover the root of my problem?

**Possible Outcomes Of Using Discovery**

The outcomes of the process are given in terms of the Learners reflections after using Discovery. The reflections are shared in the Learners own language to retain the originality and intensity of the reflection.

1. 16-year-old Boy in a youth workshop – “I realize I never thought about the way I was thinking”
2. Regional Advisor, United Nations, Bangkok – “I first read ‘Discovery’ six years back. Since then I have revisited the book several times. Each encounter unfolds something new; something precious and brings infinite joy. ‘Discovery’ would definitely be a baggage that will travel with me quite a distance in my life”
3. Director – Education, Training and Development, Human Resources, Ford Motor Company – “A key part of the learning process is reflecting on and understanding your view of the world. ‘Discovery’ is an excellent tool for helping managers seek a deeper understanding of their values and beliefs. I took ‘Discovery’ home to my family for their reaction. It was an instant hit. We use it as the basis for talking about and clarifying our values as a family.”
4. Director, Construction Company, India – “For a long time we have been hearing that the best management is self management. But how to do it? How to find out what I need to change in myself so that I become a better human being and continuously improve as a professional manager, son, brother, friend and generally as a human being. I have been using discovery on and off with tremendous results. I have been able to appreciate myself with all my follies and have positive improvement in all my relationships. The ability to say I agree that I have made a mistake and accept the same is a major change in me.”

**Conclusion**

Caught in the web of life, we become numb to how we are living our life. Discovery as a tool cum game initiates a process that sensitizes an individual to understand various facets of life that one is living. At an Individual level this game enables a step-by-step method for soul searching. When played in a small group it provides an opportunity to understand how each of our lives is woven with our own stories and how each experience we go through is a story by itself with potential to provide important learning’s from life. The approach Discovery takes is to move from being prescriptive to learning out of life through realization. Discovery, with its own structure and design has the ability to worm itself into self and throw up many a stark realities for the self. This leads to a truth true to being really human. Therefore this tool cum game can be used in a variety of ways. Primarily this can be used as a self-administered tool for deeper reflection by using only the story album; as well as a training / reflection tool in personal growth sessions.

The varied contexts include -

- The theme-based charts can be used in specific training programs like Team building, Creativity etc.
- In Executive Coaching - The coach could, with great skill, facilitate understanding of certain subtler issues.

- In Counseling – The facilitator can use the tool in the game format to open up the process with the counselee or use the format for deeper reflections.
- In Values Education – In school context, this can be used for discussions on values and to imbibe with ease the process of self-reflection among the students.

While these are some of the contexts in which this tool can be used, in the hands of a creative person focused on enabling Transformative learning for self &/or others, 'Discovery' has found multiple uses.

## References

- Allport, (G.W. 1961). *Pattern and Growth of Personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Pp.29
- Bandler, Richard & Grinder John. (1979). *Frogs into Princes*. Utah: Real People Press.
- Bower, E.M. & Hollister, W.G. (1967). (eds.) *Behavioral Science Frontiers in Education*. New York: Wiley.
- Brookfield, S. (1986). *Understanding and facilitating adult learning: A comprehensive analysis of principles and effective practices*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Burton, W.H. (1963). "Basic Principles in a Good teaching-Learning Situation." *Readings in Human Learning*. L.D. and Alice Crow (eds.). New York:McKay, p.7-19
- Cross, K.P. (1981). *Adults as Learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981
- Crow, L.D., and Crow, A.(eds.). (1963). *Readings in Human Learning*. New York: McKay.p.1
- Erickson, E.H. (1950). *Childhood and Society*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Erickson, E. H. (1959). *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: International University Press.
- Erickson, E. H. (1964). *Insight and Responsibility*. New York: W.W. Norton
- Getzels, J.W. & Jackson, P.W. (1962). *Creativity and Intelligence*. New York: Wiley.
- Iscoe, I. & Stevenson, W.W. (1960). (eds.) *Personality Development in Children*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Jarvis, P. (1987). *Adult Learning in the Social Context*. London: Croon – Helm.
- Knowles, Malcolm et al (2005). *The Adult Learner*: London: Elsevier.
- Kohlberg, L & Turiel, E. (1971). Moral development and moral education. In G. Lesser, ed. *Psychology and educational practice*. Scott Foresman.
- Kolb, David A. (1939), *Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kroeber, A.L. & Kluckhohn C. (1952). *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. Cambridge, M.A. Harvard University, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol.47
- Leigh, Robert,D. (1930). *Journal of Adult Education*. I, 2. April. p.123.
- Lindeman, E,C. *The Meaning of Adult Education*. New York: New Republic, 1926
- Mello, Anthony de. (1987). *The prayer of the frog. Volume – I*. Anand, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash Pp.xxi
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Panchatantra – [www.longlongtimeago.com/lita\\_fables\\_panchatantra.html](http://www.longlongtimeago.com/lita_fables_panchatantra.html) retrieved on 20/06/05.
- [www.indiaheritage.com/creative/litra/opdesh.html](http://www.indiaheritage.com/creative/litra/opdesh.html) retrieved on 20/06/05.
- Paramahansa Yogananda. (1998). *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Kolkata, India: Yogoda Satsanga Society of India.
- Quinn, Robert.E. (1996). *Deep change – Discovering the Leader Within*. California: Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Rogers, C.R. (1961). *On Becoming a Person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company
- Rogers, C.R. (1969). *Freedom to Learn*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.
- Rokeach, M. (1968). *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Sampath J M. (1999). *A sociological study of values clarification process in the development of organization culture*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Gujarat University.
- Sampath J M. (2004). *Inner Realities - Notes from the School of life*. Bangalore, India: Insight Publishers. p 160.
- Schon, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Towards a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Smith, R.M. (1982). *Learning How to Learn*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Cambridge.
- Thorndike, E.L. (1928). *Adult Learning*. New York : Macmillan.
- Webster's New Dictionary and Thesaurus. (1990). New York: Russell, Geddes & Grosset, Windsor Court.
- White, R.H. (1959). "Motivation Reconsidered. The Concept of Competence". *Psychological Review*, LXVI, Pp.297-333
- Wight, Albert. (1970). "Participative Education and the Inevitable Revolution". *Journal of Creative Behavior*, Vol4, No.4, Fall. P.234-282