

# Memories and Migrations: Metaphors for Maneuvering Mental Maps

by Art Costa

## MEMORIES

I remember my 6<sup>th</sup> grade graduation party. It was held in the large yard of the home of one of my classmates. His mom arranged a treasure hunt. She gave each pair of children a map with “Xs” marking the spot of each hidden treasure. All we had to do was to get oriented to the landmarks of the yard then link the landmarks with those on the map.

The “Xs” on the map served only as an approximate indication of where the treasure was hidden. Once we were confident that we were in the right location, we had to search, dig or otherwise uncover the treasure that was concealed there.

Each team could set their own course with no particular sequence implied. We found, however, that we headed for those treasures that seemed most obvious at first and then proceeded to those that took more ingenuity, insight and perseverance. We sometimes decided to move on to another location and return to one of the more seemingly futile searches at a later time.

Sometimes the treasure was obvious: on the surface before our eyes. They were often the most difficult to find! To locate other treasures we had to persist by digging, untangling or scanning from a different perspective: climbing a tree, looking under a rock or squinting through a magnifier.

The treasures themselves were almost secondary to the hunt. (I don't even remember what the prizes were. To this day, however, I vividly remember the process!) The real motivator was the intellectual challenge of entering the unknown territory, establishing our orientation, and piecing together the clues to guide us through the maze of obscure directions.

And so it is with Cognitive Coaching. We search for treasure in each of five locations on the maps of the planning and reflecting conversations. Sometimes the treasure is obvious, being apparent where the “X” is indicated. Sometimes it is on the surface—volunteered by the colleague. At other times it is obscure and the coach must dig and disentangle, search and persevere until the prize is revealed.

The coach navigates the map in no particular sequence. However, the most obvious primary “X” to dig for are the goals, outcomes and purposes of the event. Success in ultimately locating all the treasures on the map is often determined by finding this first prize that sets the direction for the remainder of the hunt. Even the goal statements, however, might be so ambiguous that considerable probing and clarifying is required until the treasure is revealed.

Coaches are focused not only on the prizes to be found in each location on the map; the searching process also intellectually challenges them. The genuine and enduring motivator is in mediating others to establish their own orientations, to find their own landmarks and to follow their own maps.