Embodied cognition: A field guide


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Abstract

The nature of cognition is being re-considered. Instead of emphasizing formal operations on abstract symbols, the new approach foregrounds the fact that cognition is, rather, a situated activity, and suggests that thinking beings ought therefore be considered first and foremost as acting beings. The essay reviews recent work in Embodied Cognition, provides a concise guide to its principles, attitudes and goals, and identifies the physical grounding project as its central research focus.

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The nature of cognition is being re-considered. Instead of emphasizing formal operations on abstract symbols, the new approach foregrounds the fact that cognition is, rather, a situated activity, and suggests that thinking beings ought therefore be considered first and foremost as acting beings. The essay reviews recent work in Embodied Cognition, provides a concise guide to its principles, attitudes and goals, and identifies the physical grounding project as its central research focus. A field spotter's guide to embodied cognition. I've spent quite a bit of time lately on the blog and Twitter talking about what embodied cognition is not. For example, it's not about moving through time (Miles et al, 2010), and it's not about leaning to the left (Eerland, Guadalupe & Zwaan, 2011). Embodied cognition is, remember, the radical hypothesis that we solve tasks using resources spanning our brain, bodies and environments coupled together via perception. If the research you are reading is primarily investigating a process that doesn't extend beyond the brain (e.g. a mental number line, or a thought about the future) then it isn't embodiment.