

Notes on Mental Maps

Learning the world around us starts when we are very young and continues throughout our lives.

Process of: sensory data>>abstraction/categories>>representation/symbols

Cognitive Mapping: gathering of environmental knowledge via our senses and direct experience of the environment

Initially things are understood from an **egocentric** perspective

Egocentric: self-centered; things in relation to us (we are the center)

As our experience of the environment grows we develop a set of locations in relation to our home and paths between those locations.

What is important is that:

- There is some kind of map in our heads
- And it is based on direct experience, egocentrism, and locations and paths

We still use this basic process of mental mapping when in **unfamiliar places**

Our mental maps seldom stay simple

- Larger areas are incorporated as we travel (more direct experience)
- We begin to annotate our direct experience with indirect experience
- Change from an egocentric to a **geocentric** understanding of environment

Geocentric: orienting ourselves to the external environment

Why does this geocentric mental map develop?

- Developmental and cognitive psychology
- Cultural/social factors

Our mental maps – whether inborn or culturally determined – is enhanced by the use of an established spatial frame of reference, which we learn from and can use with other people.

- Mental Maps are **not** like printed paper maps with accurate directions and distances.
BUT...despite this mental maps often work just fine, no matter how warped they are.

Geographical biases: what you know depends on where you live!

Name: _____

Mental Map Maze

The purpose of this assignment is to improve your mental picture of what the world is like. In other words, we want you to create a mental atlas of the world in your head. Why is this important? Simply, it is more convenient and useful to carry around a good mental atlas in your head than a real one you only use some of the time.

Directions:

In the maze below is a map of the entire world. Your job is to shade in the continents of the world as they appear to you. I will give you some help in getting started. The continents are smaller than you may think and Africa is right in the middle. Shade in the continents using a pencil because you will probably screw up a lot. Just use your mental to help you, until I give you permission to use your atlas.

