

The Mind Hidden in Our Hands

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Abstract

Our hands are always with us and are used for communication all over the world. When children do not have an established language model to learn from, they use their hands to communicate—they gesture—and these gestures take on the forms of language. In this role, the hands reveal the fundamental properties of mind that give shape to language. When children do learn an established language, they again use their hands to gesture. These gestures do not look like language, but form an integrated system with language. In this role, the hands can convey ideas not found in the language they accompany. In both contexts, gesture provides a clear view of the mind hidden in our hands.

About the speaker

Susan Goldin-Meadow studied at Smith College, where she earned a B.A. in 1971, and at the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned a Ph.D in 1975 under the direction of Professors Rochel Gelman and Lila Gleitman. In 1969-1970, she spent a year at the Institut des Sciences de l'Education in Geneva, Switzerland, where she studied with Professors Barbel Inhelder and Hermine Sinclair. She has been at the University of Chicago since 1976 and is currently the Bearsdley Ruml Distinguished Service Professor in the Departments of Psychology and Comparative Human Development. Her research focuses on the homesign gesture systems deaf children create when not exposed to language, and on the spontaneous gestures that hearing speakers produce when they talk and the role those gestures play in reflecting and shaping thought. She is an elected fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences, has just published a book *Thinking with Your Hands*.

