The Learning Body
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Success depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom.

Stevick, 1980: 4
1. The human brain and the rest of the body constitute an indissociable organism.

2. The organism interacts with the environment as an ensemble...

3. The physiological operations that we call mind are derived from the structural and functional ensemble rather than from the brain alone.

Brains are in bodies, bodies are in the world, and meaningful action in these worlds is in large part socially constructed and conducted.

“The body is in the mind”.

“Put very simply, cognition is embodied, language as a cognitive entity is embodied, and learning as a cognitive process can also be embodied.”

“Acting out word meanings helps school-age children to increase their L1 vocabularies.”

“Enacting or miming a verb resulted in better retention than explaining it.”

“Pronunciation asks for a physical learning and teaching style, a kinaesthetically insightful practice. It must help students to connect with the muscles that make the difference”.

Adrian Underhill, personal communication
Language is developed in context, as use in context shapes language resources;

Language is applied in context, as context selects the language action to be performed;

Language is adapted for context, as the experience of past language use is fitted to the here and now.

‘During conversations we imitate each other’s expressions, even each other’s syntactic constructions… If one person engaged in a dialogue uses the word “sofa” rather than the word “couch,” the other person engaged in the dialogue will do the same.’

“Extended systems theorists… reject the image of mind as a kind of input-output sandwich with cognition as the filling….

Instead, we confront an image of the local mechanisms of human cognition quite literally bleeding out into body and world.”

“Gesture … continuously informs and alters verbal thinking, which is continuously informed and altered by gesture (i.e., the two form a genuinely coupled system)"

(p.125).
Gestures are components of speech, not accompaniments but actually integral parts of it.

Types of gesture:

- deictic gestures (pointing)
- beats
- representational gestures
- pragmatic and interactional gestures
Gestures enhance learners’ communicative competence by:

- chunking information; adding emphasis to key information
- increasing redundancy and reducing ambiguity
- managing turn-taking
- as a communication strategy, to compensate for linguistic difficulties
- reducing cognitive load
- demonstrating empathy
“Gestures … occupy a unique position in human behaviour: they are bodily actions, but they are also cognitive actions”.

“Learning is more discovering how to align with the world than extracting knowledge from it.”

“An understanding of what goes on in the interactions is best arrived at by close examination of the talk and embodied behavior of group work participants”.
