



1st Jean Piaget Conferences

Theories of Development

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16h00

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From action to abstraction: Gesture as a mechanism of change

Abstract:

The spontaneous gestures that people produce when they talk have been shown to reflect a speaker's thoughts—they can index moments of cognitive instability and reflect thoughts not yet found in speech. Gesture can also go beyond reflecting thought to play a role in changing that thought—the gestures we see others produce can change our thoughts, and the gestures we ourselves produce can change our thoughts. In this talk, I consider whether gesture effects these changes because it itself is an action and can thus bring action into our mental representations. But gesture is a special kind of action—it spatializes ideas, even ideas that are inherently non-spatial, and it is representational and more abstract than direct action on objects. Gesture's representational properties may thus allow it to play a role in learning by facilitating the transition from action to abstraction.