of the whole body, it is evident that what should be first developed is a general physical efficiency.

VI. GESTURE

A. Definition

Gesture is that part of the speech code by which communication is accomplished through the visible activity of hands, arms, shoulders, head, and face. The difference between movement and gesture as the terms are used in this book is that gesture is restricted to apply to the speech activity of certain parts of the body, while movement is used to denote more general and total actions such as changes in posture and position. Lively conversation is largely made up of gestures.

Almost any activity of the instruments of gesture may at some time be effective, and, just as in the case of movement, not only gesture but absence of gesture is pretty sure to carry meanings. If hands, arms, head, and face are inert and immobile, they still carry meanings. Moving or motionless, they mean something all the time. No speaker can dodge the problem of gesture any more than he can dodge the problems of posture, movement, clothes, or a clean face.

B. General Principles of Gesture

There are certain rather definite conventional restrictions which have been placed upon gesture, certain general principles of effectiveness, widely accepted, to be neglected at the speaker’s own risk. Let us now consider some of these general principles.

1. Every Gesture Should be of the Whole Body

Gesture is not something to be added on to speech; it is an integral part of speech and should be trained into the total activity of the whole body. In gesture no joint or muscle liveth unto itself alone. All our gestures are affected by what the basic muscles do—those of the back, trunk, arms, legs, and neck. These muscles are the earliest to be mastered in infancy and their habits are more easily understood as speech signs, and such activity makes or mars the effect produced by the more delicate muscles of the hands and face. Very often the cause of awkwardness in the wrist or elbow may be found at the ankle, knee, or hip. The stiff hand positions of boys and girls are almost always the results of tensions in the larger muscles of the body. A gesture seldom is effective unless it originates in and is an integral part of a general attitude or activity of the body.

2. Gestures Should be as Graceful as Possible

Perhaps it would be more accurate to state the principle negatively and say that gestures should not be awkward. Awkward gestures call attention to themselves; they cease to be signs and are noticed as things in themselves. Gracefulness means that the action should be both easy and strong. In gesture the curved or broken line is more graceful than the straight line. Jerky, abrupt, and angular gestures are likely to call attention to themselves and away from the meaning.

2. Gestures Should Precede Utterance

We have seen that gesture as a part of general physical activity develops before voice and language. Men almost always speak first by posture, movement, and gesture; and after that by words. Watch others and see how this works. Reverse this order and you get comic and ludicrous effects. Say something with voice and words first and then add the gestures and see what happens. Tell someone, “The child was so tall.” Wait until you have spoken the words and then indicate “so tall” by gesture. This will prove to be funny because you have broken the law that gesture should come before voice and words. “Ideas are conveyed largely by suggestion; not by detailed spelling out of a message but by a flash, a picture. We flash an idea across and then spell it out in words to verify it.”