

LIVING TOGETHER: THE BODILY LIFE OF PRESCHOOLS IN CHINA AND THE
UNITED STATES

by

CHANG LIU

(Under the Direction of Joseph Tobin)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how preschools in China and the United States are sites for producing children with culturally appropriate bodily practices. By analyzing arrivals, meals, other everyday preschool routines, I examine how children, in each national context, learn to use, think about, and care for their bodies. The methodological orientation is primarily ethnographic, in the sense that the goal is to explicate the emic beliefs, knowledge, and practices concerning the body in preschools in China and the U.S., which I study by using a combination of video-cued interviews with preschool teachers and micro-analyses of video-taped classroom routines. Informed by Marcel Mauss' (1973) idea that the body is "man's first and most natural instrument" (p. 79), I explore how children learn to use their bodies in ways that Mauss called "techniques of the body" that are characteristic of the larger social groups to which they belong.

For example, the analysis of mealtimes suggests that children learn to eat in ways that are characteristic of the Chinese and US contexts, such as appropriate use of utensils, etiquette (i.e., which food can be eaten with hands), posture, and demeanor. Besides learning individual bodily practices, preschools are also places where children learn how to use their bodies in relation to others. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Erving Goffman's theories of the intercorporeal

aspects of embodiment are illuminating for understanding the choreography of bodies in a social space like preschools. Merleau-Ponty's (1968) conceptualization of "intercorporeality" and Goffman's (1963) analyses of the coordination of bodies in public spaces in mundane life are informative for understanding how children learn to eat, sit, and walk, not only as individuals, but also in coordination and synchronization with others. These bodily practices and discourses are related to Michel Foucault's (1986) concept of "the care of the self" and to what Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang (2005), following Foucault, conceptualize as "biopolitics," which they define as the role bodily practices play in social cohesion and self-cultivation.

INDEX WORDS: Preschool; Early Childhood Education; Bodily Practice; Bodily Techniques; Routines; Embodiment; China; United States

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the children, the parents, and the teachers who touch my life and help me understand the very beginning of a child's journey into this world.

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In July 28th 2012 when I took my first flight to the US, the plane was hovering over Atlanta and the endless green and gray extending on the vast land of Georgia leaped into my eyes. I was hit by a panic that I was not really ready for a trip to an unknown place, although it was a trip that I had planned for years. This dissertation would never have existed without the people who have supported, encouraged, and inspired me since the very first day that I landed in Georgia when I started a life of living elsewhere.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores how preschools in China and the United States are sites for producing young children with culturally appropriate bodily practices. It is a study of how children, in the context of their quotidian lives in preschools, learn to use, talk, and think about their bodies, and of the pedagogical strategies preschool teachers in both countries use to socialize children's bodies. It examines how these forms of embodied learning and teaching are connected to the production of children with certain kinds of subjectivities and modes of sociality that are not only intersubjective, but also "intercorporeal" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) and "spatial" (Goffman, 1971) (Crossley, 1995) (Crossley, 1995) (Crossley, 1995), and not only social, but also "biopolitical" (Farquhar & Zhang, 2005).

Contextualizing the Research: Questions, Purpose and Significance

In the last two decades there has been burgeoning interest in the humanities and social science in the body, embodiment, and materiality (Crossley, 2007; Csordas, 1990; Lock, 1993; Nevile, 2015; Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron, 2011). No longer regarded as a natural, self-contained entity, a vessel for the soul, or "entirely distinct" from the mind (Descartes, 1993), the body today is described by scholars as "historically contingent, informed by culture, discourse, and the political" and as something that "no longer stands in a tidy contrastive relationship with the mind" (as cited in Lock & Farquhar, 2007, p.2). This recasting of the body has implications for research in a range of disciplines, including education, and reflects a paradigm shift referred to as the "ontological turn," which demands that we think beyond binaries such as human/non-

human, discourse/material, and mind/body. The body, perceived as a hybrid terrain of practices, discourses, materiality, time, and space, presents itself as an object of study that invites description and interpretation.

To early childhood educators, the emergence of the body constitutes something of a return. Bodily experience and the materiality of the kindergarten classroom were central concerns of early childhood education from the start. Friedrich Fröbel offered children the *gifts*, a set of balls, wooden blocks, tiles, sticks, and rings that he created with the belief that children learn through manipulating material objects with their own hands and eyes. Maria Montessori, whose educational approaches have been carried to the present and still widely in use today, believed that bodily movements and learning are intertwined and advocated for including “sensorial experience” in early education with “sensorial materials” (Montessori, 1949):

Observations made all over the world have shown that the child demonstrates that movement helps psychic development, that development expresses itself in its turn by further movement and action. So it is a cycle, because both psyche and movement belong to the same unity. The senses also help. Without opportunity for sensorial activity the child is less intelligent. (p. 204)

Montessori’s idea that thinking and moving are a single process for young children is consistent with Jean Piaget’s emphasis on the *sensorimotor* nature of young children’s cognitive engagement with the world (Piaget, 1952).

This rich early childhood educational heritage of bodily practice and bodily theorizations has suffered in recent years for a variety of reasons, including a haunting moral panic and a privileging of the mind over the body and academic learning over play and social-emotional development (Hoffman, 2000; Tobin, 2004; Walsh, 2004). This led ECE researchers to lament

the disappearance of the body in ECE practice and scholarship (Tobin, 1997). Recent scholarship reflects efforts to bring the body back into early childhood education. Examples include paying attention to children's bodily experiences and expressions using video-supported multimodal analysis (Parks & Schmeichel, 2014) and shifting attention to the embodied, tacit, and material aspect of ECE practice (Burke & Duncan, 2014; Hayashi & Tobin, 2015). This dissertation attempts to continue this line of work.

Today in China and the U.S., the great majority of children have at least one year of preschool. Everyday life in Chinese preschools and American preschools are both organized in a similar flow of activities, mostly including arrivals, free play, large-groups, small-groups, meals, bathroom visits, exercises, and naps, which are referred as *daily routines*. In Lois Peak's study, *Learning to Go To School in Japan* (Peak, 1991), she found that the goal of cultivating culturally appropriate behavior, habits, and attitudes is less accomplished through carefully planned curriculum units than through a gradual process of socialization in group routines. In his study of the body in the organization of life in Japanese preschools, Eyal Sam-Ari (Ben-Ari, 1996) explored preschool daily routines as a set of "body projects" that are designed and organized to enculturate children.

Following in this line of work, this dissertation explores the enculturation of children's bodies in preschools in China and the US. More specifically, it examines the following questions: What are the bodily practices that children learn in preschools in these two countries? First, based on videos I shot in preschool classrooms in China and the US, I will identify, describe, and analyze daily routine bodily practices and look at how children learn to use their bodies both separately as individuals as well as in synchronization with others. Second, based on video-cued interviews, I will explore how preschool teachers in China and the U.S. conceptualize

the task of socializing children's bodies and the pedagogical strategies they employ to produce children with particularly bodily habits and attitudes.

Preschool, of all of the levels of schooling, gives attention to a particular pedagogy of the body. Preschool teachers need to teach children to sit, walk, and talk in a classroom, how to drink, eat, and dress appropriately, and how to make a space for themselves without bumping into each other when they move as a group. The body is an everyday topic and a concern for preschools in a way that isn't in other grades. What are the pedagogies that teachers employ for body socializations? What are the beliefs, knowledge, skills, and know-how concerning the body that teachers draw on in these pedagogical practices?

While the focus of my study is on bodily practices, I will also discuss how learning certain ways of using, thinking, and talking about their bodies have implications for the development of children's subjectivity. As Sigmund Freud tells us, "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego" (Freud, 1960, pp. 19–20). The sense of "who I am" is primarily derived from bodily experiences. My body is both something I have and, at same time, something I am. I have a body and I am my body. What, then, are the implications of bodily socialization for the development of subjectivity in 3 and 4 years old children?

There have been very few comparative studies in education that focus on embodied practice or make the body the central concept (Schreiber, 2015). I will examine similarities and differences between the Chinese preschool and the US preschool in bodily practices for eating, sleeping, exercising, sitting, and moving with classmates. For example, I will examine differences and similarities between *group calisthenics* ("guangbo ticao") in the Chinese preschool and *movement exploration* in the American preschool. Features of these bodily practices in each country can be seen more clearly when they are juxtaposed. For example, as an

everyday collective bodily practice in Chinese preschools, *guangbo ticao* raises questions for American preschools. Why is this practice nearly universal in China and rarely seen in American preschools? Are there any collective bodily practices in American preschools that serve the same purpose as *guangbo ticao*? And even though most American preschools do not have *guangbo ticao*, are there any other forms of bodily practices that require a synchronization of the bodies, such as choral singing during circle time? A comparative study facilitates noticing taken-for-granted features in how each country's preschools conceptualize the problem of socializing children's bodies, such as how during activities such as group exercise and story-telling, Chinese teachers emphasize self-critique, perfection, and virtuosity (Paine, 1990) and US teachers self-esteem, self-expression and fun (Tobin, Davidson, & Wu, 1989; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009)

This study aims to highlight the role of the body in early schooling and early socialization. In so doing, I wish to contribute to the body of ECE scholarship on the body. I also hope that this empirical and ethnographic dissertation will take theoretical understandings of embodiment that are vague, broad, and abstract and animate them with examples from Chinese and United States preschool classrooms.

Conceptualizing the Research: Theories and Literature Review

In this dissertation, I draw on several theorizations of the body.

Techniques of the Body.

Marcel Mauss is among the early scholars who established the body as an object of social scientific concern. Describing the body as “man's first and most natural instrument” (1934/1973, p. 79), Mauss argued that in each society people learn to use their bodies in characteristic ways he called “techniques of the body.” In his essay Mauss presented concrete examples, such as

how the French walk, eat, sit, and run with different gaits and postures from the English. He reasoned that these bodily techniques need to be learned and therefore that the transmission of these bodily techniques are essential to the child's education and include instruction in such quotidian aspects of life as how (and how not) to eat with one's hands, knife and fork, or chopsticks. Mauss suggested that techniques of the body vary not just from nation to nation, but also by gender, stage of life, and social class, and they shift from era to era. An example from Tobin et al.'s 2009 *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited* study is how the communal trough toilets seen in Chinese preschools in the 1980s were being replaced by seated toilets in stalls. Mauss' work provides useful concepts and implications for studying how preschools are key sites for socializing such basic bodily practices as eating, walking, sitting, sleeping, and using the bathroom in culturally characteristic ways.

Intercorporeality and the Spatiality of Embodiment.

Besides learning individual bodily practices, preschools are also places where children learn how to use their bodies in relation to peers with whom they spend time and share space. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Erving Goffman's theories of the intercorporeal aspects of embodiment are illuminating for understanding the choreography of bodies in a social space like preschool. Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) sees intercorporeality as the basic form of human being-in-the world, especially in contexts he refers to as "intermundane space" (p.48). Bodily techniques not only are conditioned by tradition, culture, and history, as Mauss suggested, but also by the rules and contingencies of the present. Merleau-Ponty reconceptualized intersubjectivity as "intercorporeality." People encounter each other through their bodies, using actions that are visible, perceivable, and other-oriented (Crossley, 1995).

Erving Goffman (1963) coined the phrase “the spatiality of embodiment” to conceptualize the coordination of bodies in public spaces. He examined how intercorporeal bodily techniques are employed in routine, day-to-day, face-to-face encounters, such as how pedestrians walking on a crowded sidewalk or getting in and out of an elevator negotiate their paths so as to avoid bumping into each other. Goffman’s analyses of the coordination of bodies in public spaces in mundane life is informative, both theoretically and methodologically, for my understanding of bodily practices in preschools, where children not only learn how to sit, talk, walk, run, and dance separately as individuals, but also in coordination and synchronization with others.

Intercorporeality and the spatiality of embodiment are related to the sense of group identity and membership that Sam-Ari (1997) and Fujita and Sano (Fujita & Sano, 1988) described in Japanese preschools, and that is a central concern of institutional early childhood education. In Chinese society, which is often characterized as collective and situated-oriented, preschools historically put an explicit emphasis on groupism and on “doing things collectively” (Tobin et al., 1989, p. 125). In the US, the mainstream culture is often characterized as independent and individual-centered (Hsu, 1981; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder et al., 2006). However, in the US, preschool daily routines are conducted with the expectation that children will learn to function as a community. Sam-Ari used Csordas’ (Csordas, 1993) term “embodied knowledge” to describe how children in Japanese preschools coordinate their bodily movements with the bodies of classmates when sitting down, lining up, walking, and dancing.

The Care of the Body.

In the everyday life of preschools, children learn bodily practices such as getting dressed, eating, using the bathroom, and washing their hands. At the same time, they also learn *about* the

body as they are introduced by their teachers and others to their culture's attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and values about food, etiquette, health, hygiene, attractiveness, and gender normativity. These bodily practices and discourses are related to Michel Foucault's (Foucault, 1986) concept of "the care of the self" and to what Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, following Foucault, conceptualize as "biopolitics," which they define as the role bodily practices play in social cohesion and self-cultivation.

A majority of Western scholarship on the body and schooling use Foucauldian concepts to describe schools as sites where children's bodies are disciplined and alienated through disciplinary technologies (Gleason, 2001; Harden, 2012; Johnson, 2000; A. Jones, 2001; L. Jones, 2013; Kirk, 1998; Kirk & Spiller, 1994; O'Farrell, 2000; Prout, 2000; Rossholt, 2009). For example, Kirk and Spiller (1994) used Foucault to reveal oppressive practices in Australian school everyday practices. They view physical activities, such as drill and gymnastics, as examples of Foucault's (Foucault, 1995) notion of "little practices" aimed at precise and subtle control of the body:

There were few times in drill or gymnastics lessons when pupil's bodies could escape the scrutinizing gaze of the teacher. . . Most of what happened in physical education lessons was akin to examining, since pupils were almost constantly visible, their precisely correct physical conduct, carriage and deportment the legitimate materials of teachers' work. (p. 91)

Reviewing autobiographies of adults who attended schools in Canada between the 1930s and the 1960s, Gleason (Gleason, 2001) described the tension between submission to authority and individual choice and freedom as central to the Canadian childhood. He used Foucault's concepts of the power of normalization and discipline to analyze this tension and reveal the role schooling plays in constructing particular "bodies" through its normalizing activities, including

corporeal punishment. Robin Leavitt (1994) extended this Foucauldian discussion of lived bodily experience to infants and toddlers in a childcare program. Drawing primarily from Foucault, she identified the emergence of day care centers as a new form of institutional governing of children's bodies and the process of early socialization in the West as the disciplining of children's emotional and bodily expressions. For example, she used Foucault's (1975/1995) concept of "disciplinary time" to describe how children have to accommodate their bodies to the temporal order of the day care centers, which both requires the correct use of time and the correct use of body. Notions of "the docile body" and "discipline," are used to critique the role of schooling in the loss of children's creativity, autonomy, and individuality.

Farquhar and Zhang (2005) use Foucault in a somewhat different way. In their study of *yangsheng*, a form of shared dance and exercise that senior Beijing citizens enthusiastically engage in public parks and apartment complex ground, they both use Foucault to theorize the biopolitical nature of *yangsheng*, and use this Chinese bodily practice to challenge Foucault's critical view of such regimes of bodily discipline by suggesting it is "a popular form of life that both draws on, and departs from, biopolitical techniques of rule" and "a body that both supplements and resists modern sovereign power" (p.303).

In this dissertation I use Foucault more in this way, which is consistent with my anthropological perspective. While acknowledging the power adults hold over children and the discursive forces that normalize certain versions of the body and certain appropriate bodily techniques, I also focus on enculturation, in other words, the necessity of all societies and cultures to help children develop culturally appropriate and recognized bodies. The perspective I take in this study is less negative and pessimistic than the version of Foucault used by Leavitt

and Kirk and more informed by ethnographic studies of bodily practices in preschools such as Sam-Ari's that views these practices as forms of enculturation.

Design and Methodology

The methodological orientation is primarily ethnographic, in the sense that the goal is to document and explicate beliefs, understandings, knowledge, and practices concerning the body in preschools in China and the US. My method uses a combination of video-cued interviews with preschool teachers in China and the US, micro-analysis of the video footage, and analysis of artifacts such as classroom furniture and signage, and texts, such as position statements of preschools and parent handbooks.

This is a site-based ethnographic study of the everyday bodily practice of two preschools. One of these preschools is in China and the other in the US. But I am not claiming that these schools represent national or cultural archetypes. I present examples of routine bodily practices from these two preschools side by side not to encourage binary comparisons ("the Chinese are like this, the Americans like that...") but rather to provide readers with thick descriptions of two preschool programs and thereby to encourage reflection on the meanings behind these practices in each setting. I provide context and offer some possible explanations for the practices in these two schools, and some, but by no means all of these explanations are based on aspects of Chinese and US culture. I agree with Hayashi and Tobin (2015) who write:

Our argument is not that culture explains *every* thing that happens in preschool classrooms, just that culture can explain *some* things. Or to put it another way, among the factors that interact to produce classroom practices we need to consider culture. . . We need to consider how such dimensions of the social as bureaucratic, political, economic, and demographic

factors press on cultural pedagogies and how these cultural pedagogies are never only cultural. (p.156)

Hayashi and Tobin here draw on Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (2005), that calls for detailed descriptions of the human and non-human actants that interact to produce a particular social phenomenon. Latour argues that to suggest that something is an "actant" in a particular event or practice, you have to show that it leaves a trace and that it in some way makes a difference. In this dissertation I attempt to identify the various factors, including cultural beliefs and practices, that act to produce such routine events as the way children say goodbye to their parents at DCC and the way food is laid out for lunch at Zizu.

Sites

This study takes place in two preschools: *Zizu You'eryuan*¹, a university affiliated program in Shanghai and the Darcy Child Center (DCC), which is affiliated with a university in Georgia.

Zizu You'eryuan.

¹ In this paper, instead of following a typical way of translating "you'eryuan" as "kindergarten", I chose to use the original Chinese term "you'eryuan" because "kindergarten" in some English-speaking countries, including the US, refers to first year of elementary school. In Mainland China, *you'eryuan* refers to programs that are independent from the elementary school system and that provide early education and care to children three to six years old. Similarly, Chinese teachers are addressed by the children they teach by the title *laoshi* and their last names. Throughout the paper, I use the the term *you'eryuan* to write about programs in China and the generic term "preschool" when the writing is about issues beyond China.

Zizu is a public preschool providing full-time early childhood education and care to 3 to 6-year-olds. Zizu was built and open to the public for enrollment since the fall of 2011. Located in a high-tech industrial zone, Zizu mainly serves children of university faculty and staff, engineers and other white-collar professionals, and middle-class families from the surrounding residential communities. The children come from families of both long term residents and the *xin shanghai*ren (“the new Shanghainese”). The school’s stated goal is to cultivate children who are energetic, creative, playful, and eager to learn and who are seen as “the hope and future of the people and the country.” With a newly-built spacious three-floor school building and a well-equipped outdoor playground, Zizu is home to 13 classes with 331 children and 56 adults including 28 teachers and 13 *baoyuyuan* (“caregivers”).

The Darcy Development Lab.

The Darcy Child Center (DCC) offers full-day programs for children aged 8 weeks to 5 years old. Built as a nursery school eighty years ago, it mainly serves university employees and students and the surrounding middle-class community. DCC provides an environment that encourages educational research and development. Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), DCC is devoted to providing a play-based curriculum and developmentally appropriate educational experiences to every child who is seen as unique in personality, development, and learning style and possesses special talents. The school has a total of 93 children enrolled in two infant classes, one young toddler class, one older toddler class, and a preschool class, and a multiage class.

I chose Zizu and DCC as the two sites for this site-based ethnographic study for several reasons. First, both Zizu and DCC have good reputations in their community and a curriculum and pedagogy that is recognized as progressive in each country. Zizu, like every public preschool

in Shanghai, follows the mandated Shanghai Early Childhood Education Curriculum Guidelines and the national ECE guidelines, standards, and policies; DCC aligns itself with NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and uses the High Scope Curriculum, which are both well received and widely adopted in preschool settings across the United States. The philosophies and practice of Zizu and DCC would not be considered as out of the range of normal or "best" practice in each country.

Second, Zizu and DCC have some common structural and demographic features that can facilitate comparison. Zizu and DCC both serve a mixed group of university affiliated families and members of the larger community, most of whom would be considered as middle and upper middle class families in each society. It would be problematic if Zizu was compared with a Head Start program, or DCC with a rural you'eryuan in China's less economically developed regions. The parallel social economic status of the population in each school make Zizu and DCC comparable. They both embrace a child-centered teaching philosophy, advocate developmentally appropriate practice and inquiry based learning, and follow a play-based curriculum. Their classrooms have similar daily routines, including arrivals, free play, meals, lessons, recess, outdoor activities, and departures. It is on the micro level of classroom practices that they differ from each other in nuanced ways.

Third, because they are tied to universities, Zizu and DCC both have experience serving as a site for research. Directors and teachers in the two preschools welcome researchers, feel comfortable sharing their perspectives, and look forward to learning more about themselves and each other through being studied. Because the methodological orientation of this study is primarily ethnographic, the goal, is not to evaluate which preschool is better, but to explicate the

implicit cultural knowledge, beliefs, values, and know-how that teachers use to explain and justify their practices.

I am making no claims that DCC and Zizu are typical preschools of their countries or that Mr. William is a typical American teachers or Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi are typical Chinese teachers. I do not claim that these two preschools “represent” each nation, a claim more aligned more with the quantitative social science research tradition. Rather in the tradition of ethnography, I have selected as my field sites preschools that are not “atypical in the sense of being perceived in their communities as odd or extreme” (Tobin et al., 2009, p. 8). In countries as large as the US and China there are huge variations in types of preschools, levels of provision and resourcing, and the kinds of communities served. In countries where education is as hotly debated and fraught as in the US and China there are significant variations in the pedagogical beliefs and practices of early childhood educators.

More specifically, this study was conducted with teachers and children in the Orange class, a *xiaoban* (“a class of the youngest groups”) of Zizu and DCC’s multiage class. The Orange class, located on the first floor of Zizu’s stylish three story building, is one of the five *xiaobans* at Zizu. The Orange class in the summer of 2015 became the home for 28 children. According to the mandated enrollment policy made by the Ministry of Education, the child must be by three-years-old by September 1st to be eligible for a spot in *xiaoban*. Although the 28 children of the Orange class all reached three before September 1st, 2015, they varied in age by almost a year: the youngest just had his 3rd birthday one week before school started and the oldest had his fourth birthday on the second school day. In the December of 2015 when I visited Zizu for recruitment and pre-fieldwork, 26 children out of 28 were attending school on a regular basis: one girl was on sick leave for the entire winter; a boy was on a long vocational break leave

with his parents. All of these 26 children, including 12 girls and 14 boys, were recruited into this study upon parents' approvals. Most children of this group had no prior experience of being cared or educated in settings other than home, except for one boy, whose parents enrolled him into a daycare program run by a private business for half a year "to get him ready for you'eryuan." For most children of the Orange class, it was their first time to experience school, where they are expected to share space and spend more than 6 hours a day with 20 or more peers and adults other than their parents or grandparents.



Figure 1-1. The Orange class at Zizu

The three adult informants from the Orange class are *Hu laoshi* ("Ms. Hu"), *Ji laoshi* ("Ms. Ji"), and *Du laoshi* ("Ms. Du"). This was also the first time that Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi were paired up to be each other's *daban* ("teaching partners"). Du laoshi is the *baoyuyuan* ("care provider") of the Orange class, who takes the majority of responsibility in maintaining the hygiene of the classroom, such as cleaning the tables and floors, sanitizing toys and towels, and

serving the meals. If nothing unusual happens, they will loop with this group of children for three years, a tradition followed by almost every you'eryuan in Shanghai. Hu laoshi, in her early 30s, is a graduate of one of the top programs of early childhood education in China, where she got both her bachelor's and master's degree in Early Childhood Education. In the summer of 2015, she just finished a three-year loop with a group of children who graduated in June, 2015. Starting her teaching career at Zizu the same year when Zizu began recruiting children, Hu laoshi is heading for her fifth year as a teacher and getting ready to apply for *yougao*, the senior professional title of you'eryuan teachers in China. Having won several teaching awards on the district level, she is on the right path to be named to the rank of "experienced teacher," and then, as her director expects, to grow into an "exemplary teacher." Ji laoshi, a few years younger than Hu laoshi, is a recent graduate from Tianjin Normal University with a bachelor degree in Early Childhood Education. Like Hu laoshi, teaching in Zizu is her first job and this is her second year as a you'eryuan teacher. Her first year was spent with a *daban* ("children in the oldest age group") who graduated in June. This was her first year to work with the youngest group of children. Unlike previous studies conducted in Chinese you'eryuan that usually only recruit teachers as participants, I also consider the care provider as an important informant for my study because of the role she plays in children's daily routines, especially with the youngest group, for whom the provisions of physical care are seen as more important than for the junior and the oldest group.



Figure 1-2. Mr. William’s class at DCC

The multi-age class at DCC, also known as Mr. William’s class, is located on the ground floor of a five-story brick building two miles from DCC’s main center on the university campus. This classroom, with an outdoor playground for its exclusive use, was previously home to a Georgia public Pre-K class funded by the state Lottery and run by DCC. In 2015, when DCC decided to withdraw from participating in the Georgia’s Public Pre-K system, the multiage class moved from the main center into this space. The lead teacher, Mr. William Stone, has been teaching this multiage class since 1996, when it was first established as a Head Start class. Less than 10 years ago, the funding from Head Start was withdrawn, but DCC decided to maintain it as a multiage class. To be eligible for enrollment, the child must be 3 years old before September 1st for one of the 3 years old spots or 4 years old for one of the 4 years old spots. In the fall semester of 2015, Mr. William had a group of 18 children with four 4-year-olds and 14 3-year-olds. For a few of the four 4-year-olds, this was their second year with Mr. William; for the rest

of the class, this was their first time to be in this particular class and with Mr. William. Unlike the children of the Orange class, every child, all but one of the children in Mr. William's class had classroom experience in a daycare setting.

Mr. William's class has an internationally diversified demographics with immigrant families from China, South Korea, Iran, India, and Pakistan. A majority of the group are children of the university affiliates. All 18 children, including 10 girls and 8 boys, were recruited into this study upon parents' approvals. The adult informants are Mr. William and his two assistant teachers: Ms. Shannon, and Ms. Kelly². Mr. William, who has been a preschool teacher for 20 years, has a rich and cross-disciplinary academic background in theater performance, art, speech communications, gender studies, and early childhood education. Ms. Shannon has worked at DCC for 9 years. This was her fifth year to work with Mr. William in the multiage class. Ms. Kelly, who got her associate degree in early childhood education from a local technical college, has been working at DCC for 14 years. She was familiar with the site of the classroom but new to the multiage group. She joined this multiage teaching crew in the fall of 2015.

Mr. William is in many ways an unusual US teacher, and not only because he is a man. He acknowledges that some US preschool teachers would find him on the extreme end of the child-centered, tolerant pedagogical continuum. He is also unusual among US preschool teachers in having taught preschool for over twenty years. Mr. William received his early childhood education training in an era when the field of early childhood education was emphasizing progressive, child-centered pedagogy, from a program that emphasized creativity. Hu laoshi,

² I refer to the Chinese teachers in this dissertation using the title *laoshi* after their family names and to the US teachers using their first names because this is most often how they are addressed and referred to by their colleagues and by the children they teach.

who holds bachelor's and master's degrees from one of China's top early childhood education and care programs, is certainly not representative of the average Chinese preschool teacher.

I would argue, however, and this is the argument of this dissertation, that while there are huge variations in preschools and in preschool teachers within each country, that there are also differences between DCC and Zizu as preschools and between Mr. William and Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi as teachers that are characteristic of differences between China and the US in beliefs, discourses, and practices for the bodily enculturation of young children.

Data Generation

In this dissertation, I employ different kinds of data— field notes, video recording, ethnographic interviews, material artifacts, and various forms of text including state policies, curriculum guidelines, parent handbooks, public discourses, and popular literature. My core methods are the use of video as data for micro-level analysis and the use of video as cues to stimulate reflections and discussions, a method developed by Joseph Tobin and his colleagues for their studies, *Preschool in Three Cultures: Japan, China, and the United States* (1989) and *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited: China, Japan, and the United States* (2009). My method differs from that of Tobin et. al. (Tobin et al., 1989, 2009) in being primarily focused on bodily practices; by continuously filming for several days in a row and spending more time in observing and conversing with teachers and children in addition to the days of filming; and by doing more in-depth interviews with the teachers where I asked them to comment specifically on scenes capturing bodily practices.

Shooting classroom videos.

The purpose of shooting videos is, as Timothy Asch (Asch, 1986) stated, to capture experiences that go beyond text and represent the object of inquiry in different forms. A video method served this study well as it allows for attention to bodily practices. In this study, videos were made and employed in different ways to address each of the research questions. First, by filming the everyday life in the preschool classrooms, I produced a rich body of ethnographic footage recording daily routine bodily practices. I logged and analyzed these unedited videos as data for micro-analyses of how children learn to use their bodies and the bodily practices that children are being socialized into in each country's preschool.

I then edited footage of each preschool into a 20-minute film that shows a typical day focused on quotidian bodily life. The purpose was to create something “close to the experience of a field observer” (Asch, 1986, p.43) to be shared with a future audience. These two films I used as video cues to provoke reflections and comments from teachers and children with whom I conducted focus group interviews. I explain more about this method in the following section.

For comparative analysis, the ideal plan would be to shoot videos in each classroom around the same time in their school year. However, the plan was unfeasible for me because Chinese preschools and American preschools start and end their semesters at different times of the year. I shot the footage of Zizu the last week of December, 2015—the fourth month of their school year; the footage in Mr. William's classroom was shot during March, 2016—the seventh month of their school year.

Before starting video making, I spent two weeks in each classroom to get familiar with the teachers, children, their daily routines, and the settings. During these days, I arrived early in the morning, usually before the arrival of the first parent-child dyad, stayed throughout the

morning, took a lunch break when all children went to nap, came back before they waked up, and stayed throughout the afternoon until the last child was picked up by the parent and the teachers finished the log of the day and got ready to leave the classroom. During my visits, I took notes, played with children, helped with classroom activities, had conversation with teachers from time to time, and talked to parents when they dropped off and picked up their children. I took this process as an opportunity to introduce myself, get to know my informants, and also get ideas about the filming coming after, such as what I want to record, where I should put the cameras, when I should move the camera from one space to another space, when to use wider shots and when to use close-ups, and how to deal with technical issues such as batteries, lights and shades, and the quality of sound will be captured. A few days before videotaping, I brought video equipment, including two cameras, two tripods, and a set of wireless microphone and speaker to the classrooms. The cameras were set up on tripods and left running to let the teachers and children get used to them.

Filming at each preschool started on the Monday of the week. I shoot 3 days in Mr. William's classroom and 5 days in the Orange class due to inclement weather when outdoor routines were cancelled, to get enough footage to make a film that shows a typical day in each classroom with typical bodily routines. On formal video shooting days, I began filming with the first child's arrival, and then kept shooting throughout the day until the last child was picked up. I recorded scenes of bathroom visits, free play, snacks, morning meetings, large-groups, small-groups, exercises, lunch, naps, pick-ups. Throughout the day, I left my cameras running to capture the flow of the day continuously, unless the batteries needed to be replaced or children moved from indoors to outdoors. The two cameras either recorded the same event from two different angles or were placed on different side of the classroom to record two simultaneous

events. I filmed a total of 60 hours of footage of the Orange class and 48 hours of footage of Mr. William's class.

Multivocal video-cued interviews.

In this study, videos served not only as data but also as tools to provoke discussion of my research questions. This is an adaption of *multivocal video-cued ethnography*, a method developed and extended by Tobin and his colleagues (Tobin, 1989; Tobin et al., 2009). In the two Preschool in Three Cultures studies, the researchers edited their ethnographic footage down to 20-minute long films that each reflects a typical day of a preschool in Japan, China, and the United States, had preschool teachers from each country watch the three films, and used the videos to stimulate teachers to reflect on their own practices and comment on each other's. This method, known for its powerful way of explicating insiders' folk theories and emic understandings, has been employed to study teaching as a cultural practice (Anderson-Levitt, 2002) and more recently teaching as an embodied practice (Burke & Duncan, 2014; Hayashi & Tobin, 2015).

My method follows Tobin et al.'s (1989; 2009) ethnographic concern with the quotidian life in preschools by editing footage into short films that show the flow of bodily activities in typical days in preschools; it differs from theirs by highlighting the body in the everyday life of preschools. I selected scenes featuring daily routine bodily practices from each preschool, such as group bathroom visits and group exercise in the Orange class and morning circles and movement explorations in Mr. William's class, and edited them into two 20-minute long films that each shows the flow of bodily practices in the quotidian life of the two preschool classrooms. The two films were shown to the teachers and children in each preschool as cues to facilitate discussion.

I conducted video-cued focus-group interviews with the three teachers from each preschool and asked them to both reflect on their own bodily practices and make comments on each others. The interview started with open-ended general questions such as: Does this look like a typical day in your preschool? What do you think about the daily routines in the other country's preschools video? What did you find surprising? According to their responses, I then followed up with more specific questions, such as, "Where did this practice come from? Is this something the curriculum tells you to do?" and "What is the main purpose of this bodily activity?" I also showed the two edited movies to my American colleagues who are experience early childhood educators and asked them to share their ideas and thoughts about the practices captured in the videos. In addition to interview with adults, I also invited children from each classroom to watch the two films and facilitated discussion about what they see about themselves in the film and what other children do in the other film. In this dissertation, I did not include interview transcripts with children but only transcripts with teachers and ECE experts into my analyses to address the research questions.

Approaches to Analysis

Video-based microanalysis.

The analysis of videos began with logging, identifying, and describing short segments of videos from the footage that show children learning bodily practices and teachers teaching bodily practices. Then, I conducted side-by-side microanalyses of clips from the Chinese and US footage of children's arrivals and separations with parents, mealtimes, morning meetings, exercise, nap, and practices of bodily care.

Mauss' notion of bodily techniques and Merleau-Ponty's notion of intercorporeality not only gave me a conceptual framework to think about children's socialization of the body, but

also implied a method to study and analyze how the bodily techniques are communicated from teachers to children and how they are exercised in the quotidian flow of social interaction, which is demonstrated by Goffman's analysis of mundane bodily practices such as walking in a crowd or finding a seat on the subway. My analyses also draws on Bruno Latour (Latour, 1996), who encourages us to include attention to non-human actants, which in my study includes gates, hallways, toilets, rugs, cubbies, soft toys, dishes, serving spoons, blankets, and shoes and socks (actants that are a challenge for three-year-olds in both China and the US). My work also follows in the tradition of studies of how children are socialized into the physical routines of everyday life such as tooth brushing (Tulbert & Goodwin, 2011) and cleaning (Fasulo, Loyd, & Padiglione, 2007) by a choreography of objects, verbal interactions, physical gestures, and constructed space.

Analysis of interviews transcripts with classroom teachers.

I transcribed, coded, and interpreted the interviews using a Bakhtinian approach, which treats texts, including focus group interview transcripts, as "a social phenomenon" and every word as a meaning system (Bakhtin, 1981; Vološinov, 1976). I see utterances collected from interviews as reflecting not merely or primarily the intentions of the individual speakers, but more as the locus of discourses individual speakers draw on from the larger society. This study privileges emic understandings and beliefs expressed by teachers and children in each culture and looks for patterns and common themes. But following the Bakhtinian approach, I am not looking for uniform, coherent ways of using, talking, and thinking about the body, but instead, expecting and embracing ambiguities, inconsistencies, and tensions.

CHAPTER 2
SEPARATION



Figures 2-1 a & b. Separation at DCC and Zizu

It is 7:45 a.m. at DCC. Cassie’s morning routines are almost done. Her father, Jacob, dropped her at school and walked her into the bathroom to get her hands washed. He puts her backup shoes into her cubby and put a cone-shaped birthday party hat on her head as Cassie requested. Caught by a princess book that Daeun is holding, Cassie walks away from Jacob, who is calling after her, “Come here and give me a hug?” Cassie, as if not hearing the call, leans over to Daeun and asks her eagerly: “Is that Cinderella?” Ms. Kelly comes over and takes the book from Daeun. They put their heads together and look at the book to see who the princess is. Jacob stands a few feet away and watches them smilingly. Cassie wants to know why the princess was hiding in the woods but Daeun does not want her book to be read at this moment. “Well later on when Daeun is ready, we will read her book and we will remember why they hide her in the woods.” Ms. Kelly explains to Cassie. “May I give y’all a hug and go?” Jacob steps forward and

asks again. Cassie turns back and stumps to her father. Jacob squats down and takes his daughter in his arms. “I love you two,” he kisses the doll in Cassie’s arms and kisses Cassie on her cheek (see Figure 2-1a). “Have a good day,” Jacob releases his arms, stands up, and takes his way to the door. Cassie cocks her head slightly to one side, pouts her lips, and follows Ms. Kelly around. “Oh, you need a hug,” Ms. Kelly empathetically puckers up her face, “Come on here,” Ms. Kelly spreads out her arms to Cassie. “Cassie, is it OK?” Jacob stops and turns around, “Cassie, what’s wrong?” He walks a few steps back and looks at his daughter with concern. “She just needs a hug,” Ms. Kelly puts her arms around Cassie and holds her sit on her laps. “More than one. OK.” Jacob sighs and smiles, “It’s OK.” “You’re OK Cassie?” His feet take a step towards the door but his body still lingers. “Yes,” Ms. Kelly gives Jacob an encouraging smile and gently pats Cassie on her back, ‘How was your gymnastics?’ “OK,” the father relaxes and laughs, “Have a good day.” With that he walks out and closes the door.

It is 7:45 in the morning. Yue Yue and her grandfather arrive at Zizu you’re yuan. They walk straight towards the check-in machine at the gate, one behind the other. Yue Yue holds her attendance card and taps it on the reader. “Tick, tick,” the reader responds. “OK,” grandpa takes over the card, steps back, and waves at Yue Yue, “Bye-bye.” Yue Yue does not move but rolls her body from side to side. “Hurry up and go in,” grandpa places a hand on Yue Yue’s shoulder, slightly turns her body around to face the entrance of the main building, and sends her off with an almost imperceptible push (see Figure 2-1b), “Go, we are good baby.” Cheerfully, Yue Yue runs into the courtyard without looking back. Grandpa watches her run away and then leaves.

These two scenes are from the edited preschool videos that are used as cues for interviewing teachers and children at Zizu and DCC. They each capture a typical moment of morning drop-off at each preschool: An American father tries to give his daughter a hug before

he leaves; a Chinese grandfather waves goodbye to his granddaughter and encourage her to go in with a gentle push. Despite how different the scenes look like, they are similar in depicting a key ritual in preschools that children experience in both cultures: Separation, which is literally the separation of child and adult bodies.

I suggest that the terms “hug” and “push” merit deeper analyses, as they each feature a culturally distinctive way of separation that marks the transition of the child from home to school. Why did Jacob insist on giving Cassie a hug before he left? And how did he manage to do the “hug”? Why did Yue Yue’s grandfather stop outside the school gate and wave goodbye without moving forward? Why did he give Yue Yue a push? what meaning does this push carry? The core argument of this chapter is that a moment as fleeting, quotidian, and seemingly uneventful as a hug or a push is emotionally laden, symbolically rich, and deeply cultural. In this chapter I provide microanalyses of these two and other scenes from my footage that show cultural bodily practices during morning separations and other transitions, sentiments and attitudes expressed about the body, and techniques used to socialize children’s bodies in culturally recognized ways.

Space, Architecture, and Transitions

In the mornings at preschools in China parents usually part from their children at the school gate (Tobin et al., 1989, 2009). At Zizu, most parents stop in front of the sign-in machine, which is used to record children’s attendance. Every morning, as the school gate opens, the sign-in machine is plugged into power and placed outside the gate. As if by mutual consent (there was no rule keeping them out when I filmed) parents rarely step into the courtyard (see Figure 2-1b). Instead, they routinely stop a few steps away from the gate to adjust children’s clothes, hand over school bags, and say goodbye (see Figure 2-2b).



Figures 2-2 a & b. Morning drop-off at Zizu

After this send-off, some parents immediately turn away and leave while stand near the gate long enough to see their children walk across the courtyard and into the school building. The gate, the guards in uniform, the sign-in machine, and the color-contrasted edge of the cement ground and the red rubberized courtyard mark a clear boundary line that physically separates the two life worlds: Outside there is family life; inside there is school with teachers and classmates. Children are expected to cross the line on their own.

Entering the gate, on the right hand, there is a line of sinks against the wall where children wash and dry their hands before going into the building (see Figure 2-3).



Figure 2-3. Wash hands at the sinks

Around this area there are usually one or two teachers who are responsible for the *zao hu dao* (“morning guidance”), which means supervising children through the morning routines.



Figure 2-4. Greet teachers



Figure 2-5. Ji laoshi stands aside as children wash their hands

Most children walk through these routines by themselves while teachers stand aside and watch (see Figure 2-5). They pull up their sleeves, wash their hands under running water, dry their hands with a piece of clean towel, and dispose the towel into a bin labeled “used.” They then walk across the courtyard, enter the lobby, and line up for the morning health check (see Figure 2-6).

School nurses check their eyes and throat to see if there is any redness or inflammation and their hands to see if they are clean and the nails well-trimmed. Then children get a small round chip that they carry to their classrooms. They get a red chip if they arrive on time and are healthy and good to go, a green chip if they arrive late, a yellow chip if the child is on medications and will need help with taking medicine.



Figure 2-6. Morning health check

After the morning health check, children go to their own classrooms in different directions. They greet teachers met in the hallway and put their chips into a slots on a chart hanging on their classroom door. The chart has 26 slots, each decorated with a child's name and photo (see Figure 2-7).



Figure 2-7. Put the chip into the slot

Children continue to turn into the hallway where each classroom has a set of open wardrobe and shoe case. Children put their schoolbags in place, take off their jackets, and change to their indoor shoes (see Figure 2-8 and Figure 2-9). Then, finally, they enter the classroom, join the teachers and classmates, and start the day.



Figure 2-8. Put away schoolbags



Figure 2-9. Change to inside shoes

At Zizu, the separating of the child from parents and transition to school is a series of precisely orchestrated routines, each a little ceremony of “de-familializing” and “schoolizing” occurring in a sequence of spaces that symbolically express the progression of transitions. The space, architecture, and customs help facilitate the separation and transition. These clearly-defined routines notably mark the distinction between home and school. The slot in the pocket chart that awaits the chip and the cubbyhole in the shoe case with the child’s name symbolically give the child a position to place him or herself in alignment with others and declare his or her membership to the class.

Here DCC differs from Zizu in the greater casualness and ambiguities of the transition process from home to school that are both afforded and encouraged by the space and classroom ethos.

At DCC, parents and children walk either hand in hand or with one closely following the other all the way straight into the classroom (see Figure 2-10 a). At the door the child waits for the parent to enter the password and push the door open, as they would enter their private home (see Figure 2-10 b).

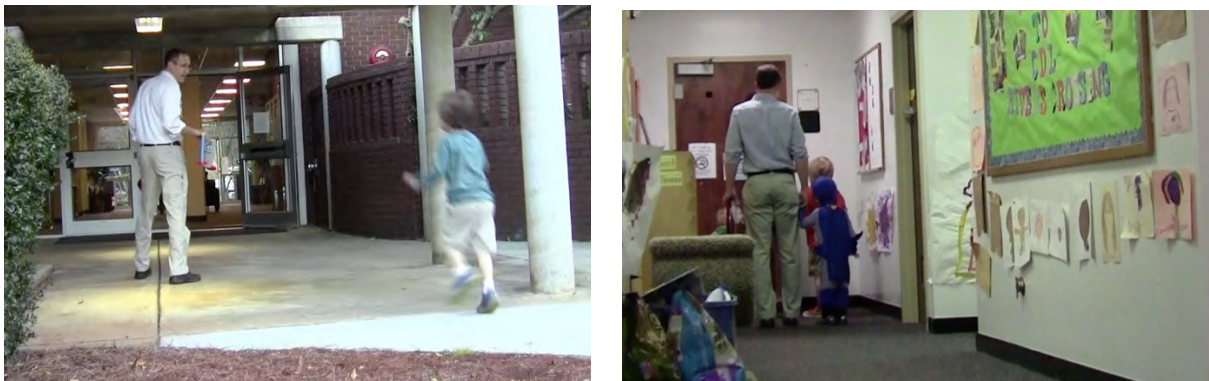


Figure 2-10 a & b. Parents walk children to the classroom

As they enter the classroom, they greet the teachers and children who have arrived and then do their morning routines: Answer the Question of the Day, put away the child's belongings, take off their coats and hang them up, and wash the child's hands (see Figure 2-11).



Figure 2-11. Morning routines at DCC

The parent-child dyad moves the classroom around to complete these chores as they would do at their own house. With parents in close proximity, children find themselves

simultaneously home and not-home. From time to time, the child may run away to chat with the teachers or play with classmates and run back to the parent for attention and care. Cassie is at school with the three teachers and her 17 classmates now but still is the Cassie at home with mommy and daddy. The parent-child dyad does not break as soon as they arrive at the preschool but continues, maintaining the physical and emotional closeness: A father comes in with his son and reads him books and build blocks; a mother arrives with her daughter late in the morning and stays with her through lunch. The attention, affection, and care that children enjoy being with their parents are carried all the way from their home into the classroom. The transition of the child from home to preschool does not formally mark itself as “completed” until the moment of separation when the parent and the child kiss each other goodbye.

Soft edges.

At DCC the transition from home to school is neither temporally marked nor spatially bounded. With a rather loose schedule and a family-friendly ethos, a transition could take as short as two minutes or as long as half an hour, when the parent lingers in the classroom. The teachers are supportive of these choices. They want the parents and children to see the place “not like a factory where you come in, eat, sit, and leave” but instead as a place like home where one stays. “We do a lot that tries to bring the family in,” Mr. William explains, “We do try to make it as homey as possible. And I think that’s what people look for. They look for soft edges. They look for, you know, pillows to sit on.”

“Soft edges” here literally refers to textiles products such as pillows and cushions that add softness and comfort to the room. But I read Mr. William’s comment also as referring, figuratively, to the soft edges between preschool and home: There is no sharp edges to mark a clear distinction between the worlds of preschool and home. We can read a concern lurking in

Mr. William's words that preschool can be a place less warm and safe than home and therefore too harsh for young children to experience. We can see a similar concern in Ms. Kelly's empathetic description of children's arrival each day at preschool as requiring them to switch:

Into that mood of being in school and around peers and ready to kind of make that. . . social, social, that's the big thing, right? You've come in from being at home with just your mom and you kind of have to come in to be social, you have to be. . . it's like a forest, almost a forest...

In Western children's stories such as the Grimm's fairy tales, the woods is often portrayed as a place of excitement and scariness. To go into the woods is a metaphor for a dangerous and challenging journey where one has no idea of the outcome, as in *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. By comparing coming to preschool to entering a forest, Ms. Kelly expresses some deeply held concerns about preschools as places that are unnatural and risky for young children. Such doubts have been looming in the American society since the beginnings of preschool, and especially since the World War II period when more women took jobs outside the home which led to an increasing need for institutional care and daycare programs, and preschool became a focus of controversy about women's employment, gender equity, social welfare, and childrearing (Tobin et al., 1989). John Bowlby's work on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1960a) and Mary Ainsworth's on children's reactions to the "stranger situation" (Ainsworth, 1979; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970) lent support to the belief that the best way to rear a child is to keep the child in the warm care of the mother. Empirical evidences from psychological reports claimed that separating young children from their mothers will cause anxiety and stress that may significantly affect the child's cognitive, emotional, and social

development. Preschool was seen by nature as a strange situation that is unpleasant and harsh for young children.

Concerns about the vulnerability of young children when faced with separation and stranger situations is still a discourse in American society, one that can be read in the efforts made to soften the edges in the classroom layout of DCC and other preschool classrooms. With a bathroom, dining tables with chairs around, a kitchen (playhouse), and furniture, the classroom mimics the basic arrangement of a white middle-class American home. The room also has “nooks and crannies”—tiny, cozy, and quiet spots, such as the loft and the sofas near the books (see Figure 2-12). “We made it very comforting, very inviting with the pillows and the cubbies,” Ms. Kelly explained to me. These “nooks and crannies,” as Mr. William believes, are set up for “slow starters”—children who are reluctant to do the morning routines and who need some time, a spatial and temporal buffer, before they are ready to interact with classmates or teachers, somewhere they can just sit by themselves until they are ready.



Figure 2-12. The loft and book reading corner at DCC

In the preschool, most space is public, visible, and freely accessible. To make the setting less institutional feeling and panoptic, Mr. William adds nooks and crannies that are remote from the centers of attention and interaction. These are sheltered, small areas big enough for only one

or two children to enter at a time. These spaces make the room less public and more private by providing the kind of privacy and seclusion children can enjoy in their bedroom or another special place at home.

Mr. William’s classroom space is organized and maintained by ritual bodily practices that are foreseeable and obligatory. Everyday each child puts away their things into a cubbyhole with their name tag (see Figure 2-13); they each take naps at a regular spot; and they eat snack and lunch at their usual seats at the table. The cubbyholes, nap spots, and dining seats anticipate children’s personal belongings and bodies. Here the children can claim that “this is my spot.” This spatial arrangement indicates mutual knowing, sustained bonding, and gated access—markers of a relationship that Erving Goffman (1971) calls “anchored relations.”



Figure 2-13. The cubbyholes at DCC

Earlier in this chapter I described the morning routines at Zizu, such as putting away schoolbags and getting inside shoes from the cubbyholes, each a little ceremony of “entering the school” and further detaching the child from the home. The cubbyholes at DCC are similar

practically as a storage space but different symbolically. Along with the loose schedule, the residential layout, and the spaces that reserve privacy and solitude, the preschool makes a concerted effort to soften the edges and provide children with home-like warmth, safeness, and sense of belonging. In this “homey” space, the boundary between preschool and home is greatly obscured. With the over-lapping presence of parents, teachers, and peers, children are multi-bonded (see Figure 2-14). Compared with Zizu, the transition from home to preschool at DCC is ambiguous, unbounded, and less saliently marked, not clearly defined until the last moment when the child and the parent hug and kiss each goodbye.



Figure 2-14. Mr. William is reading to Sam at a two-seat couch when James is reading with his father and aunt at the book corner; Ajay is playing with George and Elad.

“Give me a hug”



Figure 2-15. Cassie looks away when her father calls her for a hug

After putting away Cassie’s shoes and walking her to the bathroom, her father Jacob doesn’t leave right away but instead lingers. Several time over the next seven minutes, when he leaves the classroom Jacob approaches Cassie to give her a hug. At first glance, Jacob’s hesitance to leave seems merely to be an expression of a father’s concern about and love for his daughter—a hug is the paradigmatic Western way of saying goodbye. But a frame-to-frame analysis of Jacob’s interaction with Cassie and of the interactions that follows as one of her teachers and a classmate get involved shows the complexity of how this father manages his separation from his daughter and how the involvement of teachers, peers, and such material artifacts as toys and books combined to produce a culturally patterned form of separation.

Hugging and kissing goodbye.

During Jacob’s stay, he makes several attempts to hug Cassie. Each of these attempts has its own character. The first attempt occurs just after the two stop at Cassie’s locker to get a Minnie Mouse doll and a stuffed animal puppy from her locker. Cassie says to Jacob: “Puppy

stays here,” as she lets him take Minnie Mouse. Cassie holds the puppy out towards Ms. Kelly, and says: “Woof woof!” (see Figure 2-16 a).



Figure 2-16 a & b & c & d & e & f. Cassie walks away

As she does so, Cassie shifts her gaze and reorients her body away from Jacob and towards Ms. Kelly. The joint attention that the father-daughter dyad had at home and continued

as they complete the morning chores comes to a sudden end. The transferring of possessions also indicates that separation is in the air and a change of social arrangements is occurring. Ms. Kelly proposes to make a birthday banner to celebrate Cassie's pretend birthday and she points towards the tables where children usually do art activities (see Figure 2-16 c). Kelly's body, gaze, and gestures all invite Cassie to join her in walking over to the tables. As Cassie follows Ms. Kelly, she synchronizes her attention, body, and rhythm of steps with Ms. Kelly's (see Figure 2-16 d). Jacob, who is left standing by the cubbies, slowly walks towards the classroom door, temporarily disappears from the camera (see Figure 2-16 e). At this moment the physical distance between Jacob and Cassie increases. The father-daughter dyad is disassociating as Cassie shifts her primary engagement to her teacher and her classmate. The intimate dyadic connection of father and daughter is dissolving and being replaced by a constellation of a teacher and two children. It is at this critical juncture that we hear Jacob's voice call off from off-screen: "Do you wanna give me a hug?" Jacob's plaintive tone suggests this is a request rather than an inquiry about Cassie's wishes. Cassie ignores this request as she follows Ms. Kelly. Cassie's attention is also diverted by a princess book her classmate Daeun is holding. Cassie turns her body to the left, away from her father, in order to get a closer look at the book.



Figure 2-17. Jacob stands aside and waits

Jacob does not continue his walk toward the door. Instead, he turns and walks back toward the girls and Ms. Kelly, and from a few feet away watches closely as they discuss the princess book (see Figure 2-17). Ms. Kelly joins the conversation by saying: “It was Sleeping Beauty.” Seeing an opening, Jacob steps forward and extends his right arm towards Cassie. However, neither Cassie nor Ms. Kelly seems to notice Jacob’s second attempt to get a hug. Kelly continues her discussion of the book and Jacob withdraws his outstretched arm, retreats a few steps, and stands and waits, with a half smile on his face.

The conversation continues as Cassie asks why Sleeping Beauty was hiding in the woods. Daeun is not willing at this moment to let Cassie read her book. “Well later when Daeun is ready, we will read her book and we will remember why they hid her in the woods,” Ms. Kelly assures Cassie, concluding the conversation. Stepping forward again, Jacob makes Cassie an

offer: “Wanna give me a hug and I’ll go?” Cassie turns, and walks towards Jacob. Jacob squats down, reaches out, and takes his daughter and her toys into his arms. Saying, “Give me a hug,” he bends down and kisses the puppy in Cassie’s arms. Now sitting on the floor on one knee, Jacob says: “I love you two.” Kissing Cassie on her cheek, he says: “Have a good day!” (see Figure 2-18). Jacob then ends his hug, stands up, and quickly walks to the door.



Figure 2-18. Jacob hugs and kisses Cassie goodbye

I see here in Jacob's actions an example of how a father manages the separation with his daughter and socializes her into this cultural bodily practice of "kissing/hugging goodbye." This form of separation mirrors the sending-offs that can be seen at railway stations and airports. In the US, near train stations and at school drop-off zones, cars are often allowed to stop briefly to discharge passengers in a particular area that is marked by a road sign that reads "Kiss-and-Ride" (See Figure 2-19). The sign exemplifies a quotidian embodied ritual of American society: a kiss, and more often a hug, before parting.



Figure 2-19. A kiss-and-ride sign at a drop-off zone outside an American elementary school

In circumstances with busy traffic time and space are rigorously managed in a way that gives a clear definition and fluidity to the separation of loved ones. In American early childhood programs such as DCC where parents not merely just drop off their children at the school entrance but walk them into the classroom, the time and space of separation are less clearly defined and, especially early in the year, parents and children have not settled into a predictable routine for when and how to do their goodbyes.

Jacob's three attempts to hug Cassie is an example caught on video of a moment of socialization and synchronization of bodily practices. Jacob's first attempt is less a request for a hug than a complaint from a father who finds Cassie's separation to be too quick and

insufficiently affectionate. It is as if without a goodbye hug Jacob is not free to leave the classroom. Their separation requires a physical marking. Jacob comes closer for his second goodbye attempt. He stays a few steps away from Cassie and Ms. Kelly looking for a break in their conversation where he can jump in. Finally, Jacob steps forward to further reduce the physical distance between him and his daughter. As Ms. Kelly finishes her sentence, Jacob takes a step toward Cassie. Jacob squats down and as Cassie leans in he extends his arm to draw their torsos together. Cassie slightly tilts her head and nuzzles her face into her father's the neck. Jacob squeeze her body into his arms, holding tight for a second or two. Then Jacob releases his arm and reorients their bodies face to face. Holding Cassie by her back to maintain close physical proximity, Jacobs first lowers his head to kiss the puppy in Cassie's arms and then kisses Cassie on her forehead.

This microanalysis shows how Jacob precisely uses what Marcel Mauss (1973) calls "techniques of the body" to lead Cassie in an affectionate hugging/kissing goodbye routine. Although it appears natural, this microanalysis shows the routines complexity. Cassie must learn not just how to use her body to say goodbye to her father, but also how to do so in a manner synchronized with his, which requires negotiating timing, proximity, posture, and gaze. A hug is not a solo bodily practice but rather one that is "intercorporeal"(Merleau-Ponty, 1968), one that requires interconnected, coordinated, and synchronized bodies. Children are socialized into these individual and intercorporeal bodily techniques through the everyday routine of hugging and being hugged at separation, a process that Rogoff (1990) terms "guided participation" and Lave and Wenger call (1991) "legitimate peripheral participation." In Cassie and Jacob's separation episode, instead of giving direct verbal instructions on how to give her father a hug, Jacob uses his body and voice as tools to guide Cassie and reorient and reposition her body.

In addition to such tacit and intercorporeal guidance, children also learn from explicit verbal exchanges, as in these example from the video:

James sits at the table with his father. They watch and talk about the ant farm until his father decides that he has to go to work. He says “OK,” and stands up, lifting James from the floor, and holding him high in the air. James wraps his arms around his father’s neck and snuggles his head against his father. “Oh, that was a good hug,” the father says as he pats his son’s back and kisses him on the cheek: “I love you too, little man.”

“OK, Sam, say goodbye to your brother,” Sam’s mother says as she is about to leave the classroom. Sam, in a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle towel he wears as a cape, rushes over to his younger brother, spread his arms, and wraps the little boy up tightly in the towel. “But don’t hurt him!” the mother adds hastily. She places her hand on the younger boy’s head and strokes his hair gently.

In these two episodes, the boys both get explicit feedback from their parents concerning the way of handling a goodbye hug. James’s hug is well-received by his father as a “good hug,” which implies that the intensity of body touch is appropriately managed and communicates strong affections. Sam’s hug is perceived by his mother, who carefully monitors the process aside, as risky and dangerous to his younger brother. By placing her hand on the younger boy’s head, the mother is using her body to buffer the roughness of Sam’s hug and provide the younger boy with physical comfort. In the two scenarios, we see how parents as expert huggers guide children’s novice bodies in conducting socially appropriate hugging goodbyes.

The pout and the transition of the body.



Figure 2-20. Cassie makes a pout

When I went back to the original footage from that morning that didn't make into the 25-minute video, I noticed something I had missed before. After hugging and kissing Cassie, Jacob still lingers. Before he gets to the door, he stops and walks back. He is caught and prevented from leaving by the look on Cassie's face and by the interaction that follows. How should we make sense of the interaction following the hug?

As Jacob walks to the door, Cassie tilts her head to one side, purses her lips, and pivots to track the movement of Ms. Kelly as she crosses the classroom and passes in front of her (see Figure2-20).

Turning toward Cassie, Ms. Kelly says, "Oh, you need a hug!" Cassie slightly nods.

Ms. Kelly says, "Come here," as she extends her hand to Cassie.

From the doorway Jacob calls out: "Cassie, are you okay?"

As he takes a few more steps towards Cassie, Jacob says: "Cassie, what's wrong?"

“She just needs a hug,” Ms. Kelly chuckles. She takes Cassie into her arms and holds her on her lap.

“More than one, okay,” Jacob sighs with a smile, “It’s okay.”

“Is that a birthday pout?” Ms. Kelly asks Cassie as she gently pats on Cassie’s back.

“Do you have a birthday pout?” (Earlier this morning Cassie announced that today is her pretend birthday). Cassie raises up her puppy and shows it to Ms. Kelly.

“Puppy? Puppy makes you feel better?” asks Ms. Kelly as she strokes Cassie’s back.

“You’re okay Cassie?” Jacob takes a step towards the door and then stops.

“Yes,” Ms. Kelly smiles at Jacob and continues stroking Cassie’s back.

“Okay,” Jacob chuckles, “Have a good day.” He walks to the door and disappears behind it.



Figure 2-21. Ms. Kelly has Cassie sit in her lap and talks to her

If Jacob was only looking for a hug to complete the ritual practice of saying goodbye to his daughter, then why did he hesitate in the doorway before leaving? Why does the look on Cassie’s face concern him so? What does Ms. Kelly mean when she explains to Jacob that Cassie “just needs a hug,” given that Cassie had just received one from her father? While it appears that

Cassie and Jacob have completed the morning separation routine, the father does not want to leave until he sees that his daughter is happy. When she pouts, he can't leave until he sees a teacher comforting her.

I played this video clip to the teachers and asked them about Jacob's lingering:

Kelly: Dad has to finish that transition to make sure that Cassie is okay to be left here. She is comfortable. She is safe. She is okay. Because he kept saying "Are you okay?" I think a lot of times if they know they are sitting in our laps, they are comfortable; they are feeling—what's the word I am looking for. . . (look to Mr. William)

William: Secure.

Kelly: Secure is a good word. They are feeling secure. Their parents feel secure about that transition and they are ready to go. Because I think sometimes we think about the kid, making sure they are feeling secure, but sometimes the parents are the ones that are feeling a little insecure.

William: Right.

Kelly: I mean, as a parent, sometimes I feel a little insecure about the transition of telling my child goodbye: "It's time for you to go." So I think as a parent, Cassie's dad is a good example, that he does want to make sure that the transition is fully done before he leaves. Some parents just get in and sneak out, but he makes sure that the transition is completely done before he leaves. I think it shows the strong relationships our fathers have with their children.

The teachers empathize with the father's feelings, appreciate the strong parent-child relationship revealed in the interaction, and acknowledge his lingering as an effort to assure that the transition has been completed. What is not explicitly stated in their comments is that the

transition from home to preschool is viewed as a difficult task for both parent and child, who are both seen as emotionally fragile and in need of support. The hug provides this sense of support for both of them.

During transitions teachers look for cues from parents:

William: I always look for the parents to give me the cue. “Are you ready to leave?” “Are you trying to leave?” Sometimes it’s very difficult to read that from another adult, because they are not really certain what kind of message they are sending you or if they are even sending the message.

Shannon: Sometimes you can see the body language in them and then a lot of times we will cue each other as teachers. We will be like: “Hey, help them out so they can leave.” And so then one of us will go and help that child.

The cues could be as subtle as a push or as straightforward as handing over the child’s body.

William: Sometimes you can tell like if a parent is walking with their hands on the child’s shoulder and kind of, very subtly pushes the child in front of them. That’s a big indicator I think. And then you have parents, do you remember Zach? Like his parent, Thomas, literally, will place him in your lap. And he will say: “Mr. William, can Zach sit with you for a while because I am gonna have to leave.”

Shannon: Well then you also see that Pushan (Nier’s father) doing that with Nier (a boy newly enrolled into Mr. William’s classroom in the new school year) sometimes. Like one day last week, Pushan was like “I am gonna give you up to Ms. Shannon, you know, just so we can go.” So I mean you will see Pushan doing that a lot, sometimes go and hand him off to one of us.

Earlier in this chapter I described the space, architecture, and morning routines at the two preschools and analyzed how they interact to support different kinds of transitions. That analysis showed how children, momentarily and spatially, experience what Kagan and Neuman (1998) conceptualize as a “horizontal transition,” which they define as the (dis)continuity of experiences that “children have between different periods and between spheres of their lives” (1998, p. 366) as they move from a place called “home” to a place called “preschool.” A transition is literally a transition or handing over of the child’s body. In Cassie’s case, she is first hugged by her father and then held by the teacher, her home-to-preschool transition encapsulated in the transition from the parent’s arms to the teacher’s lap. For the child, the transition from home to preschool is from physically clinging to and being held by a parent to physically clinging to and held by a teacher. This horizontal transition is temporal, spatial, and intercorporeal.

When Cassie’s hug with her father ends and Ms. Kelly reaches out and pulls Cassie in for a hug and then places her on her lap’s arms, Cassie’s engagement shifts. This shift from connection to her father to her teacher as a source of comfort and pleasure is a shift of “cathexis,” a term that Sigmund Freud used to describe the primitive attachment an infant develops first to the breast and then to the mother (Freud, 1989). In psychoanalytic terms, as they transition from home to preschool, children shift their cathexes and form new object relations; they learn to transfer the pleasure and warmth of the parent-child relationship to other interpersonal relations and learn to enjoy their ties to their teachers and classmates and other non-kin.

To check on the typicality of Cassie’s transition scene, I showed this clip to two American colleagues who are early childhood education experts:

Bob Capuzzo: I would say it's very typical. That's very common. I think the parent was sort of like hanging out. He said goodbye, then he came back to make sure she was okay. From the teacher's side, it is like: "Just leave. She is going to be fine of course." But then I am probably guilty of this if as a parent. When I drop off, it is so different on the parent side of it. Even though I am a teacher, it is hard to just leave your kid there and you just want to make sure they are okay. I think it gets easier when you know that teacher Kelly is gonna take care of your kid. Well, it's sad.

Janna Dresden: I think that's very typical that often it's parents who have as much separation problems as do kids. In this country, most of the separation problems, by no means all, but a good portion of them, are the parent's issue rather than the child's. Or the parent is not handling it appropriately. It wasn't horrible, but it is something you see a lot.

Although Janna Dresden is more critical of the parent here than is Bob Capuzzo, they both see the scene as typical and agree that separation is a common problem for preschoolers and their parents. The thoughts and concerns provoked in US viewers by the clip are consistent: "feeling insecure" when telling one's child goodbye; describing drop-off as "difficult" and "sad;" and criticizing parents who have "as much separation problems" as do their children. A paper published on *Young Children*, the leading practitioner-oriented journal in the field of early childhood education in the US, suggests how teachers should ease the separation process for toddlers, infants, and families:

Be there to support the everyday goodbyes. Hugging, kissing, crying, waving at the window or door, saying "I love you"—all allow feelings to come out in the open. Emphasizing that Mom or Dad or Grandma will be back is very important, because young children are not always sure that is so. Since separation is a central concern in early childhood, teacher

support may be required throughout the year. When teachers form a secure base with children, children are able to explore and learn. (Balaban, 2006, p. 19)

To preschool teachers and parents in the US, separation is “sad” and “difficult” and children need support when they are separated from their parents. These cultural beliefs implicitly reflect psychoanalytic concepts: Separation is a traumatic psychic experience for young children who struggle with attachment issues. Separation produces feelings of insecurity that are undesirable and need to be managed. While the term “separation anxiety” appears self-explanatory now, relating anxiety to separation was a tentative hypothesis in the early 1920s when Freud and other psychoanalysts used to understand the anxiety they observed in infants when the mother is absent or leaving:

Only a few of the manifestations of anxiety in children are comprehensible to us, and we must confine our attention to them. They occur, for instance, when a child is alone, or in the dark, or when it finds itself with an unknown person instead of one to whom it is used— such as its mother. These three instances can be reduced to a single condition, namely, that of missing someone who is loved and longed for. But here, I think, we have the key to an understanding of anxiety and to a reconciliation of the contradictions that seem to beset it. (Freud, 1926, pp. 136-137).

Describing anxiety as a reaction to the danger of “losing the object itself” and “losing the object’s love”(Freud, 1926, p. 143) , Freud sketched out a new way of conceptualizing the psychic life of young children. This line of thinking was continued by Bowlby (1960b) who, by using the term “primary anxiety,” suggested that separation anxiety is an “elemental experience”:

Primary anxiety due to separation seems likely, therefore, to be but one example of a common condition. It has, however, several special features. Not least of these is its specially

close linkage in infants and young children to the experiences of fright and fear. When frightened, infants and young children look to their mother for security and if they fail to find her are doubly upset: both comfort and security are missing. (p.267)

Bowlby (1958) repurposed the term “attachment” to describe the nature of the child’s tie to his mother. With diverse clinical evidence and empirical findings from their *Stranger Situation* studies, John Bowlby and his colleague Mary Ainsworth introduced the terms “separation anxiety,” “attachment,” and “security base” into the professional and popular discourses that clinicians, parents, and teachers used to talk and think about separation.

Theories that once were radical, like those of Freud, Bowlby and Ainsworth, gradually become part of the implicit beliefs and practices of the larger society. People in the US who have never read Freud and may think psychoanalysis has been disproved still think and talk in terms of concepts like ego and superego, drives, and the unconscious. Concepts like secure attachment and separation anxiety, along with cultural customs and school architecture, form an assemblage of factors that combine to produce different kinds of separation practices in China and the US. The teacher and father in the US scene presumably were not consciously thinking about attachment and separation theories and they might know little about these theories in the abstract. But this kind of thinking is so deeply imbedded in US discourse that it seems natural that a child would come to school with a teddy bear, that a teacher and a parent would attend to the child’s fragile emotional state during separation, and that the separation would be punctuated with one or more hugs.

The Push



Figure 2-22. Yue Yue and her grandfather at the gate

In the beginning of this chapter I described the scene of Yue Yue and her grandfather separating at the gate of Zizu You'eryuan. In the vignette, we see them walk to the gate, Yue Yue following behind her grandfather. Yue Yue taps a card on the card reader to check herself into school and the grandfather takes the card reader, waves goodbye, turns Yue Yue's body around, gives her a gentle push, and tells her to go. There is a whole world of meaning in these subtle bodily movements. To attend to the complexity of this interaction, we need to go microscopic, read the second-by-second interaction of the little girl and her grandfather, and at the same time to attend macroscopically to the larger social context in which this scene plays out.

Children attending Zizu are mostly from families living in the surrounding neighborhood. Children and parents are often observed arriving at school on foot. Parents driving a car or a motorcycle are asked to park in specified areas that are some yards away from the school and then walk their children to the main entrance, in accordance with the directive written in a bold font on a red banner: "Park your car away from the gate and walk; don't block babies' entrance to

school.” In front of the school, a large section of the road is cleared of traffic to maintain a pedestrian friendly zone (see Figure 2-23).

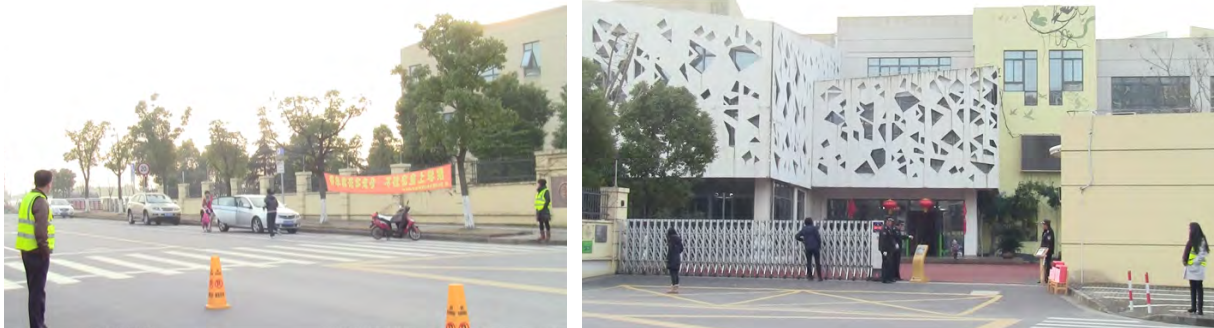


Figure 2-23. The zone in front of the gate at Zizu

The journey from home to preschool is a gradual process that begins with a parent (or grandparent) and child leaving their home and ends with a merging of these dyads into a collective of children and adults gathered, briefly, in public, in the entrance to the school (See Figure 2-24). For the last few yards of this journey, no matter what type of transportation they have taken previously, children and parents from far and near converge in front of the gate. At the gate, the adults exchange greetings with each other and the guards, parents make small talk, and children take the hands of their classmates. Morning arrival at Zizu is a social and communal event.



Figure 2-24. Parents and grandparents walk their child to the gate

It is in these brief social gatherings that parents and children say goodbye to each other. Comparing to DCC, where my camera could easily follow a parent-child dyad as they move through their morning separation routines, it was difficult at Zizu to capture how parents and children handle their separations. This was difficult both because separations occurred in a crowd and were so brief.

Like most of her classmates whose parents both work full time, Yue Yue is usually dropped off and picked up by her grandparents. She typically walks to school with her grandfather. They arrive at school early, when there are fewer children and parents around. They walk down the streets with grandfather trailing just behind Yue Yue, a hand lightly touching the strap of her backpack to guide her. As they reach the school gate, the grandfather motions with his arm and gives a light push on Yue Yue’s backpack to indicate that they should approach the card reader on the right of the gate (See Figure 2-25).



Figure 2-25. Yue Yue and her grandfather arrive at the gate

Yue Yue raises up her attendance card and taps it on the reader. The card reader calls out “Hello.” Grandpa takes the card from Yue Yue, and says: “OK.” He takes a step back and, waving his hand at Yueyue, says, “Bye-bye. Little friends should do bye-bye with smiles.”



Figure 2-26. Grandpa removes the card from the reader and steps back from Yue Yue to wave goodbye

Like most parents and grandparents who bring their children to Zizu, Grandpa goes no further into the school yard. As he stands next to the card reader and waves at Yue Yue and tells her “Bye-bye,” instead of stepping closer to Yue Yue and giving her a goodbye hug as the DCC parents do, Grandpa takes two steps back. Although in today’s China hugging to say goodbye is often seen at airports, train stations, and other public venues, preschools are not one of the places where hugging goodbye is common. Western theories of attachment suggest that because separations are disturbing to young children, parents should be affectionate and comforting

during these transitions. And yet here we see the grandfather pulling away from Yue Yue at the critical moment of separation.

I suggest there are two different ways to understand this grandfather's stepping back. One explanation is that by moving a few step back he makes it easier to create eye contact with Yue Yue and for her to have a clear view of his goodbye wave. By stepping back, he rearranges the visual field between them, clearly conveying the message that "Grandpa is leaving." Another explanation is to see the grandfather's stepping back as a way of announcing that his body is no longer available to Yue Yue, and in this way symbolizes a temporary termination of home-like closeness and care. After checking in at the card reader, Yue Yue turns her body to face her grandfather and lifts her arms as if asking to be picked up or hugged. Her grandfather's immediate reaction is to take two steps back, doubling the space between Yue Yue's body and his own. This strongly contrast with DCC's parents who at the critical moment of separation offer their bodies and even pull their child in for a hug and kiss. I interpret the increase in space the grandfather creates at the moment of separation as a symbolic broadening of the boundary between home and school. By stepping back, Grandpa adds an extra stroke to the line between preschool and home, a demarcation already made by the security guards, the steel folding gate, and the rubber yard surface that distinguishes the ground of the preschool from the cement sidewalk and paved street outside.

Although her grandfather continues to smile and to talk to Yue Yue in a gentle and loving voice, his body expresses his determination to leave Yue Yue at school by herself. This combination of a warm smile and voice with a withdrawing body embodies the principle that Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi tell parents whom they spot at the moment of separation making the mistake of holding on to their child: "Be gentle and firm."

Figure 2-27 shows Yue Yue rocking her body from left to right and lingering on the verge of the sidewalk. Her body is almost in school, but still not yet fully there. Grandpa switches his hand motion from waving goodbye to shooing her into the school yard: “Go in, quick, teacher is taking pictures!” (See Figure 2-27)



Figure 2-27. Yue Yue lingers on the verge of the sidewalk

Figure 2-28 shows the grandfather places one hand on her shoulder to pull her body around and slightly pushes her forward as he says good-bye.



Figure 2-28. Yue Yue’s grandfather pulls Yue Yue’s body around and push her forward

By lingering on the sidewalk, Yue Yue possibly is expressing her unwillingness to leave grandpa or make the transition to school. However, instead of responding to this behavior by

comforting her, grandfather reorients her body towards school and with a hand on her shoulder gently urges her forward. The grandfather's touch here is so light as to be more of a pat than a push, as it lacks the force necessary to propel a child's body forward. I suggest that what this push conveys is encouragement and confidence from grandpa that hearten Yue Yue at the critical moment of crossing the boundary into school.

In addition to the touch/push, Grandfather also encourages Yue Yue verbally by reminding her that "A teacher is watching." Figure 2-29 shows that Yue Yue looks around, puzzled and then says: "Where is the teacher?"



Figure 2-29. Yue Yue looks around for "the teacher"



Figure 2-30. The grandfather points to the camera as Yue Yue looks for “the teacher”



Figure 2-31. Yue Yue found the camera and runs into the yard

“Look, look, there you are spotted again,” her grandfather replies pointing to the direction of my filming camera, and then walking further away and waving as he calls out: “The teacher is watching. Bye-bye!” (see Figure 2-30). “Oh, there it is!” Yueyue finally spots the camera and a big smiles. She raises up her arms to stop her backpack strap sliding down and runs into the yard. Yue Yue’s grandfather stands still and watches for a second as Yue Yue turns right and runs towards the sinks in the entrance to the school building (see Figure 2-31). Then he turns to leave, the girl and the grandfather having gone their separate ways (see Figure 2-32).



Figure 2-32. Yue Yue and her grandfather go separate ways

Some suspect that because Yue Yue and her grandfather and other Zizu parents and children were aware that they were being filmed that they tried to hide their emotions and perform a tear-free and hug-free separation. I acknowledge the grandfather's awareness of being filmed created a sense of "being on the stage" and perhaps encouraged a need to be more performative. But as Perle Møhl (2011) argues, when ethnographic subjects know they are being filmed they perform not in strange ways but rather with what she calls a "densified" version of their life. As she writes: "They seek to mark out things more clearly by choosing significant actions and activities, or to speak in more precise ways, and even to accelerate movements and processes." The question then becomes how "we understand and analyze this slightly different manner and the shifts that are taking place" (p.233). When Yue Yue's grandfather coaches Yue Yue to "Do bye-bye with smiles," "Be a good baby," "Go in quick," he is performing what he believes is the cultural appropriate way of using one's body when saying goodbye at the gate of a preschool.

Reminding Yue Yue that "the teacher is watching" is a way of reinforcing the need to differentiate school from home and the public from the private spheres. What matters here is not if there really is a teacher monitoring and evaluating, but that "being watched" implies "in

public.” They are being watched on this day by someone with a camera, but also, as on every other day, by a public that includes security guards, parents and children, passersby on the street and sidewalk, and even the security camera on the wall.

“Bye-bye with smiles” and “Be a good baby” convey a Chinese cultural belief that performing emotions, and particularly sadness and grief, is not appropriate in public, even for young children. This contrasts with the tenet of “allowing feelings to come out in the open” (Balaban, 2006, p. 19) that hold by many American preschools teacher such as Mr. William and his colleagues at DCC and reveals a significant culture difference about showing emotions and performing intimacy in public.

Yue Yue’s separation from her grandfather and transition from the world of home to school was very quick by DCC standards, but slower than most of the other separations I videotaped that date at the Zizu gate. Most separation happen so quickly and subtly that they are barely noticeable. As most parent-child dyads arrives at the gate, in seemingly one motion their hands release, the parent halts, and the child’s forward momentum carries her inside. It is as if what ties the child and the parent together automatically unbuckles once they arrive at the gate, which physically demarcates preschool from home and outside.

Here we see Bo Wen and his grandmother walking hand in hand as they reach the school gate. Figure 2-32 shows that as they get close to the card reader, the grandmother extends one hand to reach the card reader to tap the card while holding Bo Wen tightly with her other hand.



Figure 2-33. Bo Wen and his grandmother arrives at the card reader



Figure 2-34. Bo Wen’s grandmother goes no further but Bowen keeps walking



Figure 2-35. Bo Wen’s grandmother releases her hand

She goes no further into the yard as the reader calls out “Hello” and Bo Wen keeps walking without a pause (see Figure 2-34). In Figure 2-35, we can see how the grandmother manages simultaneously to plant her body to stay out of the school yard and maintain Bo Wen’s forward momentum by gradually releasing his hand while swinging their arms forward. As if not aware of the instant of separation of his and his grandmother’s bodies, Bo Wen keeps walking, turns right to the sinks, and leaves his grandmother with a view of his receding back. The grandmother does not turn to leave right away, but stays to watch Bo Wen’s tiny body merging into a group of children as they proceed to the school building and disappear in the lobby. In Chinese literature and popular culture, the expressions “seeing off” and “sight of his back” are

used as metaphors for the love and concern people feel at moments of separation, as they let loved ones start out on metaphorical journeys they carry them away from home.

With the simple release of a hand, parents and children are separated. Separation is brief, fleeting and unmarked. But it does not mean that Zizu children and parents do not find separation emotionally difficult.



Figure 2-36. Bo Wen's grandmother joins a line of parents who stay and see their children off

Parental concern is not expressed, as in the US, by giving a hug, following them into the classroom, or staying handing around as long as the child wants or needs. Instead, parents stand at the gate, watching as their children cross the school yard and enter the lobby. Their love, care, and affection is condensed in the long gaze, the lingering of adult bodies outside the gate, and the carefully controlled feelings which a mixture of proudness and sadness, loss and pleasure.

CHAPTER 3

EATING



Figure 3-1 a & b. Lunch time at Zizu and morning snack at DCC

It is lunch time at Zizu. The class is divided into five groups and seated at the tables. At each table, children sit upright in their small chairs and focus on their food. Each child has their food served in three bowls that are placed in front of them. Teachers walk around the tables and serve food when children ask for more. Every once and a while the teachers bend down to check the children's progress, rearrange their bowls, and slide a chair and the seated child in closer to the table. Hu laoshi walks by Yue Yue and then steps back and squats down beside her. Hu laoshi leans towards Yue Yue and talks softly to her: "You haven't pooped for days. Vegetables need to be eaten well. Do you hear me?" Yue Yue scoops a spoonful of soup from the bowl in front of her and carefully holds it near her mouth as she drinks. Hu laoshi pulls another bowl closer to Yue Yue and pushes the soup bowl a little bit towards the left, saying: "Broccoli is very good." Yue Yue finishes the spoonful of soup, picks out a piece of the broccoli with her fingers, and tries to drop it on the table. "No throwing away!" says Hu laoshi, grabbing Yue Yue's arm (See Figure 3-1a). Hu laoshi raises her voice and asks Yue Yue, "Forgot what I told you?" as she

returns the vegetable piece to Yue Yue's bowl. She places Yue Yue's hand on the table and asks: "Can we spit things out when we eat?" Yue Yue takes several more spoons of soup and responds: "I just love eating this soup." Hu laoshi lowers her voice and says determinedly: "Loving soup is good. But you can't spit things you don't like out. Didn't you say last time that you won't be picky about food? You promised me, right?"

It is almost time for morning snack at The Child Development Lab. A wheeled cart with food and tableware is rolled into the classroom and placed next to the tables. Ms. Shannon secures the wheels and moves back and forth transporting food and tableware to each table. Today's morning snack is raisin bran and milk. Ms. Shannon places on each table a bowl of bran covered by plastic wraps, a small spoon on the top of the bowl, a carton of raisins, and a pitcher of milk. Children wash their hands in the bathroom, then each gets a cup, a spoon, and a bowl from the cart and sits down at one of the tables. Mr. William soaps his hands at the sink and takes his usual seat at the second table, with five children. He picks up the spoon, removes the wrappings from the bowls, and reaches out his hand to Meimei who is sitting on his left: "Do you want raisin bran?" Meimei nods. Mr. William takes her bowl, scoops a spoon of raisin bran into it, and turns to the next child. Soon everyone gets a bowl of raisin bran and Mr. William fills their cups with milk. Mr. William stirs his milk with raisin bran, puts a spoonful into his mouth, and asks Ajay, "So, tell us about Florida. Did you go to the beach?" Ajay tells them he found two turtles. The teacher and children continue eating and telling about they did during spring break. Ajay gets up from his chair to reach for the big bowl of raisin bran. Mr. William moves the bowl in front of Ajay, and points to the spoon: "Remember that you do not touch the food inside. You use the spoon to get it out." He watches attentively as Ajay scoops raisin bran from the big bowl into his own bowl and says, "There you go! You got a good scoop!" (See Figure 3-1a). James,

sitting next to Ajay, asks “Can I have some?” Mr. William tells James: “Would you ask him to pass you the bowl?”

This chapter analyzes mealtimes at Zizu and DCC. The preparation, production, and consumption of food carries social, moral and aesthetic meanings. Anthropologists including Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas conceptualize meals as codes that symbolically express patterns of social relations (Douglas, 1972; Lévi-Strauss, 1969). Mealtimes at preschools are key sites for socialization and enculturation. As Jaan Valsiner writes: “Mealtimes are one of the very few recurrent settings in the lives of developing children where they experience the cultural organization of the social life of their culture in its full complexity”(1987, p. 174). Mennell et al. argue that institutional dining in schools: “On the one hand. . . are settings which stand in contrast to the public, commercialized world of eating out. On the other, they stand in contrast to home-cooking in the household domain of the personal, private and intimate” (1992, p. 112).

There are similarities in the way that food enters the lives of children at Zizu and DCC: At both preschools food is cooked elsewhere and delivered to the classroom before lunch and snack times; children are served three meals a day at preschool (a snack served in the morning, a lunch served at noon, and a snack served in the afternoon); snacks are light, with less amount of food, and take less time to consume, while lunches are heavier and last longer; menus are premade, updated weekly, and posted for parents’ notice. But there are also differences in mealtimes at the two schools, differences as apparent as the contrasting serving styles and as subtle as the ways teachers encourage children to eat. I argue that these differences convey beliefs and practice about body, food, health, etiquette, and social relations that are significantly different and produce eating as culturally different bodily practices

Eating Well at Zizu

Concerned about Yue Yue's irregular bowel movement, Hu laoshi scrutinizes what Yue Yue puts in her mouth, gives Yue Yue a mini lecture on how to eat, rearranges her bowls, and catches Yue Yue red-handed as she tries to dispose of a piece of broccoli. This vignette captures a typical mealtime moment at Zizu.

In Yue Yue and Hu laoshi's conversation, we hear Hu laoshi attempt to persuade Yue Yue by saying that: "Vegetables need to be well eaten," which I translate verbatim to maintain the density of meanings expressed in the original Chinese. What does Hu laoshi mean by saying "Vegetables need to be well eaten?" Does this phrase suggest that Yue Yue needs to eat a lot of vegetables, to eat vegetables cooked in a certain way, or to chew vegetables thoroughly? The language is obscure to outsiders who might not be confused by what specific part of eating the teacher is trying to address. But the meaning of this phrase is self-evident in China, where it is often used by children who after finishing their food, proudly show their empty bowl to the teachers and wait for compliments such as "Your rice was well eaten today" and parents who come to pick up their children and ask: "Were your meals well eaten today?" This notion of "eat well" expresses one of the major concerns of teachers and parents for children's life in preschools. I suggest that this notion of "eat well" and "well-eaten" embodies the cultural practice of eating as a bodily practice that is self-caring, aesthetical, and ethical.



Figure 3-2. The bowls are shaped like Mickey Mouse’s head

Although children have three meals a day at Zizu, only lunch is seen as a full meal. On most days during lunch each child is served three bowls of food: one bowl of rice, one entrée bowl of meat and vegetables, and one bowl of soup. The three bowls follow the basic structure of a full Chinese meal: *fan* (“rice”), *cai* (“dish”), and *tang* (“soup”). *Fan*, also called *zhushi* (“staple food”), is considered the principle food that defines a meal—“A Chinese meal without *fan* is not a meal” (Cooper, 1986, p. 180). Rice, grains, and food made from rice and grains such as buns and noodles are the most common forms of staple food. Zizu’s lunch is also typical in combining liquid food, which implies the act of *yin* (“drinking”), and dry food, which implies the act of *shi* (“eating”). *Yinshi* is an inclusive term that describes the culture of Chinese eating, food, and cooking. The three bowls are brought to the table in a fixed order: the main dish first, rice second, and soup last. The order of serving food reflects the Chinese belief about the health benefits of eating warm food. The main dish usually comes first because it is cooked at a higher temperature; steamed rice comes second; and soup is served last, after portions of the other two

dishes have been eaten, so that it can be eaten while it's still hot. Fruit and sweet foods that are near room temperature are served near the end of the meal. The structure of the meal, the combination of food, and the order in which food is eaten socialize children into a culturally patterned practice. In his analysis of the social-emotional development of Japanese children, Tobin (1992) quotes the Japanese saying: "To become a (mature) person one has to eat a stranger's rice" (1992, p. 26). I suggest that what and how Chinese children eat at preschool is a key component of how they become Chinese.

In addition to the structure, combination, and order of food being served, children are also guided into proper eating behaviors by the way that food is placed in front of them. Figure 3-2 shows that the three bowls in front of children are placed in a triangle, which teachers and children call "Mickey's Head." Placing the rice bowl closest to the child to represent Mickey's round face and the soup bowl on the left and the dish bowl on the right as Mickey's two round ears, teachers create a smiling Mickey to make the food appealing and energize children's appetites. This arrangement also visualizes teachers' expectation of a well-balanced meal, which is expressed in a nursery rhyme that is often recited by teachers at lunch: "one mouthful of rice, one of the main dish, and one of soup." It also expresses teachers' concerns about picky eaters: Hu laoshi: We do not emphasize that they have to take one mouthful of rice and then one mouthful of the main dish with machine precision. It is a way to help them understand the need to balance their intake of these three dishes and finish all three of them at the same time. The concern is that some children might finish the rice first before starting on the main dish, or some might finish the entire main dish and then move on to the rice, which does not make for a balanced, healthy eating experience. The foods need to be eaten alongside each other to provide the best taste of each. That's why we tell the children the nursery rhyme: "One

mouthful of rice and one of the main dish.” This makes it easy for them to count and manage. Children can be like: “Oh, I just had a mouthful of rice, so now I need a mouthful of the main dish.” This help them match the foods. Mickey’s Head is just a playful and visual reminder for them to manage their bowls and food.

As Hu laoshi explains, neither Mickey’s head nor the nursery rhyme is meant to establish a strict rule of eating children must follow, but instead to function more as a cue. In the video clip we see Hu laoshi gently shifts the location of Yue Yue’s soup and main bowls to encourage her to eat the vegetable in the main dish as she says: “Broccoli is very good.” As Hu laoshi rearranges the dishes back into a triangle, she repairs Mickey’s head while reminding Yue Yue that she needs to eat well (see Figure 3-3).



Figure 3-3. Hu laoshi pulls the main dish bowl with broccoli closer to Yue Yue

In this interaction, Hu laoshi explicitly expresses concern about Yue Yue’s bowel movement and her vegetable consumption and she gives explicit attention to rearranging Yue Yue’s bowls. More often, teachers just Bend down and rearrange children’s bowls as they walk by, according to something that catches their attention, such as a child who shows a clear preference for a certain food and avoids other foods, or a child loosing focus on eating while her

food gets cold. Figure 3-4 shows one of the school nurses walking by on her daily check of each classroom. She notices that Yi Fan (bottom right in the picture) is holding a half-finished bowl of soup and that he has left the rice and main dish barely eaten. Bending forward, the nurse pushes Yi Fan's main dish bowl forward, placing it against the soup bowl. She then pushes the rice bowl towards the other two bowls to reform Mickey's head (see Figure 3-5).



Figure 3-4. A school nurse walks in for her daily check



Figure 3-5. The nurse pushes Yi Fan's bowls together



Figure 3-6. The nurse pulls the bowls around and rearranges the position of each bowl

Then, using both of her hands, she rotates the three bowls, maintaining the shape of Mickey's head while relocating the bowls back to their starting positions. Now Yi Fan has the rice bowl in front of him, the soup bowl on his left hand, and the main dish bowl on his hand (see Figure 3-6). By pulling the bowls back together, the nurse reminds Yi Fan to take food evenly from the three bowls. The rearrangement suggests the importance of following an order of food with rice first, main dish second, and soup in the end.

Figure 3-7 shows Chen Yi turning her head to the side, holding her spoon in the air, with her three bowls scattered in a line. Hu laoshi walking by and noticing Chen Yi's distraction, pushes the bowls back into the Mickey's head formation. As Hu laoshi leans down and pushes the bowls, Chen Yi notices the movement of her bowls, looks back, and points her spoon down.



Figure 3-7. Hu laoshi pushes Chen Yi's bowls from a line back into a Mickey's Head

The Mickey's head formation of the bowls and the nursery rhyme are strategies teachers at Zizu use to help children learn about the ideal form of a Chinese meal. They learn to differentiate food by the traditional Chinese categories of fan, cai, and tang, and to recognize how each is related to Chinese understandings of nutrition and digestion, and at the same time, to differentiate food by the food groups of vegetables, fruit, and meat. They learn about how these two forms of categorizing food coexist, how each is related with the other, and how each is related to their bodies and notions of health. As they watch teachers rearrange their bowls, they also learn to differentiate between what they want and what they need. Children learn that to

maintain a healthy body one needs to evenly take food from the rice bowl, the main dish bowl and the soup bowl and to consume balanced portions of rice, vegetable, and meat. To “eat well,” children need to balance what they want and what they need and to modify their food intake by listening to their bodies. A child like Yue Yue with a pooping problem learns that to have regular bowel movements she needs to eat vegetables both from the main dish and the soup whether she likes them or not; a child who is underweight learns that to have a stronger body he not only has to work hard to finish all the food in his bowls but also try to eat more meat. But the concept of eating well means much more than eating a healthy, balanced diet. Children also must learn to differentiate and balance liquid and solid foods, the sweet and the salty, and the tender and the hard. Children learn to experience and enjoy food by matching textures and flavors, in order, as Hu laoshi says, “to get a better taste.” Mickey’s head is a visual representation of how children at Zizu learn about food and how to eat it proper, both for health and pleasure, which is condensed in the notion of “eating well.”

Manners.



Figure 3-8. Hu laoshi slides Chen Xi and his chair close to the table

In the Zizu video we see Hu laoshi walks by Chen Xi, bend over behind him, and slightly slide his chair forward moving him closer to his food (see Figure 3-8). This movement is so quick and subtle that one barely notices it. I do this subconsciously if I happen to be around children when they are eating. When I showed teachers this clip they laughed, saying: “We aren’t even aware that we do that slide-in move, and that we do that often.” Why do we do this? Is it about table manners and etiquette? Although the movement appears to be simple, what motivates teachers here is tacit and sophisticated. One concern is that an improper distance between the body and the table will frustrate children and slow down their progress with food. If children sit too far away from the table, it will be more difficult for them to spoon food out of the bowls and put it precisely into their mouth. Safety is also a concern, as Hu laoshi explains to me as she sits in a chair and demonstrates that if there is a big gap between the chair and the table, as

the body leans forward and tries to get food from the bowls, the weight of the body will not be evenly distributed in the chair and the chair will slide back, which may end up with the eater falling on the floor.

Another concern is about body posture and health. Teachers reported to me that if the chair is pulled too far from the table, children will have to incline their body to eat, which is not good for digestion and also harmful to bone growth. Du laoshi, who does the majority of the serving of meals and interacting with children during mealtimes, explains that tucking the chair and the child into the table can help children sit upright and straight. She believes that only by maintaining their legs and limbs in a good posture can children develop a straight and beautiful bone structure. Sliding the child into the table also prevents dropping food on the floor; if the gap between their body and the table is too wide, “it is not only a waste of food but also will make Du laoshi very tired,” one girl told me when I noticed her tuck herself in and asked her why.



Figure 3-9. Hu laoshi lifts Yue Yue’s arms up

In addition to a gentle push on the child and the chair, teachers often walk by behind a child, lifts his or her arms up, and places them on the table (see Figure 3-9). This emphasis on putting hands on the tables is also heard in another nursery rhyme that is often recited during mealtimes: “One hand holds the bowl, one hand holds the spoon,” or simply “Hand hold bowl.” When I asked children why they need to hold the bowl, one girl said: “Because otherwise the bowl will run away.” What the girl described does often happen at mealtimes. All tableware, containers, and serving tools used at Zizu are stainless steel, which is easy to clean and resistant to breakage. The material is also so light and heat-resistant that a child can easily hold a bowl of hot food. But the light weight of the bowls also makes them problematic, as they can slide away if children do not hold the bowls carefully. “Hands on the table” carries a similar concern as tucking-in: By holding the bowl with a hand and placing the other hand on the table, children can get more support and have better control of their bowls and food spills are less likely. Besides these practical concern, there is a deeply embedded belief about hands that concern of politeness and respect. I remembered being disciplined for eating with one hand when I was a child. Showing both of the arms above the table is seen as a respectful way of eating. Only showing one arm handling the chopsticks or spoon at the table, and leaving the other off the table in the lap, is seen as disrespectful to the host or the elders dining together. As Du laoshi put it simply and straightforward: “Hands off the table is such a bad attitude that shows that the child does not have a nurturing home and is not well taught by the parents.” I suggest, by repositioning children’s bodies and fine-tuning their postures, teachers use these subtle movements to scaffold children’s bodies to eat skillfully, safely, and appropriately. “To be able to eat is fortune,” as the old saying goes, a saying that suggests that eating well brings happiness and wellbeing.

A Good Scoop



Figure 3-10. Mr. William watches Ajay scoop the cereal

Like Zizu, children have three meals a day at DCC: A snack served mid-morning, a lunch served noon, and a snack served after nap. Three times a day cooked food is delivered to the kitchen next to the classroom. As meal time nears, one teacher goes to the kitchen to pick up the food and tableware, while the other two teachers get the class ready for the meal.

Foods are wrapped in bowls and platters and directly brought to the tables. After washing their hands, children get bowls, spoons, and cups from a trolley cart and join their friends at a table. A teacher sits at each table with a group of children. As they eat together they talk about their weekend, their play plans for today, the cartoons they watch, and the food. On each table food is served in a large bowl or on a platter and milk in a pitcher. Teachers help children fill their cups with milk and scoop food from the serving bowl into individual bowls. Children are encouraged to serve themselves and assisted when they need help. The taking of food is voluntary. Children can eat only what they want or even not take the entire meal if they are not interested in the food or don't feel like eating at the moment. Snacks brought from home or left

from previous meals are always available to offer more food choices. Children can discontinue eating whenever they feel they are full or they don't want to eat anymore. They put their cups and bowls into a black container and their uneaten food into a trash bowl. They then scatter around the classroom to play or go to the rug and sit as they wait for the next activity. After finishing his meal, Mr. William usually goes directly to the rug and prepares for the coming activity. Ms. Shannon and Ms. Kelly wipe the tabletops after everyone leave the tables, load the bin and trash bowls onto a wheeled cart, and transport it into the kitchen. Morning snack is usually as short as 15 to 20 minutes, whereas lunch lasts about half an hour. When the weather is good mid-afternoon snack is served outside in the playground. After children wake up and visit the bathroom, teachers bring them and the snacks outside and they enjoy their snacks in the warm sunshine and gentle breeze.

Family style.

Mr. William told me: “We don’t stand in lines for food. We sit down at a table. It’s family style.” Family style eating is in contrast to getting food oneself from a buffet, ordering individually as in a restaurant, or being served a portion of food by someone else. A family-style meal is food served on platters, with diners free to serve themselves. Restaurants and catering businesses in the United States sometimes offer “family style” as a dining option that suggests an inviting, comfortable, and cozy vibe—“just like home.” Meals at DCC, as presented in the vignette, mirror family-style dinners at restaurants: all the food for the meal is placed on the table at the beginning of the meal and served in containers holding multiple portions; there is no catering staff. Teachers and children sit, eat, serve themselves, and have conversations.

Why would a preschool choose to serve meals in family style? Although family style is rare in US primary and secondary schools, where cafeteria-style is most common (Coborn,

2015), family style eating is often found in preschools. Mr. William who has taught 3 and 4-year-olds in different settings, including private daycare, Head Start, and tuition-based program like DCC for a total of 20 years, told me: “This is the only way I have ever eaten in a preschool.” Family-style meals are encouraged in Head Start classrooms. (Administration for Children and Families, 2013). The National Association of Educating Young Children (NAEYC) views family-style meals as a form of best practice (2016). Serving family-style meals is believed to be beneficial for children’s development of social, emotional, gross and fine motor skills, and self regulation (Dev, Speirs, McBride, Donovan, & Chapman-Novakofski, 2014) and for children to eat with adults who provide models of healthy eating habits and appropriate table manners (Eliassen, 2011). “Adults sitting down having meaningful conversation with children while they are eating and encouraging the trying of new food,” Mr. William explains, “is something NAEYC will look at for accreditation.” But family-style eating is not just something done at DCC to meet licensing criteria. It is also a “cultural thing”:

I think that’s a cultural thing. A lot of people are saying that American families should get back to sit down and have dinner together, and talk about your day, and have conversations. So that idea is carried over into our classrooms. I think it’s a great thing. I love doing it. We do it at my home. At mealtime we have conversations about what we did earlier, what we are gonna do later, to know each other. We encourage conversations.

To Mr. William and many other US early childhood educators, serving family-style meals feels not only natural but also necessary because it is one of way to make the preschool as homey as possible and to provide children with the “soft edges” that parents look for:

Mr. William: Parents look for the way we sit and eat. It’s very important for them to see that it is not this kind of, like, factory, like “Come in, eat, sit, leave”. It’s where we just all kind of sit

and talk, sometimes we whisper (laugh). We try to get these interactions. We also see our eating time as a teaching opportunity to talk about nutrition, to talk about taste, to talk about choices.

A good scoop.

In the vignette, when Ajay requests more food, we see Mr. William, instead of scooping raisin bran directly into Ajay's bowl, encouraging the boy to serve himself. Serving oneself is an importance part of practicing family-style meals. Children are introduced to this practice by sitting around small tables, eating, and sharing food with a group. Utensils are provided in child size that children can use comfortably; bowls have wide grips to make them easy for children to handle; serving bowls are made of plastic, that makes them light-weight, and non-heat conductive. With teachers' guidance, children become increasingly involved participants in and contributors to mealtime as they learn and gradually master the techniques of using utensils, managing plates and bowls, scooping, pouring, passing, serving, and sharing

I made the film at DCC in the middle of the school year. In the beginning of the school year the teachers do most of the serving:

Shannon: It's later in the year, so that's when we will do the first servings and then the children help themselves after that first initial serving.

William: And we will move up to them serving themselves.

The video clip vividly shows how Mr. William socializes Ajay into the bodily practice of serving oneself appropriately.

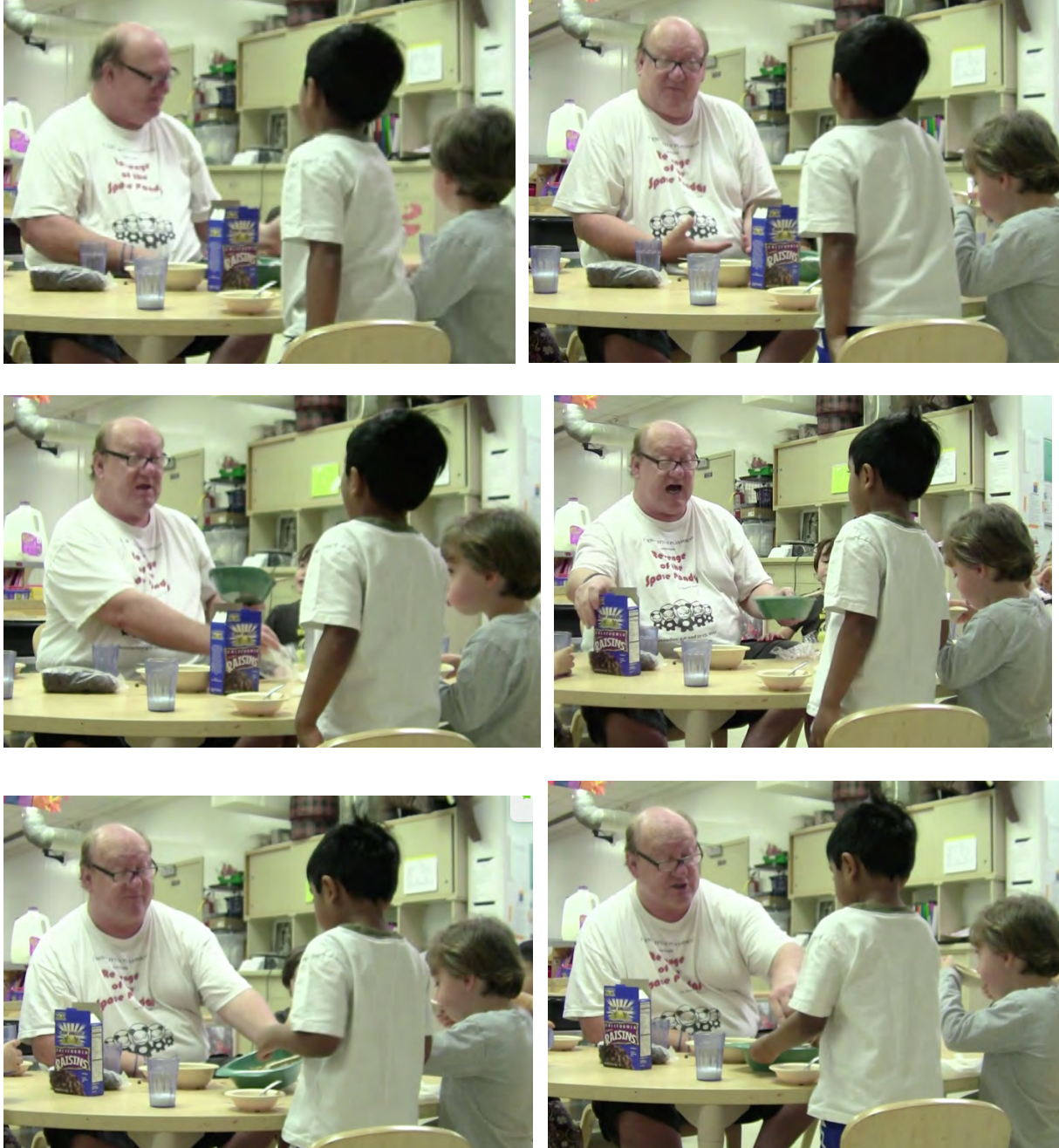


Figure 3-11 a & b & c & d & e & f. Mr. William helps Ajay to serve himself with cereal

Halfway through the morning snack, Ajay finishes his raisin bran. He stands up, reaches out to grab the bowl, and pulls it toward himself (see Figure 3-12 a). The moving of the bowl is halted by Mr. William, who places his fingers on the other end of the bowl and pulls it back in position. Mr. William tells Ajay that if he wants a second helping he should make his desire

known verbally: “Do you need some more? Then I need you to ask for some more.” Instead of giving Ajay a serving of raisin bran, Mr. William asks Ajay: “Would you like to help yourself?” As he asks, Mr. William removes the plastic wrap from the bowl (see Figure 3-12 c), moves aside the raisin carton which was in front of Ajay (see Figure 3-12 d), and places the bowl beneath Ajay’s hands with a reminder “Do not to touch the food. Use the spoon to get it out (see Figure 3-12 e & f). In this half-minute interaction Mr. William gives Ajay direct verbal instructions about the etiquette of dining with others at a table while simultaneously adjusting the serving bowls to support Ajay practicing serving himself: Mr. William removes the plastic wrap to make the bowl’s opening wider opening and therefore easier to scoop from and he moves the raisin carton aside to let Ajay have more space to manage the spoon and the bowl.

Mr. William also sometimes gives children hand-on-hand help with learning how to use utensils. In figure 3-12 we see Sam trying to take a piece of zucchini bread from the platter with a pair of tongs. He places the tongs tips on a piece of bread and tries to squeeze the arms to grip the bread. Sitting next to Sam, Mr. William sees Sam having a difficult time with the tongs. Mr. William does not interrupt Sam, take over the tongs, and pick up the bread for him; instead, he gives Sam just enough support by placing his own hand on Sam’s hand and the tongs allowing them to grasp and move the bread together to Sam’s plate.





Figure 3-12. Mr. William scaffolds Sam picking a piece of bread

Teachers’ support can also be as subtle as a gentle pat on a child’s back. In Figure 3-13, we see Sam tilt the milk jug to refill his cup. Mr. William, sitting next to him seems to pay no attention to Sam as he enjoys his own glass of milk and talks to other children at the table.



Figure 3-13. Mr. William talks to other children as Sam holds the jug to refills his milk

As he lifts his milk cup to his lips for another drink, Mr. William turns left to check on Sam.

Seeing Sam’s cup getting full, Mr. William suspends his cup in the air and gently pats Sam on the back, “That’s it” (see Figure 3-14). As Sam tilts the milk jug back to upright, Mr. William withdraws his patting hand and continues to drink his milk. The patting is part encouragement and part a timely reminder that the pouring needs to be ceased to avoid spilling.





Figure 3-14. Mr. William pats Sam on his back as the cup is getting full

Throughout the meal, with occasional prompting by the teachers, children graciously pass around the jug of milk, carefully fill their bowls with milk and cereal without touching the food in the serving bowl, and politely use “please” and “thank you” in their conversations. Cereal successfully scooped from the serving bowl is met with a smile and a hardy “You got a good scoop” from the teachers; a successful transfer of food is a cheerful victory; a refilling a cup of milk no doubt is a small feat for a four-year-old.

Licking the lid.



Figure 3-15. Sam licks the inside of the lid and Mr. William is surprised

At lunch, the milk pitcher on Mr. William's table is almost empty so Mr. William asks Sam to fetch the milk jug. Sam walks to the trolley cart, picks up the cap that is sitting next to the jug of milk, and carries both the cap and jug over to Mr. William as he announces: "The cap is already off!" Taking the jug from Sam and resting it on his knee, Mr. William looks over to Ms. Shannon and not aware that Sam has the cap in his closed hand, and asks if there are some caps in the kitchen. Sam attempts to put the cap back on the jug, fails, and then licks the inside of the cap. Mr. William spots the licking and asks in a surprised tone: "Did you just lick that?" Sam hands the lid to Mr. Williams and say: "Well, I . . ." Mr. William puts the lid on the table and sighs: "Dude!" Cassie, sitting next to Mr. William, asks curiously: "What did he do?" Mr. Williams says: "You know what he did? He thought for a second he was at home, and he licked the interior of the lid, which of course gets germs on it, right? So, we, luckily, because we are saving jugs for our igloo. . ."

Throughout the day Mr. William has been trusting Sam to use the tongs (with some scaffolding) to serve food and to pour from the half-gallon jug of milk. Mr. William appears surprised and taken aback by Sam licking the inside of the cap before putting it back on the jug. Mr. William expresses his surprise with the comment, “Dude,” which is a term that can be used to mean naughty and cool. In this way he expresses surprise and mild disapproval without directly criticizing Sam. When Cassie asks what just happened, Mr. William says: “Sam must have thought he was at home.” This comment implies that there is a difference between what is allowable at home and school. But even at home, licking the lid would not be allowed. By giving Sam’s licking a generous interpretation, Mr. William avoids embarrassing Sam with a reprimand. His comments express empathy for young children like Sam and Cassie who spend their days at a semi-public setting which is not home.

By serving family-style meals, teachers are trying to make preschool less public and more home-like. But the reality is most families in the US may not eat family-style meals at home. “Family style” in a way is a “simulacrum” (Baudrillard, 1994) a term that references less the reality of how most families in the US eat now or ate in the past than a sentimental, nostalgic version of white middle-class bourgeois American family life. Such ideologically tinged terms are used to support the practice of offering an idealized version of intimate family-style meals to children in Head Start programs, who are seen as at risk of not getting the benefits of a shared meal time with language-rich discussions and family closeness.

By promoting family-style dining while not taking slips like the licked lid too seriously, Mr. William handles the situation well. But the scene also implies that making preschool home-like is not simple or straightforward, as preschools are not home or family, but rather hybrids spaces that are home-like but not home, school like but not school. Teachers like Mr. William

always have to help children understand what sort of space this is and to learn to use their bodies appropriately in this complex context.

Spoon/Spoodle.



Figure 3-16. Mr. William hands the serving bowl to Simon

Simon finishes his cereal and wants to have more. He turns to Mr. William, pointing to his empty bowl, and asks: “Could you pass me? Could you pass me?” Mr. William picks up the serving bowl and hands it to Simon (see Figure 3-16). Simon takes the bowl and places it in front of him. He picks up the spoon and starts scooping.



Figure 3-17. Simon scoops cereal with his right hand and uses the left hand to support

There are not many flakes of cereal left in the bowl. Trying to get as much as he can onto the spoon, Simon uses the spoon to push the bran flakes to the end of the bowl into a small pile. Then he scoops the flakes from the bottom of the bowl, and carefully uses his other hand to keep the bowl in place without touching the inside of the bowl (see Figure 3-17). Finally, he gets almost a full spoon of cereal and pours it into his bowl. Encouraged by the success of the first scoop, Simon puts the spoon and the other hand into the bowl, trying to get a second scoop (see Figure 3-18). Mr. William, who was eating his cereal and talking to the other children, notices that Simon is attempting to shovel the cereal with his hand. Putting down his bowl, he pats Simon on his back and says: “We are not gonna put our hands inside the bowl” (see Figure 3-19). Simon giggles, apparently embarrassed. He withdraws his hand and lets Mr. William take the bowl from him (see Figure 3-20).



Figure 3-18. Mr. William notices Simon put his hand inside the bowl



Figure 3-19. Mr. William pats on Simon's back



Figure 3-20. Simon giggles and Mr. William takes the common bowl back

In this scene, we see Simon practice serving himself a second helping of cereal. Comparing to Ajay, who successfully served himself earlier in the meal, Simon experiences some challenges. With a thinner layer of cereal left in the bowl, scooping has become more difficult, as it requires more sophisticated fine-motor skills. This makes it more tempting for the child to put a hand into the bowl to help load the spoon. Simon is competent. He carefully

manages to get a first spoonful of cereal without touching the inside of the bowl. But now with even less cereal left in the bowl, scooping has become even more difficult. Figure 3-18 shows Simon putting his left hand inside the bowl as he tries to get another scoop. But before he starts shoveling cereal with this hand, he receives a pat from Mr. William, who also tells him that hands should not go inside the bowl. The pat is partly a reminder of the rule and partly comforting Simon for his frustration with the spoon.

For four-year-olds, scooping food from one bowl and transporting it to another bowl is physically challenging and risky if children are expected to serve themselves and food contamination is a realistic concern. If having family-style meals and apprenticing children into this practice is the goal, why wouldn't teachers offer children a serving tool that is more child-friendly?



Figure 3-21. Simon holds the spoodle



Figure 3-22. The spoon DCC uses for serving cereal at morning snack

The serving spoon, which is made of light-weight plastic, is easy for holding, but not ideal for scooping. Unlike spoons that usually are shallow and flat, this serving spoon has a deep round bottom that is ill-suited for dry food. This serving spoon is actually not a spoon, but a cross between a spoon and a ladle—a “spoodle,” as Mr. William calls.

Mr. William: I am not afraid of this family-style meal so much now because we are using the spoodles, which are those little measuring cups on handles. They are less like spoons. But when we used to use spoons, you can see a kid get some portion and then put it into his mouth. We will be like “No! Don’t do it.” I would never catch them soon enough. They put the spoon in their mouth and put the spoon back, which means that entire bowl is contaminated and you have to throw it away. No one else can eat it. You can’t get more food. There were always those moments. So that was a risk indeed. But as far as spreading germs around from child to child, I think we are overly concerned with that. I think overall we’ve always had healthy classes and this is the only way I have ever eaten in a preschool. So I think the benefits definitely outweigh the fear of passing germs along or anything like that.

As an experienced early childhood educator accustomed to thinking about the way children interact things, Mr. William is aware of children's temptation to putting any size spoon in their mouth. Children in the U.S. are taught to feed themselves with a spoon and not use their hands since they are six months old. A serving spoon, although bigger, is still a spoon. To use Karen Barad's (2007) concept, the serving spoon is an "intra-acting" object that was calling out to children: "Put me in your mouth!" To address this problem, rather than repeatedly telling children: "Don't put that serving spoon in your mouth," Mr. William decided to use something less spoon-like and therefore less tempting. Although the spoodle is difficult to use as ladle in a shallow bowl, the teachers would rather have children struggle and risk them occasionally touching the inside of the bowl or using their other hands as a shovel, than to have the bigger problem of the common spoon going into the mouth. The tradeoff is that the spoodle, a hybrid of a spoon, a private tool one uses to eat one's own food, and a ladle, a common tool that one shares with others for taking a portion from the communal food, can be frustrating for children like Simon to manipulate.

For a 4-year-old like Simon it would be easier to shovel the cereal with his hands, but it would be a breach of etiquette. To use a spoodle to transport food not only avoids cross-contamination, but also is an act that performs "good manners"—the behavior customs formed and developed in the process of "civilizing" (Elias, 2000). The figures show that Simon's body looks awkward and intense as he struggles with putting one hand in the bowl to handle the spoodle while simultaneously keeping the other hand out. This scene reveals the tension inherent in a preschool like the DCC, where a practice such as family-style dining is being pushed to make an institutional space as homey as possible, but still not quite the same as home. Simon's struggle is caused by more than the liminal nature of preschool being simultaneously home-like

and not-home. On one hand, Simon and the other children seem to enjoy the casualness of family style dining and the closeness and warmth of eating communal food; on the other hand, Simon needs to manage his body to make it appropriate for the classroom context. Simon's body is caught between a spontaneous at-home use of his body and a disciplined and socialized use of his body in public.

Scenes of Sam licking the lid and Simon scooping cereal with hand reveal the tensions that arise in a location like preschool where the private intersects with the public creating a "third space" (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). Children and teachers at preschools in the US walk the line between home-like and non-home and private and public, unlike in China where even preschools are already more clearly school, and not home. US preschools present soft edges that feel like home, combined with rules about contamination that clearly mark the space as non-home and semi-public, as when children lick the inside of a milk jug lid or put their hand into a common bowl of cereal.

CHAPTER 4

MOVING



Figure 4-1. Hu laoshi claps her hand and sings a nursery rhyme

It is almost 8:50 at Zizu. In the play centers of the Orange class, children are building with blocks, drawing pictures, and cooking pretend meals. Hu laoshi checks the time and turns to the cassette player, pressing down a button. A song rings out over the loud speakers and children cheer and shout: “It is time to move the chairs!” Scattered around the classroom, children put down their blocks, crayons, and frying pans and walk to the tables. They each pick up a chair, hold it up with both hands, and carry it to the middle of the room for the morning meeting. Hu laoshi takes her usual seat in front of the piano. Children gather in two rows in front of Hu laoshi. Hu laoshi carefully watches children as they shift their chairs slightly to make room for their friends and rearrange their positions to maintain the rows. After two minutes the children of the Orange class are all seated. Sitting in two parallel rows, the group forms an arc around Hu

laoshi, who pauses the music and starts reciting a nursery rhyme. Clapping her hands, Hu laoshi then starts the rhyme: “One, two, three” (see Figure 4-1). Children pat on their knees as they join her continuing song: “Sit, sit well.” They finish the nursery rhyme together, clapping hands and patting on their knees: “Three, two, one. Have *jingsheng!*” Next, prompted by Hu laoshi, children share what they did in center time. Children talk about the rockets they built, the paintings they made, and the meals they cooked for guests in the kitchen. After chatting for a while, Hu laoshi restarts the transition music and asks: “There’s the music again. What shall we do now?” Children cheer: “Clean up the toys!” They leave their seats and run back to put away the toys in their centers.

This chapter explores how children learn to use their bodies in synchronization with others at preschool and what strategies teachers use to support this form of intercorporeal learning.

Moving Chairs and Moving Bodies

Watching the Zizu movie, teachers at DCC were impressed by how often and well children at Zizu move their chairs. Mr. William: “They do many things with the chairs. I imagined at the very beginning of the school year, teaching them moving the chairs would take them the most time.” In the vignette, we see children, in a very short amount of time, respond to the musical prompt. They instantly suspend their play, grab a chair from the dining area, and carry it over to the middle of the room where they sit and talk in a group; they then leave their chairs and each go back to put away the toys and materials they had taken out during center time. In a classroom filled toys, books, and furniture with twenty-six children, three teachers, and one researcher shooting with two cameras on tripods, to have a four-year-old walk from one end of this room to the other is like going through an obstacle course. But here we see twenty-six

children gracefully travel through these things and bodies without losing focus and running into things and precisely fit their bodies and chairs into rows and align their position with others. At Zizu, throughout the day, children in the Orange class skillfully and peacefully move the chairs and their bodies between spaces and transition from one activity to the next in synchrony.

The vignette at the beginning of this chapter captures a scene of children transitioning from center play to morning snack. The transition is not merely a one-time shift from play to meals, but rather is just one of many times during the day when chairs are relocated by children. For example, after cleaning up the toys in the centers, the children go back to the middle of the classroom, pick up a chair, and carrying it back to the dining area. They carefully place the chairs at the tables where they sit for meals, taking care to slide the chair close to the table to avoid blocking traffic. The chair also needs to be placed at a certain distance from the table, leaving a gap for the child who could slide in her body without using her hands (See Figure 4-2).



Figure 4-2. Dang Dang first slides her chair into the table and then slightly pulls it out to make more space between the chair and the table

This is important because after washing their hands, children are expected to protect their hands from germs by avoiding touching anything, including the chair, before eating. Figure 4-3 shows Chen Yi clutch her hands together as she walks out of the bathroom.



Figure 4-3. Chen Yi clutch her hands together after washing her hands

Carrying the chairs, the size, heaviness of the wood, and hard edges make children more aware of their own body as well as the bodies of others as they carry the chairs through the classroom crowd, place them on the floor, and fit them into a line with others. The chair is an “intra-acting” object (Barad, 2007) that calls out to the child to be picked up, moved, and seated on. The chair also affords the child’s body a designated space in each classroom activity for the child to occupy. The chair, the child, and the classroom routines form an assemblage. Only when the chair is in place and synchronized with other chairs is the child in place and synchronized with the group.



Figure 4-4. Children pick up chairs and carry them to the middle of the room

One might assume, as Mr. William did, that these children’s skillfulness in handling the chairs and moving their bodies is a product of laborious training earlier in the school year and the smoothness of transition results from children being closely monitored and under the rigid control of the teachers. However, this is not the case. Teachers at Zizu told me that they actually never took time to teach children to do these things, as Mr. William guessed. Instead, children learn this skill because, as Hu laoshi explained: “They do it every day and we keep encouraging them, reminding them, and helping them when it is needed.” As the vignette shows, as children carry the chairs place them in lines, Hu laoshi sits in her chair, waits, and watches, but doesn’t direct.



Figure 4-5. Hu laoshi helps Yi Fan roll up his sleeve

During the chair moving, Hu laoshi spots a boy who has his left sleeve rolling down and helps him fix it, suggesting that the movement of the heavy chairs is not a concern (see Figure 4-5).



Figure 4-6. Hu laoshi calls the name of a child, pointing to her ear to remind him the cue of the music

As the song comes to the end, she calls the name of a child who still lingers in the kitchen (off the camera) and reminds him by pointing to her ear: “Chen Xi, what is ringing now?” (see Figure 4-7).



Figure 4-7. Hu laoshi help the boys place their chairs

It is only when the last two children struggle with to get their chairs lined up that Hu laoshi gets up, steps forward, and suggests: “Yi Fan, move your chair on the line first and then Chen Xi could move after you” (see Figure 4-7).

Watching the Zizu clip, DCC teachers also noticed that “There seems to be a lot of sitting in the chair and listening to the teacher.” They see a big contrast here between Zizu and at DCC where children are rarely asked to sit in a certain way (e.g. “crisscross applesauce during morning meeting) or for very long. They tend to see Zizu’s emphasis on moving and lining up chairs and sitting for long periods of time as an indication that the program is “very teacher-centered.” There is a widespread perception in the West that schools in China are highly controlled, teacher-centered, and insensitive to student’s individual needs and interests. To Western eyes, a scene in a video where a Chinese teacher has the full attention of twenty-six four-year-old children suggests not a pedagogical achievement but rather evidence of autocratic

control and an excess of discipline. The quietness and smoothness of the classroom routines seen in the Zizu video can appear to Westerners who watched the video as evidence of children being docile, disciplined, and regulated.

However, a microanalysis of clips that include scenes of children making and sitting in lines suggest that there is a pleasure of dwelling in this way in the group.



Figure 4-8 a & b & c & d & e & f. Align chairs into a line



Figure 4-9 a & b & c & d. Children scoop closer and stomp their feet

Finishing their morning exercise on the playground, children come back from outside and sit down to take a break. Figure a-b shows Ming Yi, the boy in a green coat, rearranging the scattered chairs into a line. Zi Bo, the boy sitting on the left end, bends down to check if his chair is exactly on the line and moves himself closer to the group (see Figure 4-8 e). Yu Xiang, the boy in the green vest, looks over and also moves himself closer (see Figure 4-9 b). Yu Xiang finds it fun to stomp his feet on the ground. Tang Tang, the girl sitting on his right and Zi Bo join him and share in the fun (see Figure 4-9 d). It is break time, with no group activity pending that would require child to sit in rows. But by spontaneously forming themselves into a line and synchronizing their bodies and making a choral sound with their feet the children experience a form of closeness and pleasure that is bodily and communal. While DCC teachers tend to view children lining up, sitting still, and listening quietly as evidence of a teacher-centered approach, Zizu teachers see “*zuo de zhu* (“being able to sit”)” and “being able to listen” as virtues and

competencies that need to be cultivated. In Chinese culture, being able to sit is generally seen as a virtue that shows one's patience, focus, and concentration. Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi acknowledge that they purposefully help children learn to be able to sit. But they don't see this as a form of training that is teacher-centered and developmentally inappropriate, and they make a differentiation between "being able to sit" and forcing a child to sit still:

Hu laoshi: I don't think it is discipline. We have children like Yi Fan and Yue Yue, who, in the traditional sense, are the kind of children who *zuo bu zhu* ("cannot sit"). When they move up to the second year, the third year, and elementary school, they will be children who have poor habits of learning and can't stay focused. So now when we have whole-group activities or we have time to sit down and they could not sit well. We would encourage them by saying: "Oh! You can do a better job if you can sit well!" If they don't listen to you, we might remind them with a serious tone. But I don't think this is discipline. Because discipline implies you make them sit here still without any movement.

Ji laoshi: It is about helping them to develop habits.

Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi told me that one of the most important goals for children in the *xiaoban* is to develop habits of living and habits of learning. Being able to sit and being able to listen are important aspects of a good habit of learning, which should be cultivated when children are young to prepare them for the future.

There are many moments at preschools when children's attention needs to be managed, such as when the teacher needs to make an announcement or read a story. At these moments children need to learn use their bodies in synchrony with others as they play together, eat together, and sleep together, sharing the same space and timeline. Western notions of child-centeredness and individual-oriented learning and development lead to a valorization of

individual-oriented activities and individualizing children's experiences while degrading the collective, communal, and intercorporeal aspect of life in preschool. The Orange class shows us that there is pleasure and comfort to be found in the experience of synchronizing one's body and rhythms to the collective.

Guangbo Ticao

In *guangbo ticao* (broadcast group exercise), children experience the most formal and explicit form of synchronization of the bodies. Every morning at Zizu, children of the orange class gather in the playground and join hundreds of children for *guangbo ticao*.

To meet the state-issued curriculum guidelines for early childhood education, Zizu must ensure that everyday children have one hour of physical exercise. This one hour is separated into two sessions: a 35-minute session in the morning and a 25-minute session in the afternoon, each of which is constituted by a set of activities that vary in form and physical intensity. Both sessions include *guangbo ticao*: two routines of *guangbo ticao* in the morning session and a third routine in the afternoon session. In 2002, the Ministry of Education of China (MOE) developed a *guangbo ticao* routine for *you'eryuan* — “The World is So Beautiful” and promoted it nationwide. Although this routine is not mandatory, almost every preschool includes “The World is So Beautiful” in its daily routines. “The World is So Beautiful” is generally seen by Chinese preschool teachers and directors as too complicated and challenging for children in the younger groups. Therefore, at Zizu, as most preschools in Shanghai, the oldest group practices “The World is So Beautiful” as one of their three routines and the junior group does a modified version. The other two routines and the songs were developed and selected by Zizu's teachers. The three routines for the youngest group are all self-created.

Everyday at 9:00, children in the Orange class form two lines outside the classroom door. Led by the teachers, children hold hands with a friend, proceed through the hallways, and join hundreds of their schoolmates at the playground. They start the thirty-five-minute session with playground activities. Each day, each class is assigned a set of equipment and a particular section of the playground to use for developing particular motor skills. Each semester, teachers who specialized in physical education develop a master schedule for children in different age groups with new equipment and new activity plans that are play-based and feature *tongqu*– “childlike joyfulness.”

Today, the Orange class is assigned to play on the slides and with bamboo sticks to use as horses. Children scatter across the playground, playing on the slides and running with the horse sticks for twenty minutes or so, until the nursery rhyme *Do Gymnastics* rings out from the loud speakers:

Little friends, come and stand well. Let’s do gymnastics together.

Look to your left. Look to your right. Turn your neck around

Stretch your arms. Bend your back. Look down and touch your toe.

Look up and stomp your feet. Run around.

Three, two, one. One, two, three. Let’s make a little circle.

Look up, hand in hand. Stand in a line and walk forward.

First jump three times like a bunny. Then croak three times like a frog

Dance and sing. Little friends feel so happy.

Stand in lines and do gymnastic. Little friends will be healthy.

Little friends, come and stand well. Let’s do gymnastics together.

Hu laoshi calls out: “Send your horses home and come to Hu laoshi.” Children put their horse sticks back into the toy box and gather around Hu laoshi. Following the beat of the song, Hu laoshi chants “one, two, three, four” as she claps her hands and walk around: “Let’s march.”



Figure 4-10. Children move their bodies in unison with Mr. Hu

Children watch Hu laoshi and try to move their body in unison with hers as they clap their hands and stomp their feet. As Hu laoshi moves around, children follow her (see Figure 4-10) and whenever she stops moving cluster around her. Qin Qi, the boy in a blue puffy Jameset, reaches out his arms toward Hu laoshi as if he wants to be picked up (see Figure 4-11).



Figure 4-11. Qinqi reaches out his hand to Hu laoshi



Figure 4-12. Children cluster around Hu laoshi

Hu laoshi holds Qin Qi's body as he steps forward and says: "That's too close."



Figure 4-13. Hu laoshi holds the bodies of the girls

Ji laoshi steps a few steps back. Two girls step forward to maintain a chose proximity with her. Hu laoshi holds their body and says: “Don’t stay too close. Hu laoshi might bump into you” (see Figure 4-13).



Figure 4-14. Hu laoshi demonstrates how to open “the little airplane”

Hu laoshi spreads her arms, makes a circle as she goes around and says: “Open your little airplanes, go around, and make a circle. Don’t bump into others. Just make one circle.” Children follow Hu laoshi, spreading their arms and rotating their bodies. The first routine comes to the

end and the music for next second routine rings out. Children each pick up a set of dumbbells made of recycled plastic water bottles filled with rice. Following Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi, children squat down, jump up, turn left, turn right and swing their dumbbells. As the song draws to a close, children finish their second routine. They gather around the toy box and put their dumbbells away. Hu laoshi takes the lead of the line and children form two lines behind her. Walking behind Hu laoshi, the children walk hand in hand back to their classroom.



Figure 4-15. Children follow the teachers do the second guangbo ticao routine

Over the past thirty years, many aspects of Chinese preschool practice have changed in accordance with a series of state-led, top-down early childhood education reforms promoting a child-initiated, play-based, individual-oriented pedagogy and curriculum (Liu and Feng 2005; Tobin et al. 2009). Nevertheless, Chinese children gather each morning in school courtyards across the country for *guangbo ticao*, just like the children in the Orange class. At almost every preschool in China *guangbo ticao* is practiced today, as it has been for over half a century. Unlike the morning exercise, which is loosely structured and less controlled by teachers, *guangbo ticao* requires children to follow a set of structured and prescribed movements that are repeated everyday. Playground activities, which focuses on motor skills such as jumping, throwing, running, climbing and balancing, is play-based and individually oriented. Teachers, observing attentively, challenge those who they deem ready to take on a more advanced physical task (for example, by raising a hurdle) and scaffold those who are still struggling (for example, by holding their hand as they walk on a beam). These playground activities exemplify the kind of child-centered and individual-oriented practices that are called for by the local and national preschool curriculum guidelines that emphasize individual differences and individualized treatment. In contrast, *guangbo ticao*'s repetitive and uniform movements are not responsive to individual needs or differences.

One could speculate that *The World is So Beautiful* is an involuntary, unwanted activity for children in the oldest age group, as it is a practice created and promoted by the Ministry of Education. But what, then, led the teachers at Zizu to add a second and a third set of *guangbo ticao* routines, ones of their own creation? If the goal is merely to have children do certain amount of physical exercise, why don't Zizu and other schools make use of the time devoted to *guangbo ticao* routine for less structured exercise and free play? Why doesn't Zizu use their

carefully planned play-based, individual-oriented playground activities to satisfy the MOE requirement of one-hour each day of exercise? One way to begin to answer this question is to conceptualize *guangbo ticao* as an “implicit cultural practice,” that is, as a practice, “largely shared among members of a profession or a region,” “seldom talked about or consciously thought about (at least not until such talk and thought are provoked by researchers), and “rarely mentioned in government guidelines, curriculum standards, or teacher education textbooks” (Hayashi & Tobin 2015, p.4). Including three sets of *guangbo* routines into the daily schedule is common across China in both progressive and more traditional preschools. When I asked teachers why children need more than one *guangbo ticao* routine, Hu laoshi replied: “Because each of them is different. One uses dumbbells; one is merely moving to a melody.” Zhu laoshi, a teacher working in another Shanghai preschool, was puzzled because the answer to my question about why three *guangbo ticao* routines is so self-evident: “One is not enough.”

Both the national and Shanghai’s local preschool curriculum guidelines say little about *guangbo ticao*. The most specific the documents get about *guangbo ticao* is in the Shanghai guideline’s chapter on “Curriculum Content,” where free-standing calisthenics and calisthenics with light-weight apparatus are listed as examples of how to get children “to feel changing motor rhythms.” In college classrooms where preschool teacher candidates systematically learn about the pedagogies of *Wu Da Lingyu* (the five big domains, including health, language, social development, science/mathematics, and art), *guangbo ticao* is barely mentioned. And yet Chinese teachers put a lot of effort into this activity. I suggest that this is because they have an implicit belief in the value of *guangbo ticao* as not just being good for the body, but also for inculcating in children values and habits that are imbued with a sense of social, cultural, and historical distinctiveness.

The fact that *guangbo ticao* is practiced so widely and consistently in Chinese preschools and is given so much ongoing attention by Chinese teachers who continually introduce and assiduously drill new songs and routines suggests that this practice serves important goals and draws on a body of implicit cultural knowledge, values, beliefs, and know-how. At Zizu, children are immersed in an ethos of communal life, as epitomized in the Shanghai's core curriculum goal: *gongtong shenghuo* ("living together"). Learning *guangbo ticao* is a component of learning to live together, which is a guided process of participation based first on observing older children and teachers, and then gradually becoming more engaged in activities of increasing complexity (Lave and Wenger 1991).

From the very beginning of life in preschool, children are oriented to major daily routines, including *guangbo ticao*. As Hu laoshi explains about her group: "They have these routines since the very first day they came to school. At the very beginning, they might just watch us do the routines or simply swing their bodies. Then they gradually learn the movements. We didn't arrange a particular time for teaching these routines. We just do them everyday." Ji laoshi agrees: "We never teach them on purpose." At *guangbo ticao*, children of the Orange class do not stand in lines or rows but scatter around at ease. Teachers rarely correct children's movements in a rigorous way or give specific instructions. The exception is the "little airplanes" routine, where the teachers demonstrated and gently corrected the children's spacing (to avoid wings/arms colliding).

These two *guangbo ticao* routines performed by the children of the Orange class are more relaxed and less complicated than the routines I observed in Ms. Zhu's class, a *daban* with children from the oldest group. The difference is not a school difference, but a group difference. The Orange class is a *xiaoban* with children from the youngest group. Although they are at

different preschools and work with different groups, the teachers of the Orange class and Ms. Zhu share understandings about how *guangbo ticao* routines should be handled with the youngest group and how the complexity of the routines should increase as the group moves up.

Hu laoshi: For the youngest group, they don't need to stand in lines. We just expect them to follow us and move their bodies. We might remind children if we see a child standing still or a child swinging his arms wildly. But on general, we don't ask them to put their arms perfectly straight or perfectly leveled.

Hu laoshi's expectation and approach is similar to that of Zhu laoshi who told me about her expectations for her group in the first year: "I don't ask children in *xiaoban* to line up for *guangbo ticao*; they can just scatter around. First, we teachers learn the routine; then once we start making the moves in front of the children, they follow us and mimic our movements." Although now the routines of Orange class look easy and spontaneous, next year when children move up to *zhongban*, they have different routines with different expectations.

Ji laoshi: It will be more difficult, because they will have a *duiwu* ("procession").

Hu laoshi: Movements will also be more challenging. And the movements need to be *zhengqi* ("uniform")

Ji laoshi: Of course we will have higher expectations. They need to do the routines with goals.

They need to have the senses of what they need to. It is not just swinging the body anymore.

Hu laoshi: Their movements need to have *lidu* ("strength") and be *daowei* ("in place"). They should look *meiguan* ("pleasing"). They should have *jinshen* ("energy")

Chinese educators expect teachers to possess a staged understanding of children that is not quite the same as Western developmental psychology's age-defined notions of childhood. *Xiaoban* (小班), *zhongban* (中班), and *daban* (大班)—the terms used for the youngest, junior,

and oldest groups of children in Chinese preschools—imply not so much that the children are either three-, four-, or five-years-old so much that they are members of a cohort of children moving through preschool together, cohorts that should experience a three-year sequence of curricular activities, including *guangbo ticao*, of increasing complexity. The *ban* (班) in these terms is an ancient Chinese character that originally was used to differentiate the rank of people attending the court and serving the imperial family and the sovereign and more generally of “a team established with certain needs or purposes,” such as an opera company or a martial art master and his disciples. In contemporary usage, *ban* most commonly is used to refer to a class of students who learn the same subject and taught by the same teachers as well as the physical institutional space they occupy. In teachers’ everyday conversation, the child is identified and his or her needs and abilities are largely defined, by membership in a cohort rather than by age. Chinese preschool teachers are much less likely to say that a routine is too difficult or too easy for a particular child or for children of a certain age than to describe a routine as too difficult for the youngest group, too easy for the oldest group, or just right for the junior group.

It is easier to see the differences in the *guangbo ticao* routines for the youngest, junior, and oldest groups in the increasing complexity of the choreography. What is harder to see is how these differences reflect teachers’ deeply held expectations for what children as they develop can do and what they should learn. As Hu laoshi told us, children in the youngest group do not need to line up or align their bodies with each other; the expectation is just to have them “move their bodies.” But as children move up, they are expected not only to perform the scripted body movements accurately, but also to achieve a state of *daowei* (“being in place”), *zhengqi* (“uniformity”), and perform with a good *jingshen* (“essence” and “vitality”). *Daowei* (到位) is an everyday Chinese term, a neologism that literally means “passing the ball to a certain

teammate or location.” Gradually, it has come to be used more figuratively to describe actions that are conducted “accurately,” “to a desirable extent,” “fittingly,” and “in place” (Wan, 2010, p. 189). In the context of *guangbo ticao*, achieving the state of *daowei* means that the body moves at a desirable momentum, with an appropriate intensity of energy and every part of the body in place. *Daowei* carries an implicitly social dimension, as it suggests an ideal that, rather than absolute, is responsive to the context and in harmony with the locations and movements of others. Movements that convey *daowei* are fitting, appropriate, modulated, and perfect for the occasion.

Teachers of the Orange class believe that learning to follow the teacher’s movements is an appropriately challenging task for the youngest group. Children in the junior and oldest groups are considered capable of achieving a higher level of *daowei* by going through a sequence not just of learning and practicing, but also of mastering *guangbo ticao* routines. A related Chinese cultural pedagogical concern is *zhengqi* (整齐), which means “uniform,” “orderly,” “nicely-shaped,” or “organized as a perfect whole.” While *daowei* is what teachers expect of children as individuals, *zhengqi* is a goal for children to accomplish as a collective. *Duiwu* (队伍), the term Ji laoshi used to describe the state of children as group in *guangbo ticao* next year, originally is an ancient Chinese term that originally carried the military meaning of “troop” and “battle lines” in military. In contemporary usage, *duiwu*, more generally, is used to refer to “a collective of people who are organized to collaborate with a shared task,” such as a research team with its research scientists and staff or a procession in the parade.

To achieve a state of *zhengqi*, children need to master their movements not only independently, but also in relation to others, that is, to coordinate and align their individual bodies collectively. *Zhengqi* requires not just a mastery of individual bodily techniques, but of

what Merleau-Ponty (1968) called “intercorporeality” and Erving Goffman (1963) analyzed in such mundane bodily practices as walking in a city. Just as moving down a crowded sidewalk requires not just the bodily adroitness of each individual, but also the ability of each pedestrian to adjust his or her movements to those of others, so does *guangbo ticao* require children to move not just gracefully but in synchrony with others. This requires coordination of timing and precision of location. In following teachers making the “little airplanes” (see Figure 4-16), children learn about spacing, a technique that they need to master in order to fit into a *duiwu* and achieve the state of *zhengqi*. They need to keep themselves at a certain distance from others to make sure they each have enough space to make full-range motions; at the same time, they need to stay close and maintain the physical proximity between their own bodies and other’s bodies to be a collective, a *ban*, and a *duiwu*.



Figure 4-16. Ms. Ji is teaching children to open their “little planes”

Guangbo ticao creates opportunities for young children to not only learn daowei and zhengqi, not only to move appropriately and in synchrony with others, but also to move and carry the body in ways that are aesthetically pleasing and suggest moral integrity. In the Orange class, when I asked children to define guangbo ticao, they told us that it is a way of “training the body” (*duanlian shenti*), with the goal of having “a healthy body.” The phrases they use here reflect both instrumental reasoning and deeper culturally nuanced understandings. In *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People’s Republic*, Susan Brownell (1995) offers an important differentiation between the Chinese term *shenti* and the English term “body.” *Shen* (身) is a Chinese character associated with ideas of self, person, and life history; *ti* (体), a character primarily used to refer to an individual unit or a closed system. The Chinese term *duanlian shenti* therefore refers to two kinds of bodies and implies that “one simultaneously trains the body-self and the flesh-body” (p.17). This careful reading of *shenti* is relevant for understanding the distinction that teachers draw between guangbo ticao and morning exercise: Hu laoshi explained: “Guangbo ticao is efficient. The movements are carefully designed. They are cute, simple, and appropriate to children. It only takes a few minutes to exercise the whole body.” Ji laoshi added: “The sense of collectivity is empty and vague that children can’t understand no matter how you explain it. But they know that at guangbo ticao, children of our Orange class should stay close together. Children from the Peach class stay somewhere else. There is nothing more straightforward and easy for them to come to understand the sense of a group than guangbo ticao.” Unlike the fragmented and individually oriented motor-skill development targeted in morning exercise, guangbo ticao affords a way of learning that is inclusive, communal, and morale boosting.

Hu laoshi emphasized that as children move up, they need to learn not just *daowei* (appropriate, accurate movement) and *zhengqi* (synchronization of movement) but also to perform the routines that look *meiguan* (美观) and with *jingshen* (精神). *Meiguan*, is an adjective in Chinese that is often used to describe things and objects that create a pleasing visual appearance to those watching. When children perform the routines, they are expected to communicate the pleasure and joyfulness that they experienced to the people watching. Watching *guangbo ticao* routines is considered to be a form of aesthetic enjoyment.

But most importantly, the routines need to be performed with *jingshen* (精神), an ancient Chinese term associated with vitality, energy, and liveliness expressed in and through the body. Some Western scholars of Chinese medicine and philosophy suggest that translating *jingshen* as “spirit” loses some of its rich physiological, aesthetic, and cosmological meanings. Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang suggest that *jingshen* should be defined as the combination of two substances: “essence” (精) and “vitality” (神) (2012, p. 24). What, then, does it mean to do *guangbo ticao* with good *jingshen*? In classroom, when teachers need to have children’s attention they often start the nursery rhyme and children join in and recite: “One, two, three. Sit, sit well; Three, two, one. Have *jingshen*.” When I ask children in the Orange class what it means to have *jingshen*, they immediately adjusted their sitting posture, placing their feet firmly on the ground, chins raised up, backs straight, hands on their laps, and eyes forward and focused. Yi Fan, the boy teachers identified earlier as one of the children who often cannot sit well, told me: “Having *jingshen* means my eyes have lights and teachers will praise me.” In *The World is So Beautiful*, one of the Ministry of Education’s five *guangbo ticao* demonstration videos, we see one girl and two boys, in a triangle formation, perform the routine in unison, with grace, rhythm, and precise movements and locations (see Figure 4-17).



Figure 4-17. Children performing World is So Beautiful in the demonstration video

The three children, dressed in identical outfits of white shorts and socks and red tank tops, exemplify the strong, energetic, confident demeanor of jingshen that teachers most hope to see in their students. In the teachers’ reflections we can discern a nuanced distinction between *guangbo ticao* and other physical exercise, such as playground activities, that only address the physiological body. *Guangbo ticao* is a training of both the “flesh-body” and “body-self,” a practice that is aesthetically rich, ethically laden, and deeply social.

Welcome to the Rug



Figure 4-18. Mr. William puts a finger to his mouth and says: “Shh”

At DCC, children are doing their work time and playing in the centers. At 9:30, Mr. William looks up the clock and announces it is time to clean up and get ready for the morning messages. Children put board games into the cupboard, return picture books to the book rack, and send toys back to their bins. Mr. William helps children move the blocks stacked on the rug back to the shelves. As the rug is cleared, Mr. William announces: "When you guys are ready, please come to the rug." He pulls a chair to a corner of the rug, sits on it, and gives children running into his arms each a big hug. "Thanks for coming to the rug," Mr. Williams says, "Now, please find a letter and sit on your bottom." On the edge of the rug are 26 letters, each printed in bold font and in different colors. Children come to the rug one after another, still in great excitement. Sam is mimicking a frog and croaking at Arad, Simon and George are kicking their feet in the air, Ajay is doing a solo dance, and Navee is rolling over around on rug. "Oh, everyone is in high spirits! Alright. Let's do this," Mr. William starts singing a nursery rhyme: "Take your little hands and go. Clap. Clap. Clap." Mr. William wiggles his hands and claps. "Take your little feet and go. Stomp. Stomp. Stomp," Mr. William continues his singing and stomps his feet. One after another, children join Mr. William in singing and moving their bodies. The singing gradually turns into a chorus with clapping and stomping and synchronized movements. "Take little fingers and go. Shh. Shh. Shh," Mr. William lowers his voice bit by bit. "If you have a finger. Hold it out like this," Mr. William says quietly and raises his right finger up high in the air. Mr. William raises his volume and says: "I say class, you say?" "Yes!" A boy pretending to be a monster let's out a moan. "All right. Listen. Listen," says Mr. William, holding his finger up, switching to a softer voice and pointing to his throat: "Your volume matches my volume." "Class?" Mr. William asks and holds his finger higher in the air. "Yes," children respond and point their fingers in the air too. "Class? Class? Class?" Mr. William jabs

his finger into the air three times. “Yes. Yes. Yes,” Children answer and follow Mr. William’s finger movement. “Clas—sity class,” Mr. William draws a big circle with his arm, pulls back his arm and puts his finger in front of his lips with a “Shh” gesture. “Ye—ssity yes,” children answer and imitate the same movement with their fingers. “Criss cross,” says Mr. William, as he puts his hand near his mouth, pretending he is whispering into someone’s ear. “Apple sauce!” children respond, crossing their legs and sitting on their bottoms. “Hands in?” Mr. William continues. “Your lap,” children respond, putting their hands in their laps. “Feet behind?” Mr. William continues. “The thin blue line,” children respond in chorus, scooting back and keeping their feet behind the blue line. Finally getting everyone seated and their eyes on him, Mr. William raises his hand up in the air and asks: “Okay. So, who can tell me what Rule Number 1 is?”

This vignette captures a typical moment of the beginning of morning message at DCC. Mr. William and his children are finishing cleaning up the centers and move to the rug for their morning messages, a time for making announcements, reading the messages written in the envelopes posted on the wall, and sharing what they did in centers. Similar to the vignette of children moving chairs for their sharing time at Zizu, children at the DCC also are transitioning from being scattered around the classroom to gathering in a communal space. At the beginning, the scene appears much more chaotic and noisy than the Orange class; but in the end, Mr. William successfully “gets everyone on the same page” and starts a conversation. In a classroom as home-like as DCC, where great emphasis is given to meeting children’s individual interests and personal needs, there are still collective bodily practices and children need to learn to use their bodies in synchronization with others. But the classroom layout, material surroundings, and

strategies used by the teacher create different bodily practices for children at DCC than we see in their Chinese peers of the Orange class.

Compared to the Orange class, where Hu laoshi quietly waits for children to take seats with minimal involvement and children patiently rearrange their chairs for classmates who come late, Mr. William has different beliefs about transitions and uses a different approach:

The idea is that you don't start the morning messages when there are only two or three kids on the rug. But you don't want to keep children waiting So when a good amount of kids get on the rug, you might start doing little attention getters, focusing activities like a little rhyme or song, so that when the others trickle on over, then they get it, then they start immediately joining in with the songs we are doing, then I can do what we need to do, like read a story or talk about some issues or ask questions.

Seeing children still in the excitement of moving their bodies and talking to their friends, Mr. William did not try to stop them or call out, "Everybody, be quiet" or "Everyone, take a seat." Instead, he uses what he calls "attention getters" to redirect children's gaily chattering into a melodic choral chanting and their miscellaneous bodily behaviors into a rhythmic and synchronized movement.

Mr. William uses a series of nursery rhymes and finger plays that are generally known to American preschool teachers. It appears that there is nothing unusual about these songs that could get children's attention and their bodies engaged in a collective and synchronized way. But a microanalysis of Mr. William's chanting and moving shows how he strategically uses these common songs by fine-tuning his volume, range and intensity of motion, facial expressions, and tone and inserting some little performance into lyrics as he carefully reads and adjusts in concert with children's reactions.

Mr. William starts by reciting “Take your little hands and go” and clapping his hands. For the first several lines, children are still talking and playing with friends and only a few are joining Mr. William in clapping hands and stomping feet. Finishing the fifth line “Take your little feet and go. Stomp. Stomp. Stomp,” Mr. William quickly places his hand near his mouth and as if he is speaking into someone’s ears, says in an abrupt tone: “Oh! Listen! Listen!” Then he lowers his volume as he speaks. Children quiet down and start following him in chanting the rest of the song.



Figure 4-19. Mr. William puts a hand near his mouth as if he is speaking into someone’s ears

Here, we see Mr. William injects a short impromptu performance in between two lines of lyrics to deal the immediate situation as he sees children still talking and distracted by the high volume of chattering and laughter from their peers. Mr. William creates and performs an everyday scenario to raise children’s awareness of their voices and have them actively modify their volume. Placing his hand near his mouth, Mr. William pretends he is speaking into someone’s ears, a gesture usually used when one has a secret to tell. He says: “Oh! Listen! Listen!” as if he has suddenly remembered something important that he forgot and has to

announce immediately. Then he lowers his volume, adding a little bit more sense of mystery and making his words more difficult to hear. Children either stop talking or lower their own voices to hear what Mr. William is saying. When Mr. William pretends to whisper into someone's ears, he is also pretending the conversation is private, as if he is whispering to a particular child instead to all of them as a group. The feeling Mr. William creates of delivering an important message to a single or small group of listeners creates interest and excitement in the children, who give him their attention. This brief performance piece, along with his artful use of gestures and vocal tone, successfully redirects children's attention, turning them into attentive listeners.

Another strategy Mr. William uses he described as "whole body engagement," a technique he learned from a professor who he took a course with and who inspired him to modify the traditional call and response of the teacher saying "Class" and children responding "Yes." Mr. William transformed this most prosaic of conversational exchanges between a teacher and students in a US classroom into something fun and special. He did this also with, *Crisscross Apple sauce* and *Hands in your laps*, the two most commonly-heard bodily instruction directed to children in American preschools (Lee, 2016), transforming these directives into a lively call and response during which the teacher and his students synchronize their movements and match each other's volume. As Mr. William explained:

The professor showed a video on whole-body engagement. That's where I learned this from. That's the technique I love because the kids love it too. That's why we do the "Cla—ss? Class class class, cla—ssity class." Some people would just say "Crisscross Apple Sauce. Hands in your lap" but then I like that choral response "Crisscross?" "Apple sauce!" "Hands in?" "Your lap!" That just helps them remember what they know, what they are doing, and has they do it.

These techniques, which are components of what Mr. William calls, “his bag of tricks,” are what he uses when he sees there is a need to synchronize children’s attention and bodies. In accordance with his read of the immediate situation and his knowledge of the particular group of children, he improvises and modifies his strategies.

I called them my bag of tricks. Because it’s things I can pull out when I know: “Oh, oh, it looks like we are gonna have a three-minute wait or five-minute wait. Let’s do something.” They are passed down. They have a placed meaning. Like I learned “Ram Sam Sam” from an old teacher. “I had a little turtle, his name is tiny Tim” was a song I remember from my childhood that we used to sing. I will add variation to them to make them more fun for me and for the children



Figure 4-20. The rug in the DCC classroom

The rug, which is the space for this daily routine, organizes children’s bodily behaviors. A piece of carpet with printed letters, numbers, shapes and colors, such rugs are widely used in American preschools as a gathering place for large group activities such as morning meetings, storytelling, and circle time. These rugs usually are printed with letters, numbers, and colored

shapes to give them pedagogical value. Teachers usually take a spot to sit on the rug or sit in a chair, as Mr. William does, and have children sit around them in a circle. When children come to the rug, they are told to find a spot and sit in a certain place, such as on a letter. In some classrooms, children are asked to sit on the initial of their first name, which may cause a fight between two children who share initials or frustrate a child who doesn't like the position he finds himself in. DCC's blue rug has 26 uppercase letters printed on the border in alphabetical order. Each letter is framed in a square-shaped pattern block of a different color.

At DCC, children don't receive specific instructions on where to sit. Mr. William explained: "We try to give children as much freedom as possible when we were at the rug. We do not have assigned letters because we want them to feel that they are coming to sit and enjoying being a part of the group, not 'I have to come to sit on the letter T all the time.'" Having the freedom to choose where to sit gives the children some freedom, but does not mean that children can use their bodies freely.

The rug presents a spatial dilemma to children. On one hand, the space defined by the rug is an undifferentiated whole where children could, by having their individual bodies come into contact with other's bodies, experience the "bodily unity and community" in a festive bodily life that Bakhtin described in *Rabelais and His World* (1984). In the beginning of the vignette, we see children come to the rug, but instead of finding a letter and sitting on it quietly they play with friends. The spaciousness, openness, vibrant colors, and softness of the rug invite children's movement and spontaneous bodily expressions. When they reach the rug the children roll on the rug and kick their feet in a manner Bakhtin described as the "carnivalesque" spirit of the medieval carnival and market place. On the other hand, the letters enclosed in varicolored square and the lines separating the perimeter of letters from the blue area in the center, divide the rug

into twenty-six booths. When a child chooses a letter and sits on it, the letter offers a seat as well as a clearly-defined space, implying that each body needs to be separated and maintained within a self-inclusive space without crossing over the lines. These implicit beliefs about the body are more explicitly stated in the instructions delivered to children as they sit on the rug, such as when Mr. William tells children to “Sit on your bottom,” “Crisscross Apple Sauce,” and put “Hands in your laps.”



Figure 4-21. Sam (the boy in blue shirt) and Myra (the girl in blue cardigan) sit on their bottom with Crisscross Applesauce and hands in the laps

Crisscross Apple Sauce is a style of sitting, once known as “Indian style,” with legs crossed and feet bent inwards and crossed at the ankle. As Figure 4-12 shows, as children sit on their bottoms Crisscross Apple Sauce and hands in their laps, their bodies are firmly attached to the floor and their hands and feet are placed inward. This body posture conveys a strong sense of self-restraint and self-control, which is best exemplified in the phrase: “Keep your hands and feet to yourself,” an instruction that is given to children in this classroom only when teachers see a potential for a physical injury or hurt feeling.

At DCC, the rug introduces the notion of community in a most straightforward way by having children's bodies placed in a communal circle where they can experience the carnivalesque joy of joining their bodies with others. At the same time, the rug also places children into separate booths where they are socialized into practices for respecting personal space and notions of a private, independent self. These two sides of the synchronization of bodies, Bakhtin's carnivalesque and Foucault's "discipline" (1995), are both present on the rug during morning messages.



Figure 4-22. Mr. William hug Meimei and Ajay as they come to the rug

When children come to the rug, Mr. William often greets them by saying, "Welcome to the rug," "Thanks you for coming to the rug," and giving them a hug (see Figure 4-22). I suggest there are deep meanings in these greetings. The rug is a hybrid space, a space of both communal warmth and of self-control, the private body, and the private self. By coming to the rug, children make a commitment to this joyful but also challenging task of socializing their bodies into a complicated hybrid that is simultaneously social and personal.

Cutting a Rug



Figure 4-23. Simon dances with Ajay

As morning messages ends, Mr. William calls for a vote for today's dance song. The first option is MC Hammer's "U Can't Touch This," the second is Sweet's "Fox on the Run." Mr. William has children listen to the prelude of each of these old rock songs and then tells them to vote by standing on different sides of the rug to make their vote. "You Can't Touch This" outpolls "Fox on the Run" by a vote of seven to six. Mr. William asks Simon to be the first dancer and sits back into his chair. "Simon, are you ready?" Mr. William asks Simon. Ms. Shannon turns on the music. A strong beat rings out. "Go! Simon Boy!" Mr. William calls out and claps his hands to the beat. Simon approaches Ajay who is sitting on his letter. Simon holds his hands out to Ajay, inviting him to join him, sticks a leg forward, and points to his foot in a gesture that suggests the dance step these two boys share. Ajay follows Simon back onto the center of the rug, which is now the dance floor. Simon sticks out his left leg puts it across his

right leg. Then he reverses this maneuver, this time crossing his left leg over his right. Ajay kicks his right foot in the air and hops on his left foot. Dancing face to face, Simon matches Ajay move as they try to stay with the beat. “Woo hoo!” Mr. William cheers and reminds them: “Make sure to stay on your feet, guys.” “Felix! Ajay and Simon, back to your letters. Here comes Felix’s turn!” Mr. William announces the next dance and gently pulls Felix’s prone body forward into the blue area. Putting his face in his arms, Felix squirms forward across the rug on his elbows and knees. Laughing, Ms. Shannon calls out: “That’s the original starter of the *shark!*” As Felix’s body leaves the blue area, Mr. William calls on the next child: “Alright. Meimei!” At this point, Luke puts squirms into the blue area. Mr. William calls out: “Oh. It’s Meimei’s turn, everyone. All the sharks out.” Taking Meimei’s torso, which is leaning into him, in both hand, Mr. William gently pushes her into the blue area. Meimei jumps a small step forward and then hesitates when Mr. William puts a finger to his lip and says “Shh.” Mr. William raises his other hand in the air and says: “Oh! Oh! Listen up!” The first section of the song has come to the end. Mr. William waves his hand in rhythm as the infectious beat of U Can’t Touch This again begins. “Go! Meimei! Cut a rug! Sister!” Mr. William calls out. Meimei approaches Marie and holds out her hands. Marie takes Meimei’s hands and they spin around making loops. Most of the children get two turns to do a solo or dance with a partner. As the song concludes, Mr. William says: “All right, good job! Everybody have a seat. Have a seat.” Mr. William turns off the media player and sits back in his chair.

Everyday at DCC children gather on the rug for dancing, which Mr. William has listed on the daily schedule as “movement exploration.” The routine is standard: children vote for the day’s dance tune from two alternatives, and then take turns dancing alone or with a partner. Mr. William invites dancers onto the dance floor and lets them know when their turn is over. There

are no prescribed movements. Instead, children improvise, and most have a signature dance move like Felix's "shark." Teachers give no dance instructions and only correct a child's ways of moving if it poses a physical risk. The goal of movement exploration, as Mr. William explains, is "*They'll do it.*"

Choice.

Movement exploration offers children the opportunity to make choices. Figure 4-23 foregrounds Simon and Ajay's dance. But the frame also includes Arad, a boy in a blue T-shirt and jeans, sitting quietly on a corner of the rug and hiding his face in his hands. He neither makes a vote nor joins the dance. At the same time, a student intern is trying to urge Zach (a boy stays in the reading corner and therefore off the camera) to come out of the book reading corner and join the dancing group on the rug. Mr. William interrupts her: "If he doesn't want to dance. Leave him over there. That's fine." At DCC, children can choose if they want to dance or not. Children can choose to stay on the rug and not participate in the dance. They can also choose to not come to the rug, even if this means a child might be away from the group, the only one not on the rug. For those that choose to come to the rug, they can vote for the music and express their individuality with their improvised dance steps.

An element of choice is present in the DCC not only in movement exploration, but in almost every other classroom routine. As Mr. William explained: "Almost everything in this classroom is their choice." At work time children can choose from a variety of activities to explore and who they want to play with. At mealtimes children can choose to eat only the foods they like and even choose to not eat at all; at naptime, children can choose to take a nap or stay awake, as long as they play quietly; after waking up from their nap, children can choose from four or five different toothpastes placed next to their toothbrushes. While many US preschool

teachers do not give children as much latitude to make choices as does Mr. William, DCC's commitment to providing children with choices reflects a core cultural belief and practice of free choice that has remained a key feature of the curriculum and pedagogy of American preschools (Tobin et al., 1989, 2009). Why this emphasis on choice in US early childhood education? When I ask Mr. William why children are offered with the choice to dance solo or with a partner, the answer to him was self-evident:

It's their choice. They get to choose to either dance solo or to dance with a partner. And believe me, if we say: "Alright today will be a solo dance time." Children will say: "Oh, we want partners! We want partners!" If we say: "Okay. Today is a partner day," children would say: "All we wanna do is solo!" They just like to have those choices and there's no cost to letting them have choice.

From Mr. William's explanation we can deduce an underlying cultural logic of choice: Because choice is an intrinsic need and a right, activities that are individually chosen are preferred to those that are collectively chosen or assigned. Although in movement exploration children are free to make many choices, these choices are by no means unrestrained. Children can choose to dance or not, but they are not free to dance as long as they want. Children need to take turns to equally share the one piece of music played each day. Children can choose not to come to rug, but if they choose to dance, it must be in the blue area in the center of the rug. Once their turn is over, they need to return to their letters and leave the dance floor for the next dancer.



Figure 4-24. Meimei walks by Myra

Although “there is no cost to letting children have choices,” as William says, making choices does come with some costs. For example, in the vignette, during her turn to cut a rug, we see Meimei (the girl with black hair in a green shirt) walk towards Myra and make eye contact. Myra, anticipating being invited to be Meimei’s dance partner, extends her hands. But Meimei pokes the air towards Myra in a gesture that says: “No, not you.” She then walks right past Myra and takes Chair’s hands (see Figure 4-24).

Later, in the middle of the song, Myra gets the turn. She takes her steps around slowly, as if she is hesitating about who she wants to dance with. Then with a big smile, she holds out her hands to Marie (the girl with blonde hair and in a tank dress). Marie slightly shakes her head in saying “No.” Myra pulls her body back and looks a little bit shocked by this rejection as the smile fades away from her face (see Figure 4-25).



Figure 4-25. Myra holds out her hands to Marie and pulls back as Marie rejects her invitation

In the first episode, Myra, who seems to read Meimei's body orientation and the eye contact as an invitation, holds out her hands to Meimei, offering herself as a dancing partner. But Meimei, who may have for the moment decided to dance with Myra, then changes her mind, rejects Myra, and turns to Marie, leaving Myra rejected, embarrassed, and visibly upset. In the second episode, Myra chooses Marie to be her partner, but her invitation is rejected. Her choice is subject to the choice of Marie, who also has the right to choose to not accept her invitation. In both episodes, children make their choices. But unlike from choosing from among five varieties of toothpastes, choosing a dancing partner requires complicated readings of bodily cues, provokes emotion laden social relations, and reflects class power dynamics. When I showed these clips to the teachers at DCC, Mr. William acknowledge the tensions:

That is the leverage of the whole thing. That's really when a child wants to demonstrate that she or he has the power. But there's also a little bit of grinding to it, isn't it? Where it looks like "I am coming to you, but suddenly I want Marie." There is a sense of people who are

more popular and who like to be danced with. Sam likes to be danced with. Marie likes to be danced with.

On one hand, children enjoy their right to make choices and chose how they want to dance and with whom they want to dance. Such choosing is assumed to be more satisfying and pleasurable than being told what dance steps to do or to be assigned a partner; on the other hand, children also learn to taste the bitterness that often accompanies such choices. The choice of partners makes peer relations and status visible: The child who chooses wields power, as does the child who is chosen, while the child who is passed over experiences powerlessness.

In *Preschools in Three Cultures Revisited*, Tobin et. al (2009) offer a Marxist interpretation of the times in American preschools when children are offered choices as being preparation for the culture of the shopping mall, where capitalist economies require consumers to have strong opinions and preferences about almost identical choices. This interpretation fits to choice of activities during center time and teeth-brushing time at DCC, when children are asked to choose among a list of familiar activities and things. But seen from Myra's perspective, choosing who to dance with and being chosen or not becomes less of a metaphor for the shopping mall than the high school prom, where the moment of choice is always socially significant and often emotionally difficult and dramatic. In contrast, in China there are no proms or other occasions when individuals make public performances of choosing and being chosen (and left out) and, more generally, teachers are careful to not put children in situations where they would hurt a classmate's feelings or put one child above another by allowing for children to choose dance partners or who to sit next to during lunch.

Letting children have choices is also implicitly associated with a meta-discourse prevalent in American society on how to be an "independent decision-maker" (Lee & Walsh,

2005), one who is accountable and responsible for the choices he or she makes. For example, before having children vote for the day's song, Mr. William and children have a short conversation about choice:

Mr. William: "Will your choice always win?"

Children answer in chorus: "No."

Mr. William: "Should we be upset about it?"

Children answer in chorus: "No."

By having this conversation, Mr. William is trying to get children emotionally prepared for the possibility of their choice not winning; he is also trying to help children develop a meta-awareness of what it means to make a choice. This short exchange is a rehearsal of choice as a key practice of American political, social, and everyday life.

Signature moves.

The vignette shows a variety of movements as children take their turns dancing to the music: Simon and Ajay's crossing-leg steps and kicks, Meimei and Marie's spinning loops, and Felix's snake-like squirm. The most striking feature of this scene is in how children move their bodies differently. Each solo is unique (with the exception of Luke's, which copies Felix's go to move, which is a *faux pas* in this classroom).

To the teachers of the Orange class at Zizu, the scene at DCC of children being called out to take turns performing a solo or a *pas de deux* in the center of the rug while classmates withdraw to the periphery suggests an intense dance competition, with each performer attempting to impress the audience and outperform the competition. However, this is not how Mr. William or other US early childhood educators see the point of the activity. When I showed the video clip of the vignette to teachers at DCC and asked them about the activity's goals and

expectations, Mr. William puts it simply: “My expectation (laughing) is just that they’ll do it. But my expectation, for dancing, is one, getting cardio, and also, developing a sense of rhythm.” However, I would point out that if these are the central goals of the movement exploration activity, why not make the entire rug an open dance floor so everyone can dance the whole time, maximizing each child’s cardio time and chance to work on rhythm? If the goal is, as with Zizu’s playground activities, to get children’s bodies moving, why not direct children’s movements in routines carefully constructed in accordance the children’s developmental stage? If the goal is mastering a sense of rhythm, why don’t the teachers give any guidance and instead happily tolerate arrhythmic movement? Mr. William gives more explanation as he comments on the dances of the boys:

You can see some of the boys that we have are really good dancers. They have really started developing a great sense of rhythm. They’ve developed a sense of how to move in certain ways. Like right now, Simon and Sam and Ajay and George all have these kind of moves. They Bend over and shake their bottom. And they like to do it in pairs, which is a really interesting thing for me to watch because it shows collaboration. It shows that they are developing a sense of rhythm that goes along with specific music. Because they won’t do it for every song. It is just for very specific songs they do it.

Mr. William also takes a quote from their program coordinator to further explain his approach for movement exploration:

Lorie was observing my classroom earlier in the year when I just had children move up from another classroom into my room. And I also have children who have been with me for a year. She was commenting on how the kids that have been with me were just like all over dancing and the kids who came up from another classroom were used to doing more traditional

dances like “You put one hand in. You take one hand out” and you stand on a square and everyone does the same motion at the same time. It's just not my thing. That speaks volumes of my approach to that kind of activity.

“You put one hand in. You take one hand out,” the sentence quoted here, are the lyrics of the *Hokey Pokey*, a participant dance with a distinctive accompanying tune, lyric structure, and a set of movements that became popular in the U.S. in the 1950s. In the hokey pokey dance, participants stand in a circle and perform movements that prescribed by the lyrics. “You put one hand in. You take one hand out,” and then “you shake it all about”. Participants move their bodies in accordance to the lyrics and the beat. The dancing bodies are synchronized as a whole.

To Lorie, who may only visit Mr. William’s classroom occasionally, there are clearly two types of dances in the classroom. One type is the hokey pokey, which is performed by children when they are new to the classroom and new to movement exploration; the other is the “all over dancing” done by children who have been with Mr. William and doing his movement exploration for a year. Mr. William agrees with her comments, and sees the clear difference that Lorie observed in how children in his class dance in a way that conveys and embodies his beliefs about dancing and demonstrate the impact of his approach.

“A great sense of rhythm,” as Mr. William proudly see emerging in the movements his children perform, is not a general sense of rhythm that could be found in dances that are structured with scripted movements and uniform motions, such as the Hokey Pokey. Movements with “a great sense of rhythm,” such as the steps and kicks of Simon and Ajay, are performed by moving the body in a particular way that goes along with a particular piece of music. These movements, which Mr. William calls “moves,” carry strong personal characteristics that vary

from child to child and pair to pair. The move becomes the signature of the dancer, such as Felix's "shark."



Figure 4-26. Felix crawls on the rug like a shark

Figure 4-26 shows Felix prone on the rug with his knees supporting his body, arms extended forward, and hands held together in front of his head. He crawls across the blue area like a shark swimming across the sea. That's how this movement got the name "the shark." Felix, who invented this movement, performs it almost every day during "cut a rug" time. This has made the shark "Felix's move;" and "Felix is the shark." There are dances with set moves in the DCC and other American preschools and, more generally, in some American dance settings (for example, square dances, line dances, and ballroom dancing). But unlike in Chinese preschools, there is also a premium on individuals developing and performing their own "signature moves," and on individuals dancing in a way that is assumed to show their individuality.

Teachers at DCC not only see children moving in different, individualized ways as natural because, as Mr. William explains: "Everyone's body develops differently," but also significant as the chance to develop self-expression.

By offering choices, organizing the rug into a mini dance floor, with the blue area as the stage, and the looping letters as audience seats, teachers create a performance space where children take turns on the stage. The goal is less of pushing children to dance well and impress the audience with skills and techniques, as one mistakenly might surmise if we were to take literally Mr. William's praise for their dancing and calls to "Cut a rug," but more of support for children to explore self-expressions through the body and encouraging them to present their individuality in a semi-public performance. Movement exploration is less a practice that aims to prepare good dancers than a chance to cultivate choice and self-expression in these young children.

Synchronization on and off the dance floor.

In the vignette, we see Simon invites Ajay to follow him into the blue area and collaborate to perform their steps and kicks, which, according to Mr. William, shows a "great sense of rhyme." The move is also exclusive to this pair: "You don't see them doing it with anybody else," Ms. Kelly explains to me when I notice remark on how frequently children invite a partner to dance with them and how well they negotiate their bodies as they share the blue area.

In Simon and Ajay's dance, we see Simon initiating his dancing turn as he walks directly to Ajay and invites him to be his partner. He holds Ajay's hands to pull his body up from a seating position to a standing posture. Simon looks into Ajay's eyes and points his fingers down at their feet, gesturing the movement he wants to dance with Ajay (see Figure 4-27).



Figure 4-27. Simon gestures Ajay to their move



Figure 4-28. Simon and Ajay dance their steps and kicks

Simon steps back and Ajay steps forward to follow him. The dance starts almost immediately when both of them placing their feet firmly on the floor of the blue area. Simon and Ajay, each try to maintain their balance as they kick one foot out and then the other. They also watch their feet closely to prevent kicking each other or stepping into the other's space where the partner's

foot could land (see figure X). They try to stay close to each other to maintain the connection and coordination, which is exciting, and also to negotiate the space to protect their bodies and keep the flow of movement. Simon and Ajay's dance presents a form of synchronization that is achieved not by a teacher directed, explicitly stated set of bodily procedures, but instead with an agreement between the two boys that is voluntary, tacit, and intercorporeal.



Figure 4-29. Sam holds Simon's hands and spins around

Such forms of synchronization are also observed in other paired dances. Sam is announced as the next dancer. He runs across the rug and pulls Simon into the blue area. Sam holds Simon's hand in his and spins around for several rotations (see Figure 4-29). All of a sudden, Sam releases his hands, spreads his arms, and whirls around. Simon looks appalled, unprepared for this abrupt change (see Figure 4-30).



Figure 4-30. Simon looks appalled

Sam giggles and playfully brushes over Simon’s hair with his arm as he whirls around (see Figure 4-31a). Figure 4-31 a to d shows Simon’s facial expression changes from a confused look into a smile as he spreads out his arms and whirls around with Sam. The sequence of images also shows that as Simon synchronizes his movement with Sam, they pull their bodies further away from each other to make more space for the extension of their arms and to avoid collisions as they whirl. This episode shows how two children restore the synchronization of their bodies after the synchronization is temporarily suspended by a playful trick. Sam, who plays the trick and suspends the spinning, does not mean to break the synchronization of the pair dance by shifting to another movement by himself. He whirls around and skims over Simon’ hair as if it is an accidental touch due to his movement. But the smirk on Sam’s face communicates that he brushed Simon’s hair on purpose, as if say “Look, I got you!” At the same time, this gesture could also be seen as a cue to capture Simon’s attention and remind him to mirror his movements: “Hey, I am doing the whirling now. Follow me!”



Figure 4-31 a & b & c & d. Simon and Sam whirl around

When I showed these clips to the teachers at DCC and asked if they found it surprising that children are synchronizing as they dance in pairs, they immediately identified these movements as special moves exclusive to each pair.

Ms. Kelly: That’s something they (Ajay and Simon) do with each other. You don’t see them doing it with anybody else. Just them two.

Mr. William: Right. And Simon and Sam used to do the Whirling Dervish with putting their arms out and whirling around.

Ms. Shannon: It’s a connection that they have made with dancing. Who they are gonna choose to do it with.

I then asked them what they think makes children want to synchronize their bodies and perform synchronized movements.

Mr. William: Because we dance everyday. Sometimes we have outdoor dance parties that last the entire afternoon.

Ms. Shannon: And they come and go as they please, of course

Mr. William: I like to have them in what we call the blue area, in the circle of the rug. Children like Simon and Ajay will coach each other before their turns, like they were in the same line on the rug. And they'd like to step out and say, "Ajay, we gotta the rug, we are gonna do this on the rug."

Ms. Shannon: Yeah. They will talk about it before they get there.

Mr. William: So they will coach each other before they get their opportunity.

Mr. William: I think they developed it because the opportunity is offered to them. That sounds hokey, but I think that's how it developed. I know Simon at home dances a lot. His mother has shared a video of him dancing at home where he makes up moves. So that's something he enjoys doing and so you just bring some with him.

I concluded these section of the video-cued interview by asking these teachers what they think about the synchronization of bodies in the *guangbo ticao* scene in the *Zizu* video.

Ms. Shannon: It's graceful and beautiful to see all the children move at the same time in progressions. But with Sam and Sid it's free will. They are just doing it. No one else is picking up on it.

Mr. William: I think the reason it's free will, what we call "free will" in our classroom, is that we have the approach that everyone's body is developing differently. So when I expect, or what I know Sam can do, or Simon can do, I know that maybe Daeun cannot do. So the idea of making Daeun to go around in synchronicity with another person seems silly to me.

With the camera focusing on the blue area, the videos usually foreground the synchronization of bodies in the paired dances. But a close reading of the periphery of the rug shows another form of synchronization of bodies in children who each stands on their letters, and wait for their turns (see Figure 4-32 and Figure 4-33). At DCC, such synchronization of bodies in motion is emergent rather than orchestrated. This suggests a pleasure the children find in the spontaneous synchronization of movement, a pleasure I suggest is like the pleasure Bakhtin (1984) describes in Rabelais and His World as the characteristic of carnival, and other collective, non-mandates bodily experiences that celebrate the sense of bodies being not only individual but also connected and collective.



Figure 4-32. Children fold their arms into “chicken wings” and flap in synchrony



Figure 4-33. Meimei, Myra, and Cassie twirl their dresses in synchrony

In both the teachers' coordination of children movements at Zizu and the emergent, child-initiated synchronization of movements at DCC we see two forms of children experiencing the pleasures of using their bodies to express a sense of community, which I suggest is a key function of preschools in China, the US, and elsewhere.

CHAPTER 5

BODILY CARE



Figure 5-1 a & b. Mr. William helps Ajay put on his shoes; Di Di is confused by his pants

It is 2:30 in the afternoon and at both DCC and Zizu children are waking up from their naps. Everyday after lunch children at both places take a two-hour nap. Shutters are left ajar and curtains not completely closed to let some light in. As naptime comes to an end, children sit up, get dressed, and tiptoe to the bathrooms. Teachers walk around, waking up children who are still asleep and assisting children who need help.

At DCC, Ajay carries his shoes and socks to Mr. William and asks for help. He hands Mr. William his sock and then pulls over a pillow to lie on it. Mr. William, gripping Ajay by the ankles, pulls his body closer and lets Ajay place his feet on Mr. William's belly. Mr. William turns Ajay' inside-out socks right-side out and put on his socks on one by one. Then Mr. William picks up Ajay's right shoe, unties the shoelaces, and loosens them (see Figure 5-1 a). Ajay scoots

his body closer to Mr. William and sticks out his right foot to let Mr. William put the shoe on. Mr. William holds his right foot, puts on the shoe, double knots the shoelaces. Ajay puts his right foot down and sticks out his left foot to let Mr. William put on the other shoe.

Meanwhile at Zizu, Di Di is confused by his pants. After waking up, Di Di first goes to the bathroom to pee then returns to get dressed. He stands next to his bed and puts on his jumper first. Then he picks up his pants, each hand holding one cuff, but doesn't know what to do next. He looks down at the pants and murmurs to himself: "How do you put on pants?" He turns the pants upside down for another perspective, but still can't figure it out. He looks to Hu laoshi and whines: "Hu laoshi, how do I put these on?" Hu laoshi's voice comes from the other end of the sleeping room: "To put on pants, you just sit on the bed." She walks over, guides him to a sitting position on the bed, and walks away.

These two scenes each capture a typical moment of interaction between teachers and children when the child needs help with bodily care. This chapter explores how teachers attend to children's bodies and how children learn to take care of their bodies at preschools in both cultures. Bodily care could be seen in moments as explicit as helping a child put on his socks and as subtle as rearranging a child's body into a posture that makes it easier for him to get his pants on. Unlike the earlier chapters which each focused on a particular time of the day and an activity, this chapter follows practices for caring for the body throughout the school day.

The Importance of Being Little

In the video we see Ajay come to Mr. William with his socks and shoes. But he doesn't get immediate help from Mr. William, who is helping Kajal put on her shoes and talking with

Sam and Simon. Ajay holds his socks and leans on Mr. William as he waits (see Figure 5-2).



Figure 5-2. Ajay holds his socks and leans on Mr. William

Ajay hands one of his socks to Mr. William, who continues talking to other children until only Ajay is left on the rug. Mr. William turns the sock right-side out and asks Ajay: “Can you put the socks on?” Ajay does not answer Mr. William’s question. Instead, he hands Mr. William the other sock, takes a pillow and lays his body comfortably on it as he lets Mr. William pull his body closer and put on the socks and shoes (See Figure 5-3).



Figure 5-3. Ajay lies down and lets Mr. William pull him in on his socks

In a preschool classroom of three-and-four-year-olds, there is nothing more usual than seeing a teacher help a child who has trouble putting on his socks or shoes. But the amount of help Mr. William offers to Ajay as well as the intensity of the attention and physical closeness is

by no means universal. When Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi watched this scene, they laughed: “We would never help a child put on his socks.” I am familiar with DCC’s teaching philosophy and routines, and yet each time I watch this scene I am struck by the ease and spontaneity in Ajay’s body and the casualness in Mr. William’s body as he handles Ajay’s body. Ajay is a competent child who can serve himself cereal and dance his signature moves. This raises the question of whether Ajay is getting more help here than he needs. The reason that Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi cannot see themselves offering children as much help as Mr. William does here with Ajay is that they expect three-and-four-year-olds to be able to put on their own socks and they believe that children can easily learn to do so through practice. Helping a child put on his socks on will not only take away a learning opportunity, but more importantly may spoil a child, a childrearing concern that has been haunting Chinese society since the 1979 One-Child Policy came into effect. But Mr. William has a different theory about what should be expected for children at this age:

Well, of course if a child here was doing that, we would say: “Oh, they are really independent!” “Oh, they are doing it by themselves.” But we would never expect a child to do that. That’s not the expectation. Should a three-year-old carry his own bag? For people who have been here, on earth, for just three years, why do we expect so much of them? I feel like when I talk about this stuff I feel like I am really permissive. I am saying things like: “It’s Okay if they act like babies.” I guess my heart is “It’s Okay if they act like babies because they are babies. You wouldn’t expect a two-year-old to behave any other way or suddenly when they become a preschooler, people go: “Oh, now they need to be doing this.” “Put on your shoes by yourself.” “But I don’t know how.” Of course they don’t know how. They don’t know left from right. I think what we do in this classroom is when behaviors like

that pop up like “I wanna put my own shoes on,” we feel that is something that is honorable but not expected.

To Mr. William, expecting children at this age to do things by themselves seems unnatural, inappropriate, and even harsh. Calling himself “permissive” is like a slip of the tongue that reveals the presence of conflicting discourses. Developmentally, preschoolers (3-year-olds) are not significantly different from babies (2-year-olds). But socially, three-year-olds are seen as different from two-year-olds because they are at preschool, where they are expected to behave differently from babies who are at home and allowed to be dependent and needy. Mr. William still sees his children as “babies” and tries to protect them from this discourse of “what preschools need to be doing” by making his class less of a preschool and more of a second home where children can be “babies” a while longer. Mr. William’s expectation complicates the notions of “independent self” and “interdependent self,” a binary cultural model of personhood that has been used to characterize North Americans and East Asians respectively (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). At least for children at this age, at least in Mr. William’s class, children are still not expected or required to develop a fully-blown independent self and a recognizable American personhood.



Figure 5-4. Children go to their cubbies to get their nap gear

This tension between expectations for preschoolers (who should be becoming independent) and for three-year-olds (whose dependency needs should be indulged) is more clearly seen in teachers' reflections on having children set up their cots for naptime. Everyday after movement exploration and before going outside, there is a short amount of time marked out for children to set up their cots. During this period, children are expected to carry their cots (a portable camp bed) from the storage room to their sleeping spots that are scattered all over the classroom, take their nap gear from their cubbies to their cots, and make their beds with their sheets, blankets, and pillows. The amount of help children need and the frustration children express through their bodies led to a change of this routine when I returned to DCC the next fall to conduct follow-up interviews. The teachers explained to me why they decided to stop asking children to set up their cots.

Mr. William: We started off with good intentions. I had to be honest. I have never thought that much of making cots. I know some teachers would want to kick me hard for me saying this. But I don't see the importance of children making their cots. I just don't. Why do we expect them to make their own cots? There are so many obstacles in your way. There's your favorite toy. There's your best friend. There is: (pretending to act like a distracted child) "Oh my goodness, what did I leave in my . . . Oh, look at that. . . Oh my, I love this!" You have to walk your way around those obstacles and get back, passing those obstacles again, to make your cot. When I say to Zach: "Zach go get your cot gear," and he goes: "Uh, I can't." I can see what he'd say, what he feels, but he couldn't. Just getting from the rug, to your cubby, back to your cot spot, is such a negotiation. Because he has to go from his letter to his cubby, pass all these people, negotiate all these stuff, just to get his cot gear to come back and do a job he feels he is inadequate to do.

Ms. Shannon: Because it's already hard for them to do it, especially with some of them. The type of sheets they have are elastic and it is a lot harder to stretch them over these cots. They are getting frustrated going to the cubbies, getting their cot gear, and then waiting for a teacher to help them get the cot made.

Mr. William: Redefining the environment is very hard for them too. "This is the environment where we play and where we learn. And suddenly, "I am here right by these lushness of toys and you want me to put a sheet on my cot?" "All I want to do is play with that doll." "I just wanna drive a truck." As adults, it is very easy for us to redefine the area or the environment. But for the children it's not.

Ms. Shannon: Now we eliminate that frustration. Now we make the cots for them, even though that process is longer for one of us to do it.

Mr. William: The Samefit of them not doing their cots is they get more time outside, more time being selective of what they are doing, in charge of themselves. There is plenty of time when they get older for them to learn stuff like putting the table cloth down or making the beds.

This conversation reveals the teachers' empathetic understandings of children's experience in a preschool classroom where the spatial layout, the attraction of the material things available, and the complexity of redefining the function of a physical space are entangled in making cot-making feel like an almost impossible mission. Watching the video of their own classroom where the day has been condensed into twenty minutes and transitions therefore appear more abrupt, it produces these teachers expressions of empathy for children who not only have to experience the macro horizontal transition from home to preschool but also the numerous micro vertical transitions happening everyday as children move through routines and space. As

Ms. Shannon said with emotion:

We just saw things in the video we don't think about very often and talked about things we don't talk about very often. The transition when parents have to leave. The transition of coming to control your body on the rug. We just talked about all those things that the children are basically teaching and learning by themselves and getting from our community. Think about their day in a whole sea of things and what they have been going through all day and then we are gonna say: "Go make your cot"? You might be stressed out. You've had a great morning. You haven't bit anyone. You have done all these things. You have used kind words. You worked out problems. You bartered. But now you have to go and get that sheetie on that cot.

The conversation also retraces the journey these teachers have made over the past several years in their thinking about the cots. As Mr. William explained:

So much responsibility. That's something we have talked about all year long or actually for like the last couple of years. It's kind of crawling under my skin, thinking about the idea of these kids, having them to do all these things. And the expectation is these kids have to do this. I have heard other teachers say "What did you learn in that class? Didn't you learn how to do things by yourself?" And I even heard, like, some people would like to layer all these kind of social behavior expectations on the kids. Like the other day I heard the little intern, she said, "Felix, do you need help?" And he said "Yes." Then she goes "But how do you ask?" Why does he need to ask? You just asked him! I mean, and she was earnest, I think she thought she was actually doing something really good here. Anyway, I think over the years we (referring to his colleagues at DCC) have gone from "Hey, I think you can do this. I want you to try. I want to see you do it" to "Hey, baby, how can I help you?" You know, "Do you need some help?" "Hey, let's do this together."



Figure 5-5. Ms. Shannon helps Ajay set up his cot and Meimei is spreading the sheet by herself

What he sees as of most importance to children at this age is not learning to do things that they will naturally come to do later, such as putting on socks and tying shoes, but to experience what at this juncture of their young lives they enjoy and they feel capable of doing. The form of independence he expects preschoolers to develop is not in using their bodies without being helped but using their bodies with choice. To Mr. William, what matters is less how much help Ajay really need at the moment to put on his socks than the intimacy and pleasure to be enjoyed by both of them at this precious time when Ajay is little and can still express neediness:

I read about massive orphanages where the only contact children have with adult was through bathing. The bathing was a little washcloth bath, They were talking and they were touching. It was very gentle and it was very bonding. It was a very good moment for this child who really didn't have that. I am not saying that children in our classroom do not have that. But for me, I like that bond of helping someone putting on their shoes and making their cot.

Having those intimate moments, you can talk about thing about their feet, about their socks, about their shoes, about where they got their shoes, or what their mom does. It's just for me it's a very nice small bonding moment.



Figure 5-6. Mr. William talks to Simon as he helps Simon stretch the sheet over the cot
Naptime, “Downtime”

Another explanation for what others may consider the excessive help with socks and shoes after nap is that the staff at DCC considers this to be a difficult time of day for young children:

Ms. Kelly: In this context Ajay is just waking up from a nap.

Ms. Shannon: For some of them, it is a lot harder. It's hard for them to get focused.

Ms. Kelly: Like you noticed, he lays down and lays his head on a pillow. . .

Mr. William: . . .Oh, he is very comfortable.

Ms. Kelly: . . .He is still trying to get his stiff body moving around and waking up.

Ms. Shannon: For some children, it takes a lot longer for them to wake up, stretched, and get their body focused after sleeping. Some of them are very hard sleepers.

The transition from naptime to classroom activities is seen as difficult for children's body, as is the transition from other activities to naptime:

Ms. Shannon: Nap time is one of the hardest times, I have to say, that portion of my day.

Mr. William: There are so many things to be accomplished during that transition. And then, just like, people's natural rhythms. I have been thinking about how I fall asleep. I roll over several times; I put pillows between my legs; I put it behind my head; I roll back over; I cover up; I uncover. That's all done in twenty minutes. But If we were watching the child do that, we will say: "Oh, lay still!" "On your belly!" For the natural things I have to do before I fall asleep, we don't always allow children to do that. Because we are so focused on getting them asleep that we don't let their natural rhythms unfold. It's just really hard. We have had some challenging transitions during nap times that we really worked on, really thought about. Like now, when one child comes up here to the rug area for a nap, someone will always come, just be a presence so that everything is quiet. So it doesn't get up here (raise his hands up above his head). Because once it gets up there it's so difficult to get it back down.

Ms. Kelly: It was difficult because again, we have been throughout our day, we have been giving them the cues, the gentle touches, and the guidance. And all of a sudden, at this moment our expectation is: "You lay down and go to sleep." That's our expectation and they are not wanting to. Their mindsets and their bodies are not ready for that. I struggled with that. I struggle with that you know you need to get these kids to sleep and also to make sure it's not done in a negative but more of a guiding and loving way: "Let's try to get to sleep." "Let's try to calm our bodies down."

Teachers tell me about the strategies they have tried to facilitate the transition to nap, such as only whispering during lunch. “Because sometimes it starts at lunch, it carries over into the bathroom portion, and then onto the cots. It spills out like water,” Mr. William explains. But he is hesitant about the whispering at lunch approach:

One day we did whispering. No one could use their regular voice until after rest time. I felt like such a heel doing that because that is really one of those, I hate to say this, it’s really one of those public school things where they control children’s bodies. I do believe children should be able to talk and eat and you know, share and communicate. But without it getting so high (raise his hand above his head), it becomes a negative attribute.

These reflections suggest a dilemma the teachers at DCC feel caught in: they view napping as essential for young children, who they believe need “down time” during the day. As Kelly explained:

There are some children that are gonna be like not wanting to go to sleep. On Friday we had three boys that chose not to go to sleep but then in the afternoon one of them was very tearful. Because your body, they are learning throughout the day, even small things like when we are making a transition, you know, a small minute, a second in their life, they are learning, their brains are working, they are making those connections. So when it gets to that point, they need that mental break, they need that time to relax, and let their brains go and kind of make these connections in there and get refreshed.

Even for Sam, who rarely takes naps, teachers still think he needs down time and it helps Ms. Kelly: When Sam didn’t go to sleep. There were a lot of days that he did down time and a lot of days that he did his own little work time that he would not when everybody was up moving around.

Mr. William: When Sam would fall asleep and his afternoons were a lot better. I mean he still needs asleep.

They view naptime as essential for children's minds, bodies, and wellbeing, but to get children asleep the teachers sometimes have to discipline the children's bodies in ways that go against their beliefs about respecting children's freedom and wishes. This dilemma plays out in the patting teachers give to children at naptime.



Figure 5-7. Ms. Shannon is patting Cassie and Simon

Figure 5-7 shows Ms. Shannon patting two children who are lying on their cots. As she explains:

I try to show these children the same affection that I will show my own children at home and be that motherly figure. Even though I am not their mother, I still show that same affection: Patting their back, giving them, as I've always called, "sugars on the forehead," covering them up, and gently touching them.

The pat and gentle rub Ms. Shannon kindly offer to children mimics the physical contact they get from their parents at home and are seen relaxing and soothing. But unlike home where the parent may sit peacefully aside the bed of the child and pat the child asleep, Ms. Shannon's body appears to be more intense as she pulls two children closer to her and tries to maximize the range of motions her body could execute. The pat is a hybrid of caring for and disciplining the body. The belief in the soothing impact of the touch suggests a deeper understanding of the body as vulnerable, tense, and in a need of care before falling into sleep.

Meimei



Figure 5-8. Meimei at morning snack

Figure 5-8 shows Meimei, the girl with two braids and sitting next to Mr. William, feeds herself with a spoonful of cereal as she places her hand on Mr. William's shoulder. Placing her hand on Mr. William's body is far from a random touch. As Mr. William told me: "She eats with her hands on my leg or she will lean into me while she is eating." Meimei does not only have this form of physical contact and closeness with Mr. William at morning snack, but throughout the

day. At mealtimes, Meimei has a regular spot right next to Mr. William, which allows her to hold onto his arm or leg and lean against him. At morning messages, she takes a seat between Mr. William's feet on the rug, instead of on her "Y," which is right next to her (see Figure 5-9); outside on the playground, she has her spot standing between Mr. William's legs or sitting on Mr. William's lap (see Figure 5-10 & Figure5-11).



Figure 5-9. Meimei sits between Mr. William's feet



Figure 5-10. Meimei leans against Mr. William as he talks to Sam



Figure 5-11. Mr. William holds Meimei on his leg as he talks to Luke

These scenes indicate that Meimei spends a good amount of time everyday in physical contact with Mr. William. I did not observe such consistent and intensive physical contact between Mr. William and any other child. It suggests a strong and unique connection between Meimei and Mr. William, a connection that raised concerns among the Chinese teachers who watched the DCC video:

Ji laoshi: She is sitting on his lap all the time (Mr. William)? Won't this make other children jealous?

Hu laoshi: If this happened in our classroom we would be surrounded by children. Everyone would want to sit on our lap. Aren't the teachers in the United States concerned that she is too close to the teacher?

Ji laoshi: Is it because of her personality? Does she have a difficult time come to preschool in the morning? What happens if the teacher does not give her this attention? Will she have a problem?

They saw similarity between Meimei and a child from their classroom:

Hu laoshi: We have a girl, Bei Cheng, who just acts like her (Meimei). She rarely interacts with children her age. During center time she does visit the little theater (one of the centers in the Orange class), but she just sits there and watches, as an audience member. She won't *rongru* ("melt") into other little friends or their play. When she comes to school, she basically just sticks around us. If she has any ideas, she always tells us; if she wants to sing a song, she will sing it in front of us. We noticed this problem early in the school year. But she has allergies, so her parents want her to take half of the day off and rest at home. So they always pick her up at noon. We were concerned that she was having some difficulties in melting into the collective. So we talked to her parents and persuaded them to send her to preschool for a

whole day when her health condition allows. Don't spend three days fishing and two days drying nets. Try come to preschool everyday. Her parents did send her here every day for a while. At first, she had such a bad mood that she would cry every day at separation. But her mood has got better and better as she comes to preschool every day.

These teachers also noticed that on the playground Meimei looks less interested in playing with her classmates than hanging around Mr. William, who gives her one-on-one attention, which they see as concerning:

Ji laoshi: Will this make her situation even worse? Only interacting with teachers but not her classmates? If she knows you (her teacher) will be her playmate, she will be more unwilling to seek out children her age.

Hu laoshi: It still depends on the child. If she is on a higher developmental level and she doesn't want to play with these little ones, that's fine. But if she is having difficulties in getting along with others. . . It still depends. It also concerns me because this is unfair to other kids. If you are playing with her, you will be less available to interact with other kids.

But unlike Bei Chen who has bad moods, cries at separation, and does not regularly attend preschools, Meimei is well adapted to her life at DCC. Each morning she separates from her mother with no apparent distress. She plays at the centers, dances on the rug, enjoys her meals, and falls asleep fast and sleeps soundly. On the rug, she sits between Mr. William's feet or leans into his arms as Mr. William makes announcements and reads the morning messages (see Figure 5-12). However, even at these moments of physical proximity to or even contact with Mr. William's body, Meimei is lively and engaged in activities and class discussion. Figure 5-13 shows Meimei lunging forward, spreading her arms to balance her body, and using the fingertips of her right to slightly touch Mr. William's leg for support. Figure 5-14 shows Meimei stands on

one foot as she places one hand on Mr. William's leg and the other hand against Mr. William's hand to get support.



Figure 5-12. Meimei leans into Mr. William's arm



Figure 5-13. Meimei lunges forward



Figure 5-14. Meimei stands on one foot



Figure 5-15. Meimei raises up her hand when Mr. William asks who has a nose

Meimei is actively involved in the class collective practices. Figure 5-15 shows Meimei raising her hand when Mr. William asks the class: “If you have a nose, raise your hand.”



Figure 5-16. Meimei leans towards Myra to check her nostrils

Throughout the day Meimei playfully interacts with her classmates. Mr. William asks children to show two fingers if they have two nostrils. Meimei steps forward and leans toward Myra to check how many nostrils Myra has on her face (See Figure 5-16). The fact that Meimei always sits close to Mr. William even though she is not on her initial letter does not seem disturbing to either the teachers or the children at DCC:

Ms. Kelly: I will say that different kids bond with different teachers in different ways. We have some children that have relationships with spots on the rug or spots on the table. "That's their spot!" and other children are very respectful of that. They move around and they are not picking up on that. It's not a big thing. It just casually happens. Some children bond with other teachers and they make that connection in different ways.

Mr. William: I agree. Seeing James just recently started experimenting by eating at other tables, I think it is a nice thing for him. And where Cassie is sitting now, that spot belongs to Laura

Marie and everyone knows that that's Laura Marie's spot. That's Meimei's spot and that's James's spot unless they see James sitting someplace else. I think it's interesting that they very quietly sit there; they don't say: "Oh, James, I am sitting on your spot," which is kind of odd for our class because we have a lot of button-pushers.

Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi disapprove of giving a child unlimited access to physical closeness with teachers because they believe that all the children would want this access, which would produce jealousy. The amount of bodily attention and care they can offer to a class of 26 children is limited, and therefore should be equally apportioned. In contrast, the teachers at DCC do not assume that each child would want as much closeness with her teachers as Meimei does so there is no inequity in indulging Meimei's wishes to be physically close to Mr. William.

These teachers see their modes of connecting with each child as different and unique:

Mr. William: The bond between Meimei and me is kind of unique. I have had bonds like that with children in the past. But the unique thing is this one has lasted for so long. Usually when a child comes to my class, in the very beginning, they really need that teacher support, emotional support. But as they get more comfortable they will grow away from the teacher and interact more with the children. But Meimei does not. I am convinced she is really an old woman. I mean because she is just very determined. She always has her own perspective and she is very articulate. In fact, she is reading now, which is really a cool thing. But she is always just kind of coming around to me. She is always there, which I like. I like Meimei a lot. Because she is cool.

The logic here is that in the beginning of the school year when Meimei just came to Mr. William's classroom, she may have sought out Mr. William's body as a form of undifferentiated closeness and support that every child needs when moving into a new environment. But as Mr.

William explained, the connection between Meimei and him has evolved into one of mutual affection. For her own reasons, which Mr. William doesn't question, Meimei just likes hanging around Mr. William. And Mr. William readily acknowledges that he is happy to have Meimei around him not only because he wants to give Meimei and other children as much attention and closeness as they need, but also because Meimei is "cool" and it is "cool" to have a "cool" friend around.



Figure 5-17. Meimei pours her milk

Figure 5-17 shows Meimei sit with her group at Mr. William's table. She pours milk into her bowl and makes cereal.



Figure 5-18 a & b & c & d. Meimei cuddles with Mr. William

In Figures 5a-d, we see Meimei (a) tap on Mr. William's arm as he is drinking milk; she then gestures with her spoon for him to look at her bowl (b), which leads Mr. William to express surprise with wide eyes and open mouth. Mr. William then (c) nudges Meimei with his arm and Meimei then wraps her arm around his (d) and as they cuddle they each smile. This brief and

spontaneous bodily exchange well illustrates the intimate and close relationship between Mr. William and Meimei. It also conveys a sense of pleasure created by physical and emotional closeness with a friend with whom one shares mutual knowing, trust and habits of touch.

When I came back to DCC for the follow-up interviews, I raised Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi's concern about Meimei not interacting with her classmates with the DCC teachers. Mr. William shared an update on Meimei with a mixture of pride and nostalgia:

Last year, I think, that was her coming around, learning, and hanging out. This year, she is interacting a lot more. Now she has very strong connections with the children in this classroom this year. And I do think that she was sought out by others. It wasn't that Meimei sought them out. She was sought out by her classmates and that's how the play groups formed. In fact, I was talking with her mom about it. I am very proud. I am very proud of her for forming these friendships in small-groups and in large-groups. But at the same time when I was telling her mom, I feel abandoned a little bit. I was like: "Oh no! Meimei is gone! My friend is gone!"

Teachers are well aware of Meimei's desire to be in physical contact with an adult, but they do not see this need as excessive or unusual or as a cause for concern. Instead, they interpret Meimei's need as a natural reaction to a child used to getting intense one-to-one attention at home transitioning to being just one of 18 children at preschool:

Ms. Shannon: I think she has to have that physical contact with an adult. I don't know if that is how her family is at home, or it's just something that she feels that she needs from maybe one of us here.

Mr. William: Her mom was doing a post-doc after Meimei was born. Meimei was with her and Meimei's older sister stayed with her father, I think in Omaha, or some place in the

Midwest. So that is a unique thing where she has that, probably very early in her life, had that direct one-on-one time with an adult. And so she probably might have transferred it into our early childhood program.

Meimei may have made her particular reason for needing more to stay close to Mr. William and to seek out his body for cuddling throughout the day. But in Mr. William's classroom, it was not only Meimei who expressed a need for attention and comfort through physical contact. Throughout the day, children spontaneously approach teachers to sit on their laps, cling to their bodies, and get a hug (see Figure 5-19 a & b, Figure 5-20 a & b, Figure 5-21).



Figure 5-19 a & b. Simon leans on Mr. William's body while Mr. William is talking to Sam; Charlie (the boy in a red and striped T-shirt) comes to Mr. William for a hug



Figure 5-20 a & b. Mr. William holds Felix close and kisses his forehead; Ajay kisses Ms.

Shannon



Figure 5-21. Ms. Kelly holds Kajal sit on her lap

Figure 5-21 shows Ms. Kelly holding Kajal sit on her lap. Kajal is crying because her Daddy just dropped her off and left the room without much warning. Kajal is usually dropped off at preschool by her father, who often carries her into the classroom in his arms. He usually stays

for a while before he leaves, but this morning they were running late. Ms. Kelly strokes her back and softly comforts her: “You guys are running a little late this morning, right? Because you are usually here by now.” Ms. Kelly holds her patiently until she stops crying, sits up, and starts engaging with the toys on the table next to them. Teachers at Zizu found this scene particularly striking both because of the way Kajal being carried into the classroom by her father rather looked indulgent and because of the amount of time Ms. Kelly took to comfort Kajal and give her undivided attention. When I told her of this concern from the Chinese teachers in the Orange class, Ms. Kelly explained:

I can see what they’re saying. I have a five-year-old at home and carrying him would probably be something I would not do at school. Just because he is big and heavy. But looking at Kajal’s situation, she just got a baby sister. That might be her and daddy’s time. To have that time, yours at school, ours at home with mom. This is: “I am gonna give you this attention, a few minutes before I leave you to go to my work.” Even for the Dad, it might be his time to say “I am taking this time with Kajal before I spend my day at work.”

Mr. William agrees:

Yeah. I remember a couple of weeks ago I even wondered: “If she is okay?” But then she turned around and I could see she was all smiles. She was really enjoying the caring and the attention. I am reading this book, called *The Importance of Being Little*. The author talks about a visit she made to the home of a family from Africa. The mom was feeding the three-year-old and the author wrote: “I quite hauntingly said: ‘Don’t you think the child should be feeding herself?’ And the mother said: ‘No, I don’t.’” This made the author stop and think about what is the problem: “Why did I think that way?” And then the author goes on this quest, and she has got to know this family for twenty years. So then she writes: “The fact that

mother fed her when she was three did not stop this child from growing up to be doctor.”

That also made me think: “Wait a minute, I have been right with her.” Because I think it’s important to hold kids. I think it’s important to whatever, maybe people think it’s spoiling. I think it’s okay. It’s okay if someone is crying that I hold them and sooth them until they are done, as opposed to just walk away, which I’ve seen happen before. And this has been the most curious behavior to me. Sometimes I cry, personally, and I want people to comfort me. So I don’t get it.

Ms. Shannon: I feel like getting too much attention, to a certain extent, is okay. There is a time when you reevaluate, you sit back and think to yourself: “This must be too much.” But I think it’s never too much! Everybody wants attention, whether it’s to feel good or they are sad about something. I mean, to me, attention is wonderful.

Mr. William: I agree with you, Shannon. And I also think that we have a lot of children in our classroom who are only children. They are only children at home, but when they come to school they are one of eighteen. So there is that learning curve for them. And you know, some children in our classroom now are only children who get very upset when someone was playing with something they were looking at three days ago. Our job is to help that child during that growth part, to understand that, to help him do it or her do it in a very non-stressful way. So, I think it’s okay if someone else calls a child spoiled.

In these responses to the Chinese teachers’ concern about “too much help” and “too much attention,” the DCC teachers articulate a different theory about spoiling that contrasts with the Chinese perspective which, I suggest, arises out of contemporary Chinese social anxiety about raising single children who are selfish, indulgent, and disrespectful. The DCC teachers see it as natural for children to have needs for attention and comfort away from home, no matter if the

child is a singleton who exclusively enjoys the care of a family, or a child needing attention and care following the birth of a sibling. These teachers think the idea of reserving attention and care to comfort a crying three-year-old out of a fear of spoiling the child is strange and inhumane. They empathize with children who have lost the consistent, affectionate, and physical daily care of their parents when they come to preschool where they become one of eighteen. The role of preschool teachers, as Mr. William states, is try to maintain the continuity of attention, which is “wonderful” and can never be too much.

Yishi (“Sense”) and *Xiguan* (“Habits”)



Figure 5-21. Di Di flaps his pant legs

Sitting down on his bed, Di Di holds onto the top of his pants and puts each of his legs into pant hole. He lays back against the bed and tries but fails to pull them all the way up. Ms. Du has set the tables and has the afternoon snack ready. She peaks her head through the curtains

into the sleeping area and urges children who are still getting themselves dressed: “Hurry up! We have sweet hot soup today!” Di Di looks at Du laoshi, and flaps the pant legs at her in an appeal for help (see Figure5-21). Ji laoshi’ s voice comes from the other side of the room: “Di Di, you have your pants the wrong way around.” Ji laoshi comes over, pulls Di Di’s pants off, and says: “And you haven’t put on your socks yet.” “Put on the socks first then the outside pants,” Ji laoshi says and walks away.

The video shows Di Di having difficulty putting on his pants. But pants are just one of the challenges he faced in getting dressed. It was late in December when I filmed in the Orange class at Zizu. It was already midwinter in Shanghai and children were wearing multiple layers of clothes to stay warm.



Figure 5-22. Di Di before naptime

Besides the long johns he wears to bed, Di Di has a sweater, a turtle-neck fleece, and a zippered windbreaker on top and underpants, thick sweatpants, and socks and shoes on the bottom. Before naptime, Di Di needs to undress each layer of these clothes, fold each of them,

arrange the folded pieces into a stack, and put the stack at the foot of his bed. After waking up, Di Di needs to dress himself in a careful and well-planned sequence to make sure he can stay warm as he puts every piece back on and looks neatly dressed when he's finished. Undressing and dressing in the winter can be laborious for children, especially for Di Di, who, as the youngest child in the Orange class, seems to need more help than most of the other children in the class. However, the help Di Di receives from the teachers seems minimal. Figure 5-23 shows Ji laoshi and Hu laoshi come over to check on Di Di from time to time as he tries to put on his sweater.



Figure 5-23 a & b & c & d & e. Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi come over to help Di Di with his sweater

In Figures 5-23a-e, we see Hu laoshi (a) squat beside Di Di and lay his sweater out flat on the bed, with its back facing upward. Di Di pulls the sweater across his shoulder (b) with one sleeve hanging in the front and the other on his back but with neither of his arms in a sleeve.

Noticing that Di Di is not making any progress, Ji laoshi pulls the right sleeve closer to Di Di's arm as she walks by (c). Hu laoshi then comes over and takes the right sleeve (d) and holds it for Di Di to put his hand into the armhole (e). When these two teachers approach Di Di, they appear to give only a minimal amount of help. Rather than put the sweater on Di Di, the teachers offer a series of small assistances, such as flattening and positioning the sweater to making it easier for Di Di to put on himself, pulling a sleeve closer the side of the shoulder where Di Di can more easily reach it, or holding the armhole for Di Di to insert his arm. The help the teachers offer to Di Di is, neither too much nor too little, but precisely the amount of help Di Di needs exactly at that moment to move on to the next step. For the teachers, walking back and forth between Di Di and other children and giving this form of minimal help may take more time to get Di Di dressed and ready for snack while his sweet soup is getting cold. Why don't they just help Di Di put on his clothes all at once, as Mr. William does for Ajay, which could be a more efficient use of time for the teacher and also less stressful for the child? The answer is simple, as Ji laoshi told me: "Because Di Di needs to learn to do his own things by himself."

In the Orange class, Di Di and his classmates, are not only expected to learn to undress and dress themselves at naptime, but also to master routines throughout the day at preschool for managing "personal tasks" which includes carrying their schoolbags into the preschool, putting their belongings away, changing to their inside shoes, drinking water to stay hydrated, washing hands to maintain personal hygiene, visiting the bathroom when there is a need, eating well, sleeping well, and getting their schoolbags well packed when it is time to go home. By guiding children towards mastery of these bodily practices, the Orange class teachers expect children to develop *zili nengli* ("the ability of self-care") and cultivate *yishi* ("sense") and *xiguan* (habit),

which are seen as the most important goals for children to achieve in the first year of preschool as they will provide a solid foundation for their life in future.

Yishi (Sense).

In the clip of Di Di, we see the teachers, instead of taking the pants and the sweater from Di Di and putting them on him all at once, patiently give Di Di a little help every time they approach him. The help is carefully doled out in small enough portions that it does not entirely release Di Di from the responsibility of dressing himself, but rather gives him just enough supports to keep making progress.

Hu laoshi: If there is really a need, for example, the child doesn't know how to put it on, sure we will help him. But for some kids, it seems like he can do it but he doesn't want to. Because we have been teaching them for a while, we know what they can do. The other day, Yi Fan was tossing and turning on his bed. I asked why he wasn't going to sleep. He was wearing shorts that day and he said he can't take them off. But obviously we know he can do it. So, because you have seen him taking off his clothes before, you know it is not difficult for him. It is not that he can't do it, but he is not willing to do it.

Ji laoshi: We don't necessarily ask him to be able to do it. But he needs to have that *sense* to do it by himself.

In their explanations, Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi convey a belief about helping a child that is significantly different from Mr. William's at DCC. Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi believe that it is important for the teacher to use her knowledge and experience to evaluate the necessity of the help. They make a clear differentiation between "being able to do" and "being willing to do," a distinction that guides their decision about if the help is necessary and how much help is appropriate. A child who is willing to put his clothes on but has difficulties causes no concern. In

contrast, a child who is capable but not willing to dress himself will lead teachers to be concerned about the emergence of bad character traits such as laziness and selfishness. This concern is straightforwardly expressed when the teachers explained why they encourage children to carry their bags to school instead of making their parents do it.

Ji laoshi: We ask children to carry their schoolbags by themselves. It is also a way to cultivate their sense. We tell parents not to carry the bag for their kids and to let the kids carry it on their own. You should not assume that everyone is there to help you. But now many kids just take this help for granted. They don't feel gratitude anymore. This is terrible. When they grow up, they won't see how much their family has sacrificed for them; they couldn't bear it if they didn't get the attention and help that they assume they can get from the world.

Hu laoshi: This (the importance of sense) is actually in our curriculum (Shanghai Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education) where we have four segments: Living, Exercising, Learning, and Play. In the segment of "living," there is a small section about things you can do by yourself. If we see a parent holding his child's schoolbag, we would remind the child to do it himself, but this reminder is actually for the parent. When we have parent-teacher meetings we always tell parents to let children do what they can do by themselves at home, such as letting them participate and share in housework. But it usually doesn't really work. Often times, a parent would tell his child in front of you: "Oh, you need to carry it by yourself." But then when you walk away, the parent would just pick up the bag again.

These comments make clearer the range of meanings of the term *yishi*, an ambiguous Chinese term that could be translated into nouns such as "awareness," "consciousness," "sense," or into verbs such as "realize" and "come to know." Different from "awareness" and

“consciousness” which are mostly used to refer to the individual psyche and internal mental process, *yishi* is deeply social and relational when it is used as a noun in Chinese. When someone who has failed to behave appropriately says: “I didn’t have *yishi*,” he usually means not just that he spaced out, but rather that he failed to pick up and attend to the implicit social rules that apply to that situation. What would be the *yishi* that three-and-four years olds are expected to develop in a Chinese preschool? In giving Di Di minimal help and asking children to carry their schoolbags by themselves, Ji laoshi and Hu laoshi are trying to cultivate in children a form of *yishi* that includes a social awareness that enables children to realize which things are their “personal tasks.” *Yishi* functions to give children intrinsic motivation to take care of themselves instead of seeking out the unnecessary help of others.

Besides the meaning of “do it by yourself,” *yishi* also carries the meaning of “do it right” or “do the right thing.” In the 20-minute video of Orange class, there is a scene in the hallway where Di Di drags his schoolbag on the floor as he walks forward and Hu laoshi reminds him to lift his bag off the floor (See Figure 5-24).



Figure 5-24. Di Di drags his bag on the floor as he walks in the hallway

I asked the teachers if the dragging motion means the schoolbag is too heavy for Di Di to carry and therefore if it would be too harsh to ask him to lift the bag off the floor.

Hu laoshi: No. I don't think so. I think it is a problem with his sense and habits (she laughs).

Because we know what's in the bag. There is only a pair of backup underpants. It is really light.

Ji laoshi: And you know the child very well. Di Di really does not have much sense. For children who have sense, they would know that dragging a bag on the floor is bad. Even if we don't say anything, children around would call out: "It's getting dirty!"

Hu laoshi: Most of our children have sense, only a few don't. Children who have weaker sense would do this to their bags. Yi Fan also often drags his sheets on the floor. Such children are just more casual about everything. If we notice it, we would remind them: "Oh, you might get it dirty in this way." We would not force him to do it, if he can't, but just remind him.

Di Di and Yi Fan are seen as having no sense or weak sense because they still have difficulty telling the front of their pants and sweaters from the back and the left from the right as they dress themselves. In the video we see Di Di wearing his pants backwards and Yi Fan having trouble telling his left shoe from the right (see Figure 5-25).



Figure 5-25. Hu laoshi is teaching Yi Fan to observe the difference between his left shoe and right shoe

Hu laoshi: When they (children of the Orange class) just came here, half of them had some sense and half not. Di Di didn't know how to dress himself and Yi Fan always wore the wrong shoe on the wrong foot. But they slowly learned it.

Ji laoshi: They are all very smart, I think. We don't give them specific trainings. We just teach them little by little when they are undressing and dressing themselves. They all can learn it.

There are always a few that are weaker.

Hu laoshi: They basically know how to get dressed, just in the wrong way sometime.

They might wear a shirt back to front or inside out. If we notice it, we would tell them to take a look at the top. “Is the flower on your top in the front? If it is not, turn it around. Turn the flower to the front and then put your arms back into it.”

As teachers explained, if a child dresses himself in the wrong way, they don't give him a harsh critique or force him to correct it immediately, but instead just give him a gentle reminder. The reminders may come directly from a teacher who just walks by or classmates who have better sense.

There are also less direct reminders. In the sleeping room of the Orange class a set of pictures are posted on the wall to give children a hint on how to do things right. The pictures show the right way and wrong way to, for example, put on pants or sleep. The image of the wrong way is marked with an X, and the image of the right way with a check mark. In Figure 5-25 a, the wavy lines drawn along the legs of the standing figure and the sad face suggest this person is suffering from imbalance as he stands on the bed to undress himself; the smiling face on the figure sitting on the bed suggests that he feels happy and safe.



Figure 5-25 a & b. Pictorial illustrations in the bedroom

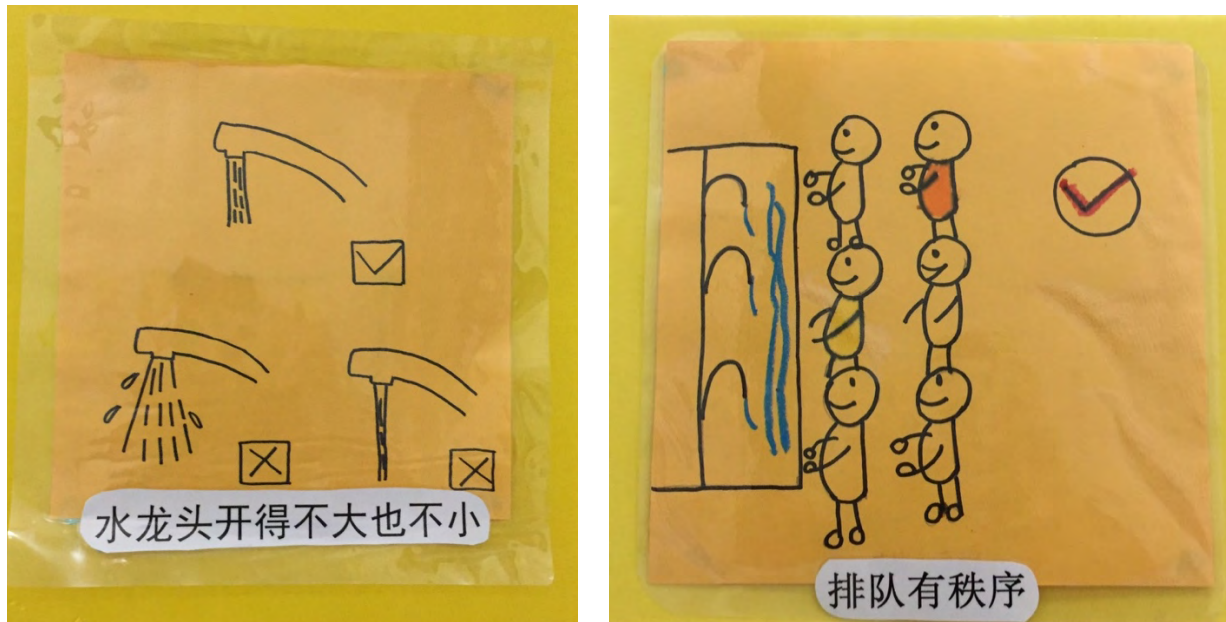


Figure 5-26 a & b. Pictorial illustrations in the bathroom

In the bathroom, a set of pictures are posted on the wall above the sink as cues for children to “do it right” with the faucet when they get water and “do it right” with their bodies when they wait to use the sink. Painted in contrasting colors with child-like strokes and posted at a child-friendly height on the walls, these pictures are arranged to cue children as they undress and dress themselves, lay on their beds, wash their hands, and wait in front of the sink, each task a dimension of bodily practices of *yishi* in the preschool classroom.

To the DCC teachers, many of the interactions between children and teachers of the Orange class appear to be, as Mr. William commented, “lessons where the teacher tells children what they should do or how they should behave.” He sees a difference between the two programs in the tone of the teachers. Mr. William says:

It seems like the tone is a lot different. . . it feels like my approach is “We are all in this together and so we are going to discover what we need to do together,” whereas she (Hu laoshi) seems to be more of an authoritarian.

To DCC teachers the Chinese approach to everyday bodily care appears didactic, cold, and controlling. The Chinese logic appears to be “A child with strong sense is a child well controlled.” But I suggest that from Hu laoshi and Ji laoshi’s perspective, the main goal of *yishi* in preschool is not mastering particular bodily routines and following arbitrary rules made by teachers but rather learn that there are right and wrong ways to do everything. Being able to differentiate the right from the left and the front from the back holds significance for children not only because these are required for getting dressed but also stepping stones on the path of the development of spatial cognition. Differentiating dirty from the clean is not merely a hygienic or medical concern but also a component of Chinese cultural conceptions of dirt and cleanliness (Lai, 2014). Learning to line up patiently for a turn at a sink is important not only for the smooth functioning of bathroom time at preschool, but more generally for learning to live in a society where people need to use their bodies in non-selfish ways. Instructing children on the proper flow of water coming out of a faucet conveys an ethical concern about the use natural resources and sustainable development. The form of *yishi* that children are cultivated in at Zizu through learning to handle their own bodily practices in the right ways is not only personal, but also intercorporeal, cultural, social, and ethical.

In addition to the “right versus wrong way” pictures, the Orange class also has a variety of “step-by-step” pictures posted on the walls that show children techniques of bodily care, such as proper hand washing and face-wiping.



Figure 5-27. Step-by-step pictorial illustration of how to wash hands

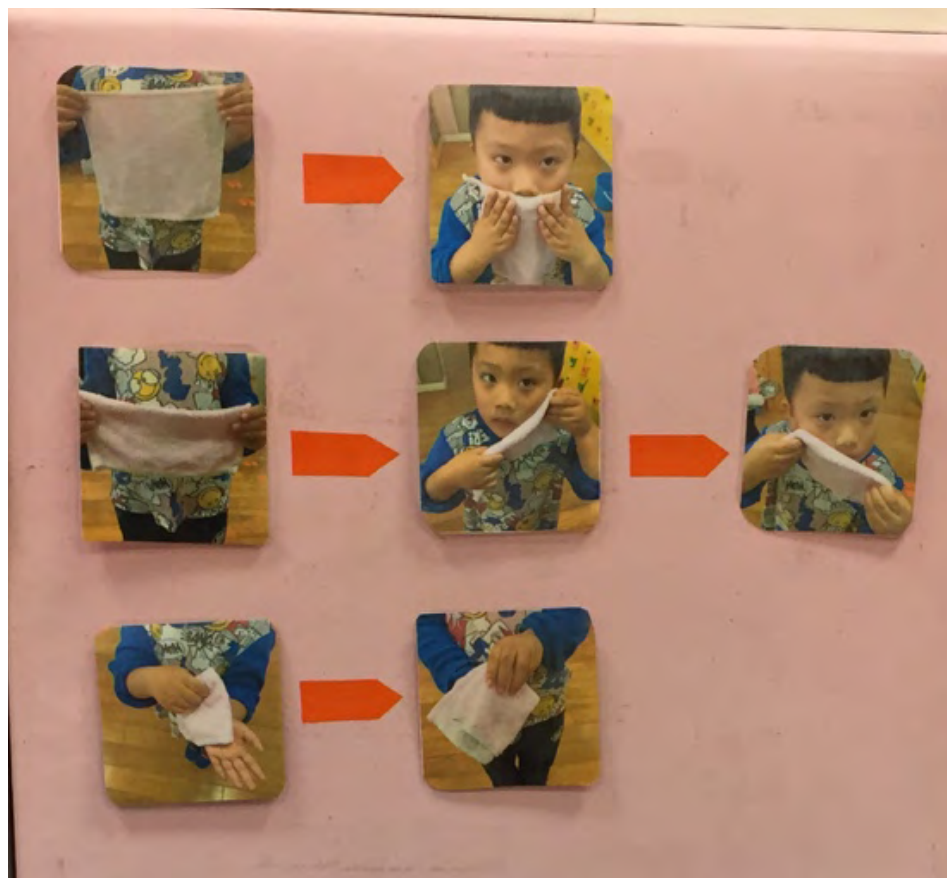


Figure 5-28. Step-by-step pictorial illustration of wiping a face

Instead of using hand-drawn cartoon figures, these illustrations use photos to demonstrate each of the steps of routine bodily practices in the preschool. Figure 5-26 shows a set of five pictures connected by arrows that demonstrate the first five steps of washing hands: first, rub the hands palm to palm; secondly, cross the fingers and rub the palm of one hand towards the back of the other; third, cross the fingers and rub the palm of one hand towards the palm of the other; fourth, rub the fingertips towards the palms; fifth, hold the thumbs within the palms and rub. Figure 5-27 shows a set of seven photos that demonstrate a complete process for wiping the face. Realizing that these illustrations could be seen by outsiders as dogmatic and unnecessarily complicated for three-and-four years old, the teachers at Zizu explained:

Ji laoshi: We use these step-by-step illustration as an implicit reminder for children to wipe their face. After a long time, when they have learned how to do it, I don't think we need it anymore.

Hu laoshi: It is not as complicated as it looks. It is not like "For the first step, you have to . . ." Of course there are a lot of ways of to wipe the face. But little friends don't know which one is the right one. We just pick one from the many, one that we feel children are capable of, one that is the most convenient, a habit that we think of as more scientific to teach our children and help them do it better. For example, for wiping the mouth, at the very beginning, many kids just use the towel to skim over their faces in a casual way. It does not have any cleansing effect, but may instead spread grease left on the mouth all over the face. So we had a discussion about it. And we think they can start by using the whole piece of the towel to wipe the mouth, then fold it to make it smaller to wipe the cheek, then fold it into a small square to wipe their hands. We summarized our experience. This is a more convenient and sanitary way to wipe a face. And we pass these experiences on to our children. We use the same

approach to teach them how to fold their clothes. When they grow up, they can devise many possible ways to fold a pair of pants. They can make it into a roll or even a flower. But when they are still young and still not capable of developing their own methods, we pick the easiest one and teach them in a child-like manner. When they just started their first year, we taught them how to fold their pants. Pants have two legs, right? To young children, that is the most visible feature of pants. So we created a nursery rhyme to teach them how to fold the pants: “Two legs turn into one leg. And make your pants Bend down.”

This rhetoric of cultivating sense and good living habits in Ji laoshi and Hu laoshi’s comments presume that young children do not instinctively know what’s best for them or have the will to do what's best. The teachers’ belief in cultivating in children such sense and habits of self-care embody a Confucian approach to the crafting of a good life that can only be achieved with deliberate effort, discipline, and cultivation. The everyday routines of bodily care practiced by children of the Orange class at Zizu resemble *yangsheng*, the practices of life cultivation that Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang (2005) observed in senior Beijing citizens who self-consciously pursue and craft good lives through group practices, in public of dance, music, and exercise. By following these pictorial illustrations and taking guidance from their teachers and peers, these three-and-four-year-old Chinese children are similarly self-consciously crafting a good life at the preschools and refining their techniques for what Foucault called “the care of the self.”

Hands On Bodily Care

Although, as seen in the quotes in the above sections, the teachers at Zizu emphasize the value of encouraging children to care for their own bodies, they are also pragmatists who in certain circumstances and times of the day deviate from their pedagogy of minimal intervention.

One situation is when they perceive the cost of a child doing a bodily care task badly is too high. For example, in Figure 5-29 we see Hu laoshi pulling three-year-old En Tu's body away from the sink as he washes his hands out of concern that he would get his sweater sopping wet. In Figure 5-29 a, we see Hu laoshi pull up Di Di's sleeves to keep them out of the flowing tap water. In Figure 5-29 b we see Ji laoshi wiping Di Di's butt after he has had a bowel movement, a practice of teachers' bodily care that is routine at Zizu, but not as DCC, where children are alone in the toilets. Given that most three- and four-year olds in both China and US lack the dexterity to wipe their behinds effectively, the question is less why teachers do this task for children at Zizu then why they don't at DCC. I speculate that a social concern in the US about adults seeing and touching a child's naked body is a key factor here, one that has been ascribed to a "moral panic" that arose in the 1990s (Tobin, 1997).



Figure 5-29. Hu laoshi lifts En Tu's arms above the sink



Figure 5-30 a & b. Hu laoshi pulls up Di Di's sleeves; Ji laoshi wipes Di Di's butt

Another context where the Orange Class teachers deviate from their usual practice of minimizing giving extended one-to-one attention and physical contact with children is when a child refuses or is unable to follow the classroom routines. Di Di is always the last child in the class to get undressed and dressed, the least skilled in the bathroom, and also the most likely to cry. On one of the days when videotaped Di Di was particularly slow in undressing for bed, which led Ji laoshi lift him up and carry out of the sleeping room to give him a stern talking to (see Figure 5-31). She placed him on her lap, something that is common in Mr. William's class but rare at Zizu. Ji laoshi's handling of Di Di is a hybrid gesture. Taking him in her lap suggests mother-like nurturing, which goes against Zizu's belief that teachers should wean children from the expectation of mother-like care at preschool. And yet she places Di Di on her lap, perhaps to secure his attention and perhaps to give him some nurturance. But to avoid being too nurturing or mother-like, Ji laoshi leans back, away from Di Di, as if to communicate the clear limits to

physical closeness available to him here. We see a similar dynamic in Figure 5-31, where discovering that Yue Yue is resisting getting ready for nap, Hu laoshi pulls her close and strokes her hair. There is a mutual physical restraint and awkwardness in the teachers' and children's bodily engagement here that contrasts with the ease and mutual pleasure in physical contact between Mr. William and Meimei.



Figure 5-31. Ji laoshi has Di Di sit on her lap



Figure 5-32. Hu laoshi pulls Yue Yue closer and talks to her

The other context where Chinese teachers become hands-on in bodily care of children is right before departure. In contrast to the way they leave children to struggle with getting their clothes on straight during the day, just before departure the teachers re-do ponytails on the girls, tucking in shirts and sweaters, pulling up pants, and zipping up coats. I suggest that here a concern to send the children to their parents clearly well cared for trumps the ethic of *yishi* and minimal bodily care that is the routine during the *Zizu* day.



Figure 5-33. Ji laoshi unties Yue Yue's pony tails before naptime and redoes her hair after naptime



Figure 5-34. Hu laoshi tucks En Tu's sweater in and pulls his pant up



Figure 5-35. Children ready to go meet their parents outside

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Bruno Latour wrote what he subtitled “a somewhat Socratic dialogue” between a professor and a doctoral student (2004) in which he explains how you know when a dissertation is over. I have edited this dialogue a bit, deleting some passages and re-ordering a few others:

Professor: As I always say: a good thesis is a thesis that is done. But there is another way to stop than by “adding an explanation” or “putting it into a frame” You stop when you have written your 80,000 words or whatever is the format. You write a text of so many words, in so many months, for so much grant money, based on so many interviews, so many hours of observation, so many documents. That’s all. You do nothing more. I feel like an old bore always repeating the same thing: ‘describe, write, describe, write.

Student: The problem is that that’s not at all what my supervisor wants. He wants my case studies to be generalizable. He does not want “mere description.” So, even if I do what you want, I will have one nice description of one state of affairs, and then what? Then, I still have to put it into a frame, find a typology, compare, explain, generalize. That’s why I’m starting to panic.

Professor: So the direction to follow would be more descriptions, I am afraid. Don’t try to shift from description to explanation: simply continue the description.

Student: But I have to explain instead.

Professor: I’d say that if your description needs an explanation, it’s not a good description, that’s all. Only bad descriptions need an explanation. It’s quite simple really. I have never seen a

good description in need, then, of an explanation. But I have read countless bad descriptions to which nothing was added by a massive addition of “explanations.”

Don’t worry—in the pages that follow I am going to conclude this dissertation with some tentative attempts to generalize, contextualize, and theorize. But I start this conclusion with the passages above from Latour to make the point that I see the strength of this dissertation in the descriptions, not in post-description theorizing I can add to the final chapter. The chapters above presented microanalyses of many hours of video recorded in two preschool classrooms, one in China and one in the US. This is the first such study to describe in detail how three- and four-year-old Chinese and American children are enculturated in two preschool programs into particular ways of doing things with their bodies. I have also presented interpretive analyses of the explanations the teachers in the Chinese and US preschool classrooms give for how they help the young children in the care of their bodies and develop particular bodily practices.

The limits of Structural Analyses

In writing about the bodily lives of children and teachers in the Orange class at Zizu and Mr. William’s class at DCC, I often found that my attempts to identify cultural explanations only sort of fit with the events I captured in the videos. Descriptions attend to the concrete, the sensory, and the quotidian while structural analyses generalize and abstract. For example, in Chapter 3 “Eating,” in the tradition of such structural anthropologists as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas, I identified binaries in the eating practices at Zizu and inferred a deep cultural grammar that lies beneath these categorizations. Specifically, I suggested that the three bowls of rice, soup, and a main dish, arrayed in what Zizu calls a “Mickey head” represents the basic structure of a Chinese meal. In the subtle guidance the teachers provided to the children by rearranging their three bowls, the ideal form of a Chinese meal becomes visible, and binary

distinctions are made between “dry food” and “liquid food” and “vegetable” and “meat.” This kind of structuralist interpretation generally fits the eating practices of the Orange class. And yet a careful review of each of the instances of eating I captured in five days of videotaping meals at Zizu reveals many exceptions. These include instances where teachers remind children to ignore the usual rule and, for example, to set aside the main dish and rice and eat just his soup. When I asked the teachers why they made these exceptions, they gave explanations such as “that boy is overweight,” or “that girl eats too fast and chokes on solid food if she eats it when she is very hungry,” or “that boy always complains that main dish is too salty.” In Latour’s terms, concerns about being overweight, the risk of choking, and fussy tastes of a child are “actants.” Hot soup, salty main courses, and bland rice are all potential actants, as are Chinese traditional discourses about the order and balance of a meal, and contemporary discourses such as concern about even young children being overweight. Human actants here include a child who chokes when she eats too fast, a chubby boy who eats too much rice, a boy with a dislike of salt, a teacher who for whatever reason is not in the mood that day to fight with this boy, the school nurse who weighs children every other month, and the parents who, though not physically near during lunch, still act by being present in the children’s eating habits and the teachers’ concerns. During any given meal, these and other actants interact to produce particular eating outcomes, outcomes that cannot be predicted or entirely explained by structural theories of either Chinese eating or Chinese pedagogical practice.

One more example: the custom at Zizu is for children in the youngest class to eat with a spoon, and not to introduce chopsticks, which are believed to be more difficult to use, until the second year. There is also a belief that children even in the first year should be introduced to a wide variety of types of food. These beliefs collide on days when lunch is a bowl of noodle soup,

which requires using a spoon and chopsticks. The cooks make an accommodation for the young children by making their noodles shorter and wider than usual. In other words, in such situations deep structural binaries and grammars may or may not be stronger actants than the fussiness of a child, the mood of a teacher that day, or the thickness of a noodle. In this sense, description is always in some tension with generalization. The “thicker” the description gets, the complexities, contradictions, and contingencies become more visible and the structural interpretations less stable.

In writing this dissertation, I have found that to describe an event I have to include a description of the material surroundings, time, and space in which the event unfolds. The architecture of the gates and doorways matter. Tapping an identification card on a card reader, as at Zizu matters, as it is different than signing in on laptop at DCC. It matters if the child enters the classroom carrying a familiar stuffed animal to ease the anxiety of separation; it matters if it is midwinter in a classroom without a central heating, factors that are closely connected to the thick layers of clothing children at Zizu need to deal with at naptime.

In Chapter 2 “Separation,” I started by describing the space in each preschool. I suggested that the architecture, spatial layout, cultural theories about separation and attachment, and beliefs about the nature and function of preschools are tangled up in children’s experience of transiting each day from home to school. However, the architecture of each preschool is not a random actant: instead the architecture also reflects many factors, including laws, regulations, weather, funding, and cultural notions about space and aesthetics, all of which contribute to the way children say goodbye to their parents each morning in each country.

Cultural schema is embedded in the architecture. The landscape of Zizu You’er yuan mimics a traditional Chinese resident home for an affluent family, with the buildings surrounded

by a garden, with footpaths, plants, and pavilions, as indicated in *yuan*, the Chinese character for “garden.” In those magnificent ancient Chinese residential dwellings, such as the classic gardens in Suzhou, the main building is always placed far from the entrance. After entering the gate, the guest usually needs to take a walk across a yard or several yards until he could meet the host. The longer the walk, the higher the status of the host family. What van Gennepe (1960) calls “rites of transition” between the chaotic, unordered, and vulgar outside world and the peaceful, organized, and decent inside world are built into the landscape of the garden to enable an outsider to pass from one defined social position to another well-defined social position as one takes the walk through the yards, which is intended not only for the guest to appreciate the magnificence of the garden, but also the dignity of the private life of the family, in accordance to which, the guest should adjust his temperament and manners. With a similar transitional procession from the gate to the sink, to the yard, to the lobby and to the classrooms, Zizu’s architecture embodies an ancient Chinese understanding of differentiating different life worlds that is rarely seen in contemporary Chinese residential homes, but still can be found in preschools.

Does Culture Produce Behavior?

At both DCC and Zizu teachers, parents, and children do things with their bodies, both by habit and intent. Parents and teachers in Mr. William’s classroom give children hugs when they read discomfort in children’s bodies, based on the cultural belief that a good hug carries the power to heal emotional wounds; Zizu parents release the hand of their children as they approach the school gate because they believe it’s the proper time and place to let them go. At mealtimes, DCC teachers do not intervene in children’s food choices because they believe in respecting children’s personal will; Zizu teachers tell children to eat what’s served whether they like it or

not because the body is a precious entity that should be nurtured and disciplined, but not indulged; to live a good life requires a well-nurtured body. At naptime, DCC children sleep on their cots without undressing because of the idea that one should not expose the naked body to unrelated people; Zizu children undress and sleep under a blanket in their underwear because their “outside” clothes, which are by definition dirty, should not be brought into contact with the bed sheet which is “inside” and therefore clean. The different bodily practices we can find in these Chinese and US preschool routines reflect beliefs, know-how, and knowledge about the body that are not limited to the domain of early childhood education but rather are connected with broader cultural notions about touch, affection, food, pleasure, health, privacy, dirt, and cleanliness. We can read culture in the details of how bodies are handled.

Except for when we can't. Culture can't make people do things any more than people can make culture do things. Rather, people and culture do things with each other. Culture can't be *a priori* assumed to be the cause of observed behaviors. We can't say that the discursive benefits ascribed to a hug in the US or a balanced meal in China will make a teacher use her body or redirect a child's in a certain way. We can, however, these beliefs and templates for practice as actants that will interact with other actants, in a sort of Iowa caucus process. Only in retrospect after an actant acts and leaves a trace can we say it acted. There is contingency and emergence here, not only on the scale of an event in a single classroom but at a higher level of resolution, such as the introduction of a new curriculum funded by the World Bank in a particular locale. *A good hug* is one emic notion that can act in a US preschool classroom, but not the only one. Cultural emic actants interact with non-cultural concerns (like policy, etc.) and with things and bodies (which aren't infinitely malleable). And even non-cultural actants have cultural actants behind them. As Tobin (in press) writes:

Latour does not usually list cultural beliefs and practices as among the actants he considers. But I see no incompatibility between ANT and cultural explanation, as long as culture is viewed as just one actant among many, and not given foundational explanatory or causal status. Latour sees deep similarities between ANT and ethnomethodology and anthropology, in the focus each of these fields gives to thick description and attention to the interplay of multiple factors.



Figure 6-1 a & b & c & d. Sam asks if he could put on his turtle towel but Mr. William rejects his request

I'll end with one last description followed by one more attempt at generalization:

At DCC in Mr. William's classroom, Mr. William announces it is time for everyone to clean up the toys and come to the rug. He takes his seat on the rug and waits for the children to join him. Meimei and Ajay reach out their arms and run over to Mr. William's for a hug. Mr. William spreads his arms around Meimei and Ajay and gives each of them a kiss on the forehead. Sam comes and sits down on his letter. Then he stands up and asks Mr. William: "Can I put on my towel (which he wears as a cape)?" (see Figure 6-1a). "No. Sit down," Mr. William says, pointing his hand toward Sam as Meimei, as usual, leans on him. Sam crosses his arms in frustration (b), and pleads: "I want to be comfy." Mr. William waves his hand, gesturing to Sam to sit down. Sam kneels down on one leg, with the other still under him, and waves his fingers (c), trying once more to get Mr. William's permission to get his towel: "It comforts my hands!" Mr. William shakes his head and says firmly: "You can be comfy later. Now I want you to be uncomfortable." Sam sits back on his bottom, visibly upset.

One might conclude that in this scene Mr. William acts inconsistently. Mr. William, whose pedagogy I have described as mostly indulgent and whose bodily practices are nurturing and accepting, here tells Sam that he wants him to be uncomfortable. The apparent inconsistency here is not just between this scene and others I have described of Mr. William's classroom in this dissertation, but also within this scene, in which Mr. William is both nurturing (he hugs and kisses Meimei and Ajay) and strict with Sam.

The point I want to make here is not that Mr. William is arbitrary or inconsistent, but rather that emotional and bodily life in his and other preschool classrooms in the US, China, and elsewhere is contingent, emergent, and hybrid. There are culturally characteristic routines and practices we can see each day in Mr. William's classroom as in Hu laoshi's. But these classroom

routines are in a continual state of interacting with heterogeneous discourses, teachers' and children's moods, the weather, the time of the day, the location, concerns about each child's developmentally needs and trajectory. Both of these statements are true: there are practices characteristic of each preschool classroom and these practices are also characteristic, to a greater or lesser extent, with aspects of the larger cultures and societies in which they are located. And yet at the same time each moment in each classroom has the potential for surprise and for bodily acts which exceed their social and cultural frames. We don't know why at this moment Mr. William decided that it was good for Sam to be uncomfortable. I didn't ask him, so we will never know. Even in a thickly described, micro-analyzed study of one scene in one preschool classroom, there are events we have to accept are beyond our understanding and ability to explain.

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