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Day Care Differences and the Reproduction of Social Class

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Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in two day care centers—the Green Mountain Child Care Center in College Town, Vermont, and the Rocky Mountain Christian Day Care in Coalville, Wyoming—the authors demonstrate differences between centers serving different segments of the population. The authors rely on Annette Lareau’s (2003) concepts of “concerted cultivation” and the “accomplishment of natural growth” as a way to describe these differences. The authors then reflect on the potential consequences of different styles of child care for the skills, attitudes, and orientations developed by young children.

Keywords: *day care; social class; preschool; parents*

A substantial body of literature demonstrates that class differences in parenting styles exist and have a major impact on children’s orientation toward the world, on children’s daily activities, and on the success that children enjoy within schools. Recently, in *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life*, Annette Lareau (2003) offered compelling descriptions of, and compelling names for, class-based parenting styles, dubbing the style practiced by the middle class “concerted cultivation” and that practiced by the working class and the poor the “accomplishment of natural growth.”

Lareau’s characterizations have been widely cited in the scholarly literature (e.g., Aries and Seider 2005; Boocock and Scott 2005; Giroux and Schmidt 2004; Hill et al. 2004) and even in the popular press (Brooks 2006), where it is argued that the congruence between parental teachings and school expectations give middle-class children a significant advantage in achieving

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academic success (see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Farkas 2003). However, Lareau's concepts have not been applied to institutions themselves; hence, "congruence" is often assumed rather than demonstrated. Moreover, because Lareau's study focuses on parental behaviors with respect to school-age children, it ignores both the preschool years and role of nonparental care during that time. This latter issue is an important one now that many children receive care outside the home prior to attending kindergarten (National Center for Education Statistics 2001), and many scholars put their faith in the possibility that specific types of preschool experiences can alleviate the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers (Clarke-Stewart and Allhusen 2005).

In this article, we draw on an ethnographic study of two child care centers—Green Mountain Child Care (GMCC) in College Town, Vermont, and Rocky Mountain Christian Day Care (RMCD) in Coalville, Wyoming¹—to make several related contributions to these ongoing discussions of class differences in child-rearing styles. First, we demonstrate that the class advantage indeed may occur very early in a child's life insofar as day care settings available to and attended by different social classes might incorporate the characteristics of class-based differences in style and thus play an important role in the reproduction of social class. Second, we illustrate the utility of applying Lareau's concepts as a way of characterizing day care environments.² Third, and following from this application, we argue that although characterizations of the quality of child care settings often embed within them class-based differences of style, as sociologists we might want to separate these sets of concepts (i.e., class and quality) to consider the implications of differences among day care settings for a range of issues including school readiness and other kinds of behaviors and attitudes.

More specifically, in what follows, we briefly review the relevant literature on class differences in child rearing and on quality indicators for preschool settings. We then turn to a description of the ethnographic research we conducted in each of the two day care centers—GMCC, which predominantly served children of the professional middle class, and RMCD, which predominantly served children whose parents either held working-class occupations or were poor. Our findings demonstrate that although each of the centers offered care that met local standards (and was considered to be of excellent quality within its community), the two centers differed significantly in the style of care they offered. After providing a general comparison of the two centers, we examine four specific arenas of a child's day at each of the centers: how, for what behaviors, and how often children are corrected by teachers; how, for what behaviors, and how often children are praised by teachers; how children interact with each other and the frequency

with which teachers intervene in these interactions; and finally, the manner (and the purposes for which) children call on teachers to be resources for them in their daily activities. Finally, we reflect on some possible consequences of these different styles for the abilities, orientations, and attitudes of the children who attend these centers during their formative years.

Literature Review

Two relatively distinct bodies of literature provide evidence for class-based differences in child care both at home and in preschools. As noted above, a substantial body of literature argues that child-rearing styles are associated with social class (for a good review, see Demo and Cox 2000). These differences include the degree to which the parents are “child centered,” meaning that adults are encouraged to shape their parenting around responding to the child’s wants and needs (Hays 1996, 51), and the style of discipline used in the home (Bernstein 1971; Cancian 2002; Hays 1996; Lareau 2003). In general, studies show that middle-class parents are more likely to give children choices, negotiate with them about proper behavior, encourage them to share their own views, and give reasons for disciplinary practices, whereas working-class parents are more likely to expect children to acknowledge their authority and do what is asked of them, and to use directives without offering reasoned explanations. In addition, scholars have recorded differences in the patterns of language use encouraged within the home (Bernstein 1971; Hart and Risley 1995; Heath 1996), differences in the kind and range of cultural capital with which parents supply children (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; De Graaf, De Graaf, and Kraaykamp 2000; DiMaggio 1982; Lareau 2003), and differences in the degree to which parents equip children to intervene in institutions on their own behalf (Lareau 2003).

Drawing on her own intensive ethnographic research, Lareau summarizes these differences. She calls the middle-class style “concerted cultivation” and locates its key element as residing in the fact that the parent “actively fosters and assesses [the] child’s talents, opinions, and skill” (Lareau 2003, 31). Concerted cultivation also entails the provision of “multiple child leisure activities orchestrated by adults,” the incorporation of both reasoning and directives in language use, and the ongoing training of children to take on the role of intervention in institutions. As a result of being raised in this style, Lareau argues, children develop what she calls an “emerging sense of entitlement,” a belief in their own importance and in the obligation of institutions to serve them. By way of contrast, Lareau characterizes the child-rearing style of the working class and the poor as being fashioned around providing

basic care for the child and allowing the child to grow. Children reared according to the precepts of what she calls “the accomplishment of natural growth” spend their days differently than middle-class children do: they are more likely to be found “hanging out” and interacting with playmates of different ages (including kin), and the language they hear from adults often takes the form of “directives” commanding obedience. Lareau notes that children raised according to the precepts of the accomplishment of natural growth develop skills that are unavailable to those raised according to concerted cultivation (including the capacity to manage their own time and to solve disputes), but they also develop an “emerging sense of constraint” in their actions in institutional settings. Moreover, Lareau predicts that children reared according to concerted cultivation will succeed in educational institutions and thus secure further privileges, whereas children reared according to the accomplishment of natural growth will be less successful in those same institutions and will enjoy a narrower range of options.

For many years now, a substantial body of research on child care (dating back to the early studies of Head Start) demonstrates that children in day care centers enjoy intellectual and social gains that serve them well in their early years of education and sometimes extend into their subsequent educational experiences (Barnett 1995; Cole and Cole 2001; for an excellent review, see Clarke-Stewart and Allhusen 2005). Of course, these outcomes depend on the nature of the care provided by day care centers and preschools. Indeed, it is quite possible that rather than equalizing possibilities and achievements across social classes, the care to which young children of different social classes are exposed will subtly (or not so subtly) reinforce class-based practices and reproduce such orientations toward the world that Lareau suggests with her concepts of “entitlement” and “constraint.” Both parental resources and parental preferences clearly play a role. As Lareau notes, concerted cultivation is an expensive style for parents; presumably it would also be an expensive style within a child care institution, because it is dependent on extensive space, facilities, equipment, a trained staff, and a low child-to-teacher ratio. In fact, research has shown that the type of child care on which parents rely depends on parental income (with those with a higher income relying more often on center-based programs or other forms of nonrelative care and less on relative care; National Center for Education Statistics 2001).

Moreover, research suggests that parents often prefer substitute child care that is congenial to their own personal style rather than one that differs from it (Uttal 1999; van Ijzendoorn et al. 1998). Thus, although there is an acknowledgment that class, race, and ethnicity can make a difference not only in parenting styles but also in the choices parents make about nonparental care, much of the psychological and sociological literature about child care takes a less

reflective and more adamant approach to these issues (see, for example, Helburn and Bergmann 2002). The indicators applied to these differences are assumed to be assessments of quality. One such set of indicators concerns the *structural* features of the child care setting such as “the ratio of caregivers to children, the size of the groups of children that are cared for together, the staff/provider education and training, the extent of staff/provider turnover, and the amount and quality of space used” (Helburn and Bergmann 2002, 72). These “structural features” form the basis for state standards and, as Helburn and Bergmann (2002, 72) note, in center-based care “quality of services is strongly and positively related to staffing ratio of children to adult caregivers, the education and training of center staff, and low staff turnover rates.” The other set of standards involves the ongoing *processes* in a day care setting; it relies more on the degree to which a given environment helps children “develop a receptivity to learning” (Helburn and Bergmann 2002, 61). These standards have been encoded in the “Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale” (Harms, Clifford, and Cryer 1998), which covers such areas as informal use of language, the use of language to develop reasoning skill, style of discipline, range of interactions among children, the variety of art materials made available, opportunities for free play and choice, and space for privacy. Centers that receive an “excellent” on most characteristics, Helburn and Bergmann (2002, 74) note, “combine first rate facilities, furnishings and materials that are specifically designed for children’s use with a lot of individualized attention, and more complex learning activities or projects.”

Following Francesca Cancian’s (2002) analysis, however, we suggest that these “quality” measures indicating “appropriate” modes of intervention on the part of adults almost inevitably trespass into practices tied to cultural norms that can vary by nation, race/ethnicity, and class.³ In what follows, we not only try to avoid making assessments of quality but we also make explicit how variations perceived as being “quality” indicators are linked to class-based approaches to child care. As we have already indicated and will discuss further below, each of the centers on which we report has a good reputation within its own locale, each of them meets state standards, and in each of them the children in care appeared to be happy and safe.

Method

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected in several ways through a long period of time. First, one of the two authors (Rebecca Schutz) worked in each of

the two centers during the course of several years as an undergraduate student.⁴ She worked in GMCC at least two or three times a week for several hours on each occasion for three years; she also worked at RMCD for an entire summer and during several school vacations. During this time, the observations she made were as a child care worker and not as a trained sociologist (For a similar methodology, see Phelan and Hunt 1998, 280-83). However, she received formal training at GMCC and casual indoctrination at RMCD, and she had ample opportunity to make informal observations; to become familiar with the structure and functioning of each of the centers; and to come to know the other staff members, the children, and the parents of the children attending the center.

In addition, Rebecca Schutz returned to each of the two centers as an observer for approximately two hours on at least ten separate occasions, thus giving her an additional forty hours of careful observation beyond the context of her immersion in the worlds of the two centers. These observations served the purpose of expanding our understanding of how each center functioned to provide care to different groups of children and how teachers and children interacted on a daily basis. As an adult in a child care setting, she was frequently approached by children who asked questions about what she was doing or invited her participation in their activities. She openly responded to these questions and, from time to time, became involved in children's games and ongoing activities.

Finally, to round out the research, Rebecca Schutz conducted discrete observations for each of four types of interaction at each of the two centers for what was an admittedly brief period of time—one hour at each of the centers for each of the four types of interactions (for a total of eight hours of observation).⁵ During these observational periods, she recorded every interaction of one of the four specified types that occurred, trying as much as possible to make the observations both with the same group (the 3 to 5 year olds in both centers⁶) and during periods when the same activities (e.g., art projects, free play) were taking place.⁷

Analytic Strategy

The four sets of issues that formed the basis for the discrete observations are analyzed closely below, drawing on both the quantitative data obtained during these observations and more general knowledge of how these issues reflected the ongoing processes in the centers. The first two issues (words of praise and correction) were selected to reveal both patterns of discipline and the language use associated with these patterns, because these are often

the focus of social class comparisons in parenting styles. During the observation periods on these topics, the researcher kept note of what behaviors on the part of children elicited praise or correction, the language used to indicate praise and correction, and the frequency with which children were praised or corrected during a single hour. Although the researcher found it easy to tell when teachers were displaying approval or disapproval of children's actions in general, these interpretations clearly built on prior knowledge of language use in the two centers.

The concern with the issue of children's interactions with each other emerged in part from Lareau's (2003) observation that middle-class children raised through the strictures of concerted cultivation appeared to have more disputes with their siblings and, in comparison with working-class and poor children, appeared less able to resolve their interpersonal disputes without intervention. (Interactions among children were somewhat difficult to define; the researcher watched for the moment when interactions began to be consistent in her records.) In the formal observations, interactions among children were roughly grouped as either conflict free or conflictual ones. Interactions were coded as conflict free if the children appeared to be playing together or communicating happily. Interactions in which some sort of dispute occurred (e.g., arguments over toys) were coded as conflictual. In addition to observing the style of interaction among the children, the study considered occasions on which adults became involved in those interactions. Finally, observations were also conducted to assess the instances for which the children at the two centers approached adults. These observations were aimed at ascertaining when (that is, for what purposes) the children felt that adults were needed and the manner in which they made their requests of adults. In interpreting these selective quantitative data, we draw on the full range of data available to us (i.e., on the extensive knowledge available from being a participant in the ongoing life of the center and from the other forty hours of observation).

Description of Settings

In many ways, College Town, Vermont (the setting for GMCC) and Coalville, Wyoming (the setting for RMCD) are quite similar (see table 1 for an overview). Both of them are rural towns located in rural states, both of them have a population that is predominantly white, and both of them have income distributions that are relatively flat in comparison with the United States as a whole (i.e., fewer families that are either exceptionally poor or exceptionally rich). Coalville is, however, more than twice as large

Table 1
Comparison of the Two Towns in Percentages

	College Town, Vermont	Coalville, Wyoming	United States
Percent of population that is white	95.0	91.2	75.1
Family income			
Less than \$25,000	15.7	16.7	20.8
\$25,000 to \$49,999	35.0	30.5	29.1
\$50,000 to \$99,999	34.3	43.0	34.8
\$100,000 or more	15.0	9.8	15.2
Labor force in construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	6.7	21.3	9.4
Labor force in agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining industries	4.1	14.5	1.9
Labor force in educational, health, and social services industries	44.5	18.5	19.9
Females 16 years or older in labor force	58.3	59.4	57.5

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000a, 2000b, 2000c.

as College Town, with a population of 23,016 in comparison with College Town's population of 10,096. Two other major differences help distinguish between the two settings.

First, as the pseudonym suggests, Coalville was established in 1888 as a mining town, and the natural resources around the area are the driving force behind the economy ([Coalville] Chamber of Commerce, 2003-2004). To the present day, Coalville has experienced booms and busts. When one of the local industries (oil, natural gas, soda ash, coal) is in high demand, people flock to the town for jobs, only to move on when the boom subsides. As can be seen in table 1, at the time of the 2000 Census, a full one fifth of the employed civilian population was engaged in construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations. By way of contrast, College Town is not only considerably older than Coalville, but as its pseudonym suggests, it hosts within its borders a small, liberal arts college (and a small regional hospital). Nearly half of the labor force is engaged in industries involving education, health, and social services, and industries built on natural resources play a minor role in the local economy.

Second, and most relevant to the issues under consideration here, the child care picture is quite different in the two towns. In Coalville, parents have few options for center-based child care when they need to locate it: In addition to RMCD, there is one other child care center at the local Young Women's Christian Association, a center at the local community college (which is only

available to children whose parents are students or employees at the college), and a Head Start program (which, by definition, serves only those children whose household incomes fall below the poverty level). In total, there are only 218 center-based slots for children in day care in Coalville, whereas there were at least 1,729 children under five years of age in the town in 2000 and the female labor force participation rate was high (59.4 percent). The vast majority of children who attend RMCD come from families that might well be called working class based on the occupations of their parents, and at least half of the parents who send their children to that center receive aid from the state for living expenses and also to help cover the costs of sending their children to day care (which is \$101 a week for 3 to 5 year olds). RMCD has the reputation of being the best day care center in the town, and the state childcare inspector called it one of the best day care centers in the state. The center always has a waiting list of families hoping to be enrolled. When parents send their children to RMCD, they may be making a choice to do so, but that choice is constrained by the limitations within the community in which they live.

In College Town, there are multiple options for day care and over 250 child care slots for the approximately 450 children under 5 years old who live in the town, including a Head Start program and a variety of other private preschools and day care centers. (College Town contains most of the center-based child care in the county of which it is a part. There are approximately 2,200 children under 5 years old in the county, and the female labor force rate is also high [58.3%]. Thus the pressure on these services is greater yet.) The parents who choose GMCC from among the various options not only can afford to do so (by the time their children complete their fifth year of day care, parents who choose GMCC will have spent almost \$50,000 on child care) but they are also often opting for a specific kind of care for their children from within the variety offered in the community. The center has a good reputation for care, and it creates a strong sense of involvement among its families. The vast majority of the children attending the day care center have parents who are professional workers; many of those parents are employed at the nearby college. At the time during which the study was conducted, only two of the children in the center were getting state assistance to help defray the cost of care, which (at \$139 a week for 3 to 5 year olds) is higher than that at RMCD.

Life at Two Child Care Centers

The two centers differ from each other in physical and staff resources, structure, and orientation. We review these general characteristics of the

centers and of the daily life within them before turning to the discrete observations of the four issues discussed above.

GMCC: Stable in Structure; Rich in Resources

GMCC, which has been in continuous operation for over 20 years, is located in an old farmhouse that has been remodeled to meet code guidelines as a child care center. (For an overview, see table 2A.) The large, attractive, white building provides ample space for outside play areas (segregated by the age of children) and a wraparound porch that allows children to get some fresh air even on rainy days. Inside, the first floor has rooms for the three youngest groups of children (infants through toddlers); upstairs, the older children, ages 3 to 5 years, known as the Lions (who are the focus of this study), spend most of their time. On any given day, there are 16 children in this group and three full-time teachers that run the program. The child-to-teacher ratio is thus approximately 5 to 1, a ratio that is far lower than the approved standard in Vermont (10:1). In addition, because college students often work part-time or volunteer at the center, there are often even more adults available for each child. Teachers take advantage of the presence of additional staff to take time away from the children to plan activities for the week; each teacher is assured at least two hours a week to devote to this planning.

The Lions have four different playrooms at their disposal: a kitchen with child-sized tables and chairs and a bookcase with games and puzzles; an art room that also contains child-sized tables with chairs, a range of craft supplies (many of which are kept on shelves that the children can reach), puzzles, games, toys and at least one sensory table; a third room, which holds a large climber, a bookcase, an assortment of toys, and two aquariums (one with fish and another with turtles); and the main playroom, which has sufficient space for the children and teachers to sit as a full group for circle time each day and many shelves with toys and books.

According to the center's Web site, each group of children, from the youngest (infants) to the oldest, has a specific thematic orientation: as children grow, they move through themes of "discovery," "continued exploration," "curiosity," and finally, as Lions, to "creativity" ([Green Mountain] Child Care Center 2005):

Lions spend a year or two in this preschool age program further developing their social skills, literacy skills (learning the foundations of reading and writing), problem solving, and decision-making. Lions are constantly formulating their thoughts and then testing their theories about how things around them work. We support them in finding answers to their questions and in

Table 2A
Comparison of the Two Child Care Centers

	Green Mountain Child Care	Rocky Mountain Christian Day Care
Years in Existence	20	12 years of day care in the building; 5 years in the current structure
Number of children enrolled	55 to 60	100 to 150
Number of children present at one time	42	50
Percentage of children enrolled present at any given time (using maximum enrollment numbers)	70	33
Child: Teacher Ratio (State requirements if different)		
Under 12 months	4:1	4:1
12 to 24 months	4:1	5:1
24 to 36 months	5:1	8:1
3 years	5:1 (10:1)	10:1
4 years	5:1 (10:1)	12:1
5 years	5:1 (10:1)	12:1
Weekly rate for child care		
Infants	\$190	\$124
Toddlers	\$186	\$124
Ages 2 to 3 years	\$155	\$113
Age 3 years and above	\$139	\$101

learning to express themselves through art, music, and storytelling. We strive to help them develop their creative and critical thinking skills, preparing them to be the innovators and discoverers of tomorrow.

The employee handbook outlines the rudiments of the daily schedule (see table 2B). The day is organized into occasional periods of free play and structured activities and defined times to eat (morning snack, lunch, and afternoon snack) and rest. But these broad outlines conceal the careful planning that goes into organizing the time for the Lions on a daily basis. For example, in the time set aside for activities in the morning, there is a more detailed and more regular routine: the group goes to a local gym one day a week; to the library another day; and on the remaining three days, the group is divided into smaller groups for activities and lessons. During these small group times, the children are consistently with the same teacher and among a very small group of peers (no more than five or six).

Table 2B
Comparison of Schedules at Two Child Care Centers

Time	Green Mountain Child Care	Time	Rocky Mountain Christian Day Care
7:30 to 9:00	Free play	5:30 to 9:00	Free play (between 8:00 and 8:15, school-aged children get ready and leave for school)
9:00 to 9:30	Morning snack	9:00 to 9:30	Morning snack
9:45 to 10:00	Circle time		
10:00 to 11:30	Activities (field trips, walks, outdoor play in good weather, gym, library)	9:30 to 11:00	Free play or activities
		11:00 to 11:30	Group time
11:30 to 12:00	Lunch	12:15 to 1:00	Lunch (morning kindergarten children return)
12:00 to 2:30	Nap time; quiet time; free play for those who are awake	1:00 to 3:00	Nap time; quiet time; free play for those who are awake (afternoon kindergarten children leave for school)
2:30 to 3:00	Afternoon snack	3:00 to 3:30	Afternoon snack (school children return)
3:00 to 5:30	Afternoon activities; free play (outside or inside)	3:30 to 6:00	Free play; sometimes organized games or art activities with all the children or television; clean up and preparation to go home

Several other features of daily life at GMCC are worth noting. First, as the Web site suggests, teachers actively encourage the development of skills that will prepare the children for school success. Teachers at GMCC consistently tell children that they should “use words” to resolve disputes and to express their needs and desires, and they invite children to explain the reasoning for their actions and feelings. They also use a lot of words themselves: they offer full explanations of what they are doing; they help children understand their feelings and the consequences of their actions; and they read books to the children. The teachers also consciously expose children to a range of objects for exploration: sensory tables with different substances are often available throughout the day, and basic art supplies are within the

children's reach to be used during free play. Generally, at least two of the four rooms are open (and offering a different choice of activities); children are free to move between the rooms and to be in a smaller group.

Second, children at GMCC are observed closely. The employee handbook at GMCC discusses what the administration sees as being the intrinsic value of this practice ([Green Mountain] Child Care Center 2001):

Our role as teachers is not simply to provide information; we must be researchers for, and observers and listeners of, our children so that we can provide them with the materials and equipment that reflect their desire to gain specific information. In a critical and fundamental way, this helps set the stage for life-long learning.

These teacher observations serve as the basis for three sets of documents. Teachers produce progress reports for each child once each year and meet with each child's parents to share these reports of the child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. In addition, the center produces a monthly newsletter, and teachers from each of the classrooms must produce articles about what they have been doing in their rooms; often, teachers of the older group include quotes from the children about their reactions to things they have done at the center. Finally, teachers also produce a scrapbook for each child that includes pictures and text recording things that the child has done. In short, not only is close observation prescribed but it is also necessitated by the production of documents themselves.

Third, daily life at GMCC involves intense interaction between children and adults. Adults are instructed, again by the manual, to be involved with the children: "at [GMCC] we expect that all Teachers will be actively involved with children while they are here. It is not acceptable to sit in a chair and watch children play!" ([Green Mountain] Child Care Center 2001).

Fourth, the organizational structure of the center secures consistent care for children in terms of the teachers who watch over them and consistent groups of other children with whom they interact on a daily basis. Children are placed in an age-appropriate group at the beginning of a school year and remain with that group until the entire group, together, moves up to the next age group. The center Web site speaks of this continuity and consistency with a certain pride ([Green Mountain] Child Care Center 2005):

If your child starts in one of the younger groups by the time they reach the second floor they will know every inch of the rooms up there, they'll know all of the teachers, they'll probably know every child and every child's parents and what kind of car every child's parents drive too.

In short, the stated policy at GMCC replicates many of the practices that Lareau (2003) describes as concerted cultivation; as we will see in what follows, these practices extend deep into the daily life of the center and might well have consequences similar to those produced by parental care of the same style.

RMCD: Making Accommodations

RMCD is housed in the basement of one of the many Protestant churches that are scattered throughout Coalville. (This is not quite as grim as it sounds; the church is built on a hill so the basement is at ground level in the back.) In spite of its affiliation to the church, religion has but a minor role in everyday life at the center, manifest primarily in the fact that the children say a prayer together in unison before lunch and snacks and that RMCD focuses on Christian holidays and events (in contrast with GMCC which actively promotes a “multi-cultural” understanding of the world).

As is the case for GMCC, there are two different outside playground areas for the children, segregated by age, and equipped with large climbing structures and smaller toys, though the number, quality, and range are all much smaller than at GMCC. And as is the case at GMCC, inside the center an attempt is made to divide children into rooms by age, with separate spaces for babies, toddlers, and older children. This division, however, is often bent to accommodate different schedules and to maintain appropriate child-to-teacher ratios for different age groups; because the center enrolls many more children than it can serve at any given time, these accommodations are frequent.

The children who are the focus of this study, the 3 to 5 year olds, spend most of their time in what is known as the “big room.” (This is also the space where school-age children spend time when they attend the center before and after school, thus providing shifts in the composition of the group and in the range of ages throughout the day.) The big room is roughly the same size as the sanctuary above it and for much of the day there are at least fifteen to twenty children in the space. One side of the room has a sink, cabinets, and refrigerators; near another wall, there are three tables of varying heights and the chairs that go with them (to preserve room, these are stacked against the wall, except during meal and snack times or when the children are engaged in art projects). One corner of the room has a television and a VCR and some child-sized chairs. Along another wall are cubbies, a large fish tank, and a shelf of books. The rest of the room is mostly open space with some play kitchen equipment and a few other toys. Adjacent to and attached to the big room are two smaller rooms where the children in the big room can play during free

play time if one of the rooms is not being used for toddlers; these rooms are filled with toys, including blocks, pretend tools and kitchen utensils, dolls, and dress-up clothes. Like GMCC, RMCD complies with state regulations concerning child-to-teacher ratios but it does not exceed them.

The rudiments of the RMCD schedule are much the same as that at GMCC insofar as it too includes free play, meals, and quiet time (see table 2B). As is the case for circle time at GMCC, group time at RMCD allows the children to sit together and share an activity. And as is the case at GMCC, a weekly visit to the library for story time is scheduled into the week. Free time might also involve structured activities similar to those used at GMCC, but this is less consistently the case at RMCD. Sometimes teachers will plan art activities or lead the children in games that the whole group can play (such as musical chairs), but the teachers do not have time set aside to plan and they must do so as part of the day's routine. Structured activities thus vary from day to day, involve the whole group, and are often initiated in response to the needs or moods of the children present. As one of the RMCD teachers said, "sometimes we are structured, but then sometimes, like when we are short on staff, we don't have much structure [and] we let the kids do whatever they want."

RMCD includes some features that are not present at GMCC. First, the center opens much earlier and remains open later; some children have very long days at the center. Second, both the teachers to whom the children are exposed and the group of children with whom they spend their days undergo more constant change, and the age range of children with whom they interact is much greater. Third, the television and VCR play a big role in everyday life at RMCD and not any at GMCC. The center owns a large number of G-rated movies, and children spend some time watching these almost every day. (Generally, the teacher will select a movie and children watch as long as they remain interested and then wander off to free play.)

Finally, at RMCD there is a clear separation between the worlds of adults and the worlds of children and a clear separation between what adults and children are expected to do (Lareau 2000). Adults rarely join a child in play (although they may lead activities) and during free time, the adults are often involved in doing jobs such as cleaning, paperwork, and preparation for meals or activities. Teachers remain attentive to what is happening among the children and ready to intervene if there is dangerous behavior; they also talk with children who are around. But with all the routine responsibilities falling on a relatively small staff, teachers are often busy in activities that serve the children but do not involve them directly. This separation is articulated in a two-word phrase that children at RMCD hear quite often: "go play." Generally, this phrase ends an interaction in which a child approaches an

adult; it indicates that there has been a resolution and that the interaction is complete. The following incident illustrates well the use of this phrase:

A girl named Lena started crying and the teacher called to her, “Lena, come over here.” When she did, she explained (through her sobs) that a boy named Dylan had hit her on the nose and that it had been “on purpose.” The teacher told Lena to go tell Dylan to come over to her. When the two children returned, the teacher asked them to explain what happened. Dylan said that hitting Lena had been an accident. The teacher asked Lena if that was true, since she had originally said it wasn’t an accident. She nodded her head that it was true. The teacher then said to the kids, “Okay, go play,” and they ran off.

In short, as even this brief overview suggests, GMCC and RMCD provide very different kinds of care to children. RMCD leaves children free to develop their own play (or television watching) far more often than does GMCC, and this approach to child care resembles the pattern described by Lareau as the “accomplishment of natural growth.” The degree to which the differences between the two centers are embedded in other aspects of daily life can be seen when we examine the issues that constituted the focus of more intense observation.

Discrete Observations

Words of Correction

How Do Teachers Say “No”?

The class differences in discipline and language use noted above are echoed in the way that the teachers correct children and, as we will see, in how they praise them as well.

Correction at GMCC: It’s not okay; make a different choice. GMCC teachers are instructed carefully about how to comment on and guide children’s behavior. The employee manual given to every teacher is explicit in its advice both to avoid direct confrontation and to tell children what they may do rather than what they may not do: “Let a child know where it is safe to climb, what they *can* throw, and that they *can* give their friends gentle touches” ([Green Mountain] Child Care Center Employee Manual 2001, 9).

In daily practice, two styles of saying “no” prevail. One is through the use of the phrase, “it’s not okay,” which, as the manual suggests it should be, is

usually tied both to a reason and to an alternative: hence a teacher might say something on the order of, "it's not okay to hit our friends, because it makes them sad. Can you give your friend gentle touches instead?"

The other practice involves the concept of choices (and denies it at the same time). Children are encouraged to make choices but are also taught that some choices are *not* choices. That is, occasionally, and somewhat contradictorily, the child is told that what she is doing is "not a choice" and that she should "make a different choice" or "walk away" from the situation.

Needless to say, from time to time, teachers at GMCC do directly confront children and issue straightforward directives, telling a child not to engage in a certain practice. They also often discipline through processes that involve indirection or abstraction. A teacher might say, "Oh-oh, I don't know if that play is safe. It looks a little rough," "That's kind of scary when you move your arms like that," "Are you being gentle with that baby [doll]?" or "David, your voice is really hurting my ears." The children being corrected in this manner have to figure out precisely what aspect of their behavior is being reproved (why is his play unsafe) and come up with an alternative on their own (just how loudly can he speak).

Correction at RMCD: Stop it now; You know better. Although at RMCD each teacher is free to develop her own style of discipline, the prevailing style is quite uniform and relies heavily on straightforward directives. At RMCD it is not uncommon to hear a teacher say such things as, "quit spitting on people," "Zach, get in here!" "Throw them away, please." or "Quit throwing stuff." These phrases simply tell children not to do what they are doing; they are not accompanied by either explanations or alternatives.

This is not to say that the children are never expected to use their own reasoning to figure out implicit messages. But the range of reasoning required of children at RMCD might be somewhat narrower than that required by the abstractions at GMCC. For example, on one occasion we observed a child yelling through a plastic cone; after a few moments, the teacher moved close and reached out her hand, indicating that the child was to give over the toy. Often, the tone of voice conveys as much of the teacher's meaning as do the words used themselves.

In addition, teachers often say to children engaging in prohibited behavior, "you know better," a phrase that locates responsibility for knowing the rules within the child and clearly signifies that there are concrete rules that a child has to learn (and should have learned by this time). (An interesting finding was that as the GMCC phrase "make a different choice" contains

the contradiction of simultaneously giving and denying choice, the phrase “you know better” at one and the same time praises a child for knowing the rules and reproves the child for not following them.) We also observed practices of correction at RMCD that we never observed at GMCC. On occasion, teachers mock threaten to use physical force (although it is never done); they also teasingly call children names. For example, a child named Kurt was hitting and picking a fight with a girl who was trying to escape from him. One of the teachers called out, “Hey! Kurt! You wanna fight? I’ll take you outside and we’ll fight.” Another time, Zach was standing on a chair and the teacher, Sandra, said, “You need to get down from there.” Zach said, “Unh-unh,” refusing to get down. Sandra asked him, “You want me to push you?” She said this playfully, giving him a little nudge as a joke, and he laughed. On another occasion, one of the teachers said to a child, “You’re picking your nose. Go get a Kleenex, sick-o.”

What Are Children Doing When They Are Corrected?

As the examples above suggest, to a great extent, the same kinds of actions call down words of admonition in both centers. And indeed, this is the case (see table 3, section A). At both centers, children who are engaged in unsafe play or engaged in actions that violate norms of sanitation and health are directed to stop; children are also called on to cease engaging in behaviors that annoy the teachers, behaviors that teachers believe are annoying to other children, and behaviors that violate norms of mannerly behavior; and children are also instructed to clean up and care for materials if they haven’t done so on their own.

How Often Are Children Corrected?

Over a one-hour period, there are twice as many occasions of correction of children at RMCD (37) than at GMCC (18), though given the differences in the number of children present, occasions of correction per child have approximately the same frequency at the two centers. However, it is worth noting that almost half of the corrections done at RMCD were from two of the teachers addressed to their own two children (who attend the day care center). When these corrections are excluded, it turns out that on average, the remaining 15 children were each admonished slightly more than one time in contrast with almost twice as much correction (from someone other than a parent) at GMCC. RMCD children are thus exposed to more correction, but unless a child’s parent is in the room, children at RMCD have fewer admonitions directed at them on a daily basis.

Table 3
One-Hour Observational Data

	Green Mountain Child Care	Rocky Mountain Christian Day Care
A: Correction issues		
Annoying manners	44%	43%
Safety or sanitation	44%	43%
Cleaning up	11%	14%
Total	100%	100%
Number of correction actions during one hour	18	37
Number of children present	7	17
Number of correction actions per child	2.6	2.2
Number of correction actions excluding parent toward own children	N/A	20
Number of children present (without a parent)	N/A	15
Number of correction actions per child (excluding those from parents)	N/A	1.3
B: Praise issues		
Compliance, good behavior	50%	14%
Compliments	44%	0%
Ideas or creativity	11%	86%
Total	100%	100%
Number of praise interactions during one hour	12	7
Number of children present	7.0	17.0
Number of praise interactions per child	1.7	0.4
C: Children's interactions with each other		
Conflict-free interactions	56%	88%
Conflictual interactions	44%	12%
Total	100%	100%
Number of children present	8	17
Total number of interactions	25	40
Total number of interactions per child	3.1	2.4
Number of conflict-free interactions	14	35
Number of conflictual interactions per child	1.8	2.1
Number of negative interactions	11	5
Number of negative interactions per child	1.4	0.3
D: Teacher involvement in children's interactions		
Teacher involvement as a percentage of all interactions	48%	23%
Teacher involvement as a percentage of conflict-free interactions	21%	20%
Teacher involvement as a percentage of conflictual interactions	82%	40%

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

	Green Mountain Child Care	Rocky Mountain Christian Day Care
E: Children's requests of teachers		
Permission	32%	53%
Help or assistance	9%	32%
Attention	55%	11%
Tattling	5%	5%
Total	100%	100%
Total number of requests	22	19
Number of children present	8	17
Requests per child	2.2	1.1

Words of Praise

The flip side of correction is approval or praise, and it is a prescribed part of child care; child care analysts argue that when it is done consistently and pointedly, it can lead to condoned behavior on the part of children (Clarke-Stewart and Allhusen 2005). As with correction, it is interesting to note both how many occasions of praise are received by each child during a one-hour period and the types of behavior that bring forth praise. (At both centers, the children were working on art projects during the period of discrete observation of this issue.)

How Much Praise Is Received?

As section B of table 3 shows, at RMCD, over the period of one hour of free play, seventeen children were present and these children were accorded but seven occasions of praise, or less than half a praise per hour for each child. Indeed, praise seems sparing at best in that center. Praise is not only frequent at GMCC but is far more commonplace there than at RMCD. Over the one-hour period of discrete observations, 12 interactions involving praise were meted out to seven children, averaging 1.7 praise interactions per child. In addition, at GMCC praise is stored and saved up for later times during the day. In fact, the staff at GMCC not only praises children on an ongoing basis in casual interactions but teachers also actually create a permanent record of children's optimal behavior. The center's "kindness caterpillar" records on circles of construction paper what the teacher considered to be good behavior during a particular day. These observations are discussed during circle time and the specific day's incidents are added to the wall in the long row that

makes the caterpillar. On one day of observation, sections were added for Betsy helping to fix a book with tape, David helping to pick up tissue in the yard, Mary and Julie picking up some toys that they hadn't played with, Alyssa and Sadie helping to set the table for snack (thus adding sections for six children out of the total group of 16 Lions). (As the notes indicate, most of these behaviors were not what casual conversation might consider kindness per se—that is, they were not addressed to individuals—but approved behavior for participation in the daily life of the center.)

For What Are Children Praised?

An interesting finding was that compliance and good behavior are far more commonly the reasons for praise at GMCC (50%) than they are at RMCD (14%) as much of the child guidance literature suggests should be the case. Teachers at GMCC thank children for complying with teachers' requests (cleaning up when asked to do so) and for doing something that adults consider to be good behavior (such as helping another child or washing hands for snack without being told to do so). Children are also frequently given compliments for appearance. And children at GMCC are praised, albeit with less frequency, for engaging in actions that will lead to a creative product whether or not the product itself is praised. For example, we observed one of the children ask a teacher if she could use some plastic pegs from a game to make designs in the play dough. The teacher replied, "Well, that's a pretty good idea, if you are willing to wash them out [when you are done]." In another example, a teacher, Karen, asked Sadie if she was making a keyboard with the play dough. When Sadie said yes, Karen said, "Very nice!" Later, Alyssa showed Karen a book she had made, saying "Look, I made a book." Karen replied, "You *did* make a book, how nice!" On these occasions at GMCC, teachers appear to be praising a child's ideas or the act of creating. Even when Alyssa showed Karen her finished book, Karen praised the fact that she had made a book rather than praising the finished product that Alyssa showed her.

Praise itself is not only less frequent at RMCD than at GMCC, but it is used differently there. Children at RMCD were rarely praised for their behavior or for their compliance; rather, praise was reserved more for their ideas and creative accomplishments. In all such cases, the products themselves were evaluated, not just the process: children's snowflakes cut from paper were described as being "awesome" and a book a child created was described as being "pretty" (which was quite different from the praise meted out at GMCC for having *made* a book). As a last example, on one occasion, Becky had found a poem that one of the older children had written. She put

it up on the refrigerator and later talked to the child who had written the poem. She said, "That was a pretty poem you wrote; you're very good at it." Then, after a pause, she gave the child a hug and added, "You're getting smarter, girlfriend."

Children Interacting with Other Children

Children in day care centers have to learn to interact with other children and with adults who are not their parents. The children at GMCC and RMCD receive different lessons about how to accomplish these daily encounters.

Are the Children Having Fun Yet?

Taken as a whole, although there were more interactions among children at RMCD over an hour's observation than there were at GMCC, because there were more children at RMCD, each child was actually involved in somewhat fewer interactions (an average of 2.4 at RMCD and an average of 3.1 at GMCC).⁸ (See section C of table 3.)

As section C of table 3 shows, the vast majority of interactions between children at RMCD were without conflict (88%) in contrast with only slightly more than half (56%) of the interactions at GMCC. Thus, although the children at the two centers experience approximately the same number of interactions without conflict, children at GMCC experience almost five times as many conflictual interactions over a one-hour period.

With Whom Do Children Interact?

A second difference between children's interactions at the two centers is worth noting. At GMCC, all interactions between and among children take place with children of relatively equal ages and levels of development; for the Lions, this means interaction with other three to five year olds. At RMCD, children of the same age have more experience with children of both younger and older ages. Some of the older children might look after the younger ones, sometimes "adopting" a child by spending a lot of time with her or him; younger children learn that they can ask for help (e.g., tying a shoe, reaching something) from an older child as well as from the teacher. The young children who are the focus of this study can also be a resource for children even younger than themselves. On one occasion at RMCD, there were two infants in the big room along with the older children; because these were the only two babies at the center so far that day, the teachers had not started a

separate baby room. At the time of the observation, one of the babies was in a crib and the other was on a blanket on the floor. From the way the children responded, it was clear that they knew how to play safely around the babies and were actually quite adept at entertaining them (or getting help when their own efforts failed):

Mark (an infant of about six months), who was on his stomach on the floor, began to fuss. Miles (a three-year-old child) went over to where Mark was and lay down on his stomach with his face close to Mark's and talked to him in a soothing voice. Mark continued to cry softly. Miles then sat up next to Mark and rubbed his back. When this didn't stop the crying, he brought Mark a toy which he placed in front of him. Again, he lay down with his face close to Mark and talked to him. At this point, Miles seemed to be out of ideas, but Mark's fussing had not yet become loud enough to be heard by a teacher. Miles called out to a teacher, "Mark's crying."

When Teachers Are Involved

Differences between the experiences of children at the two centers emerge even more clearly when we look at the response of teachers to the children's interactions. Teachers are involved in less than a quarter of all children's interactions at RMCD but a full half of children's interactions at GMCC. Moreover, teachers at the two centers become involved in different kinds of interactions and construct their involvement in very different ways. (See section D of table 3).

Teacher involvement in nonconflict events. In each of the sites, teachers are involved in a fifth of the children's interactions that do not involve conflict. For the most part, at both centers, when all is going well, teachers are likely to allow the children to play on their own. The small numbers, however, belie the extent of teacher involvement at GMCC when they do intervene and the more modest style of intervention at RMCD. The following two examples illustrate well the intensive teacher intervention in interactions at GMCC, which do not involve conflict.

Three children were working together to construct a barn out of blocks, and they had designated an area near the barn to be a pond. They also had a basket full of small stuffed animals: some of these they placed in the barn; others (including an octopus) they placed in the pond. During this time, a teacher was sitting close to them and was taking notes about what they were saying. She was also prompting their play and their discussion of the animals with questions. For example, she asked them why they thought the octopus

belonged in the pond rather than the barn, and she asked questions about which animals were farm animals. She did not correct them or tell them where she thought they should place different animals, but she recorded what she heard and her questions played a fairly large role in the conversation that went on during the play.

Seven children were sitting together at the snack table, having a conversation as they ate. The conversation began with one child telling another about a puppet show she had seen in town. Two of the other children who had seen the same puppet show added their comments. Kim, the teacher who was in the room at the time, got a piece of paper, sat down and started to take notes. The children noticed this right away and began to direct their conversation toward Kim rather than toward the other children at the table. Kim asked the children questions about the puppet show and helped to control who spoke when, making sure that the children took turns speaking. Kim also asked leading questions, helping the children express themselves and give details about the show that they had seen.

By way of contrast to the intensive involvement of teachers with children at GMCC, RMCD teachers might facilitate children's interactions but do not direct them. They might, for example, place a baby on the floor to make it easier for the older children to entertain her, but they will not give specific guidance about what to do. When children and teachers talk together, teachers neither take notes nor necessarily direct the conversation. And teachers might refuse to become involved in interactions that are going well, even when children request that they do so. For example, one day, four children were playing school and one of them said, "Becky is the teacher." Becky, who was indeed the teacher, replied (indicating that her desires were to be taken into account), "I don't want to be the teacher," leaving the children to sort out who among them would assume this role in their play.

Teacher involvement in conflictual events. As noted above, children at GMCC appear to have more disputes with each other than do children at RMCD: at GMCC, in fact, almost half of all interactions between and among children involve some kind of conflict, while at RMCD, a small minority of all interactions do.

Teachers at RMCD are involved in fewer than half of the conflictual interactions among children at that center. The remainder of the time, children resolve these disputes on their own. The nature of the involvement is different as well. The following two examples illustrate the minimal teacher involvement in disputes at RMCD:

Nathan pulled off Max's sock, and Max got upset. Becky (the teacher) did not see what happened but saw Max with his sock off and told him to put it on again. Max explained that Nathan had pulled off his sock and Becky told Nathan not to do that.

Kurt took a ball from Nathan. Nathan tattled to the teacher, but the teacher did not do anything about it. Nathan went back to Kurt and managed to wrestle the ball away from him.

Teacher involvement in interactions involving conflict at GMCC is more intense and more frequent as a proportion of the interactions involving conflict. This involvement occurs when children are seen as needing help, when the teachers want to reinforce a positive resolution, and, on occasion, it appears when it might not even be necessary. The following was observed and recorded as an example of teachers intervening in a dispute when a child showed obvious distress:

Tim, Mary, and David had been playing together, building with blocks. Tim took a few of the blocks and moved to another section of the room to play on his own. David was angry that Tim had taken the blocks, and he wanted them back. He told Mary to get the blocks. She paused, thought, and then shook her head to indicate no. Beth, the teacher in the room at the time, told Mary that she had made a good choice in deciding not to take the blocks from Tim. When Mary would not recapture the blocks for him, David went over and took a block from Tim. Tim got very angry and started crying. Beth told David to put down the block and asked him how he thought Tim felt about the situation. David said that he thought that Tim looked sad. Beth agreed that he looked sad and asked David what he could do to make Tim feel better. Eventually, with a good deal of prompting from Beth, David decided that if he gave the block back and apologized, then Tim would probably feel better.

The next episode describes a teacher intervening even when the children appear to have resolved the conflict on their own; in this case, the teacher was reinforcing behavior that was approved, and perhaps, inadvertently, suggesting that it was only the teacher's voice that mattered.

When the children were sitting and talking with a teacher (Kim) at the snack table, Nicole interrupted Mary. Mary responded, by saying, "Nicole, you interrupted me!" Kim then reminded Nicole that she should wait until Mary was done speaking.

And finally, the following episode illustrates how teachers do not just intervene but help children identify feelings in various situations according to what they (the teachers) believe those feelings to be:

David, Mary, and Julie were playing together with frequent disagreements. The girls began to exclude David from what they were doing. He continued to follow them around and to try to be involved in their play. Natalie, a teacher, asked David if he was enjoying the game he was playing with Mary and Julie and he answered, "Yes." She then asked him if he felt happy while they were playing that game. Again, he answered that he did. Natalie said that it seemed to her that he was frustrated with some of the things the girls were doing. She asked the girls how they thought David felt about how they had been playing. They said that he might be sad, and Natalie encouraged them to talk about how they could make him feel happier. Eventually, they agreed on a way to include him in their game.

Approaching Teachers

At RMCD, children call adults "teacher" (or on occasion, when the teacher is a child's parent, "mommy"), while at GMCC, children call adults by their first names. This different nomenclature (which corresponds to what Bernstein [1971] calls positional and personal authority) is just the start of the very different ways in which children at the two centers appear to regard and make daily use of the adult staff.

As section E of table 3 shows, stark differences between the two centers emerge when we look at the frequency with which, and the occasions for which, children approach teachers over a one-hour period of observation. Children at GMCC are more demanding of teachers than are children at RMCD, making slightly over two requests of a teacher per child per hour, in contrast with but slightly over one request per child per hour at RMCD.

There are differences in the occasion for requests as well. At RMCD, over half of all requests are for permission to do something; another third are for help or assistance; and a small number are for attention, recognition, or affection, or to tattle about another child. At GMCC, children ask for attention considerably more often than they do for permission, but they rarely ask for help or assistance.⁹

Children's requests for permission can also sound somewhat different in the two settings. At GMCC, requests sometimes take the form of statements rather than questions. Children tell the teacher what they want to do (e.g., "I want to go for snack") rather than asking whether they can do something; these interactions count as requests because the children wait for affirmation before moving on. Often as well, children tell the teacher that they "need" something (e.g., "I need to go to the art room") and are often prepared with a reason why they have that specific need. And some of the requests sound much like attention getting devices. On one occasion, a child asked if she could play with a particular toy that she had played with for the two preceding days; this child seemed

to be asking the teacher to note her actions, since it was quite obvious from her previous experience that she was allowed to play with that specific toy.

When children at RMCD ask for permission, they seem less certain that permission will be granted: they might be right since 70 percent of their requests were granted in contrast with 100 percent of the requests at GMCC. At RMCD, children also phrase requests in terms of actual questions: can I do this or can I have that? (For example, during one observation period, children asked for permission to climb on a teacher's back, to have some potato chips a teacher was eating, to hold a baby, to sit with another child on a chair, and to use certain materials.) Moreover, the children at RMCD get different verbal responses from those at GMCC, which indicate to the children that even if some of their requests are granted, they should not make boundless requests. If a child asks for a magic marker and receives a color that she does not like, she might well be told by the teacher, "you get what you get and you don't throw a fit." The fact that the children can recite this phrase along with the teachers suggests that they are learning to internalize limits and constraints.

Yet another difference between the centers emerges from the observation that at GMCC, along with requests for permission, requests for attention or recognition were the most common types of requests. Children ask teachers to "look at me" as they engage in play. They ask teachers to watch them manipulate toys, to admire something they have built, or sometimes to simply join them in examining a toy or a picture on the wall. By way of contrast, requests to "look at me" or to look at something that a child made appeared to be less common at RMCD. This may reflect learned experience: teachers at RMCD are less readily available for the "looking."

Children at GMCC also often ask for affection from teachers both verbally (requesting to sit in a lap) and nonverbally (approaching a teacher with arms held up in a motion that clearly asks to be picked up). By and large, in keeping with the child-centered approach of the center, teachers do not initiate affection and children learn to ask for (and they receive) the affection they want (Hays 1996, 51). At RMCD, children less commonly ask for physical affection, but the teachers do initiate it. Children who approach a teacher for help will get a hug, a back rub, or tousled hair; as teachers wander through the room checking on things, they give hugs and pats on the head.

Discussion

Experts who judge the quality of child care with structural and process guidelines in mind would find reason to approve of the prevailing practices

at both of these centers. Both offer appropriate child-to-teacher ratios; both offer sufficient space for children to run around and ample toys so that children need not struggle over them; both offer opportunities for structured learning and informal free play; and both offer a range of materials from which children can learn to manipulate objects.

But there are differences between the two centers, and they are both subtle and obvious. They have to do with the frequency and nature of correction and praise: children at GMCC are more carefully guided toward approved behavior than are children at RMCD. The differences also have to do with the style of interactions at the two centers: children at GMCC are involved in more disputes with their peers; children at GMCC make more requests of the adults around them.

It is dangerous, of course, to assume that we know what different actions directed toward children will produce when those children mature, and especially as they turn into adults. What follows is simply speculation about what the differences we observed might mean with respect to four issues relevant to a consideration of the impact of different child-rearing styles: getting ready for the lessons of school, learning to play with others, understanding the rules of appropriate behavior, and orientations of entitlement and constraint.

Getting Ready for the Lessons of School

In many ways, GMCC children might be better prepared than those at RMCD for school and the academic material to be learned there. They have been exposed to more similar activities (e.g., being read to; lessons involving words and numbers; art projects; field trips) and they have more experience in participating in structured activities and working within a group composed entirely of children of the same age as themselves. "More" is the operative word here: RMCD children do participate in structured activities. These occasions, however, are less regularly a part of their daily life at the center than is the case for children at GMCC.

Moreover, the GMCC staff makes the acquisition of verbal skills a more prominent part of ongoing activities. Not only are the children read to more often than are those at RMCD, but they are repeatedly told of the importance of words ("use words") and are praised and thanked for becoming adept at the use of language. They are also taught the importance of the written word: each child dictates a description of herself to accompany her picture hanging in the hall; when a child makes a drawing, a teacher might ask him to explain what it is he has drawn and then will write the child's words on the picture

(thus teaching that the same thought can be expressed in different ways); and teachers often record the words of the children as part of the documentation of children's lives. Indeed, the children appear to have developed a fairly sophisticated vocabulary (e.g., "You're interrupting me") and reasoning capacities (e.g., they can explain why one animal goes in the barn and another in the pond).

At RMCD, language itself is less celebrated and language is less often an apparent object to be manipulated. Teachers and children do learn rhyming phrases that demonstrate pleasure in words and the sounds they make: children chant together when they are asked to sit "criss-cross apple-sauce" and they learn songs and intone grace before food. But more of what they hear appears to conform to a restricted code rather than an elaborated one (Bernstein 1973): they are told to stop what they are doing rather than which behavior they are to alter and why it is offensive. In this setting, the context becomes more important: another child, across the room, would not know why her peer was being corrected. Also, teachers less often urge children to explain their actions or offer reasons for their own.

The use of the television and VCR to entertain children at RMCD might have some interesting consequences. Clearly, children at this center receive more daily exposure to popular culture and its products. They also learn to sit quietly, even if they are not particularly interested in what is happening (as might often be the case in school). But the children also often wander off when their attention flags or when something more interesting is offered to them. They may thus become accustomed to, or develop a greater tolerance for, not understanding what is happening around them, rather than wanting to know the answers and hearing the end of a story.

Interpersonal Skills

School life (and real life) is not just about academic lessons but also about getting along with others. GMCC children have fun with their friends and eagerly and joyfully engage in both parallel play and group play. They can tell their friends when they are bothering them and they can engage in spirited conversation about their reactions to a puppet show or as part of their play around a toy barn. They can also impose rules for mannerly behavior (such as not interrupting others). And they learn to express their feelings during interactions and to observe and respond to the feelings of others: they can describe a fellow student as being sad; they can be prompted to include a child in their play even when they do not want to do so. But GMCC children also have many disputes with other children during the time they spend in day

care, and they might well become accustomed to having those disputes resolved by adults.

RMCD children also enjoy interactions with other children in both parallel and group play. At the same time, their experiences include interactions with children of more varied ages than is the case for children at GMCC, and they learn to resolve disputes among themselves. They also learn the skills necessary to care for children younger than themselves and to follow the lead of children who are considerably older. The former skill, of course, is frequently naturalized and *not* noted to be a skill; nor is it acknowledged as such in most institutional settings (Abel and Nelson 1990; Luttrell 1997).

An interesting finding is that these differences are almost precisely those noted by Lareau (2003) in her examination of older children raised by concerted cultivation and children brought up through the practices of the accomplishment of natural growth. The former, she noted, are less accustomed to managing their own time and their own interactions; they also exhibit hostility toward their siblings. By way of contrast, children raised according to the accomplishment of natural growth develop skill at entertaining themselves and social competence with children of many different ages. Even at the young age of the children observed at the two centers, these differences have started to emerge.

Testing the Boundaries and Learning about Appropriate Behavior

As noted, the behavior of children at GMCC is often corrected through the use of two phrases: "It's not okay," and "make a different choice." It is worthwhile to think about the implicit meaning of these phrases. "It's not okay" signifies that there is a universe of things that are okay but that it is quite bounded by what is *not* okay. A child's job in a world of "some things are okay and others things are not" is to figure out the code (Bernstein 1975). The phrase itself does not indicate whether "okay" constitutes a large or a small universe but does signify that there are actions outside it and that therefore the approved behavior (within this particular setting or group) is narrowed and constrained.

At the same time that they learn about the boundedness of the world of okay, children at GMCC are also given freedom to make choices; they then experience having that freedom taken away from them, through the contradictory phrase of "that's not a choice." Children are thus shown that they should internalize the specific rules: "that's not a choice" means that the behavior in question is not appropriate for *you* or, by extension, for people like us. The follow-up phrase "make a different choice" commands participation in one's

own oppression. The child is thus supposed to learn how to restrict choices to acceptable behavior.

Children at RMCD have a different, and perhaps simpler, task. They are told to stop doing certain things (e.g., spitting, yelling) because teachers do not like those actions, but nothing is thereby implied about a code of behavior that *is* approved. Indeed, because the world of “not” is more clearly defined by prohibitions (“stop it now”), the world of acceptable behavior is left far wider and less nuanced or subject to the code that prevails among a particular group of people. Of course, children at RMCD are also expected to learn the rules; they are told they “know better” than to do what is wrong. But these rules are more tightly linked to what is wrong than to what is right and thus potentially leaves the world of acceptable behavior wider. It also might leave the world of acceptable behavior less subject to relative standards. “You know better,” that is, might suggest an absolute moral world of right and wrong rather than the more ambiguous and contingent world of okay or not okay.

The Many Faces of Constraint and Entitlement

Children at GMCC appear to learn that adults are interested in them and that they are concerned about their feelings, attitudes, and knowledge. And they learn that adults are endlessly available to them (except when they disappear to do their work) and endlessly aware of and responsive to them (whether they want them to be or not). This ongoing pattern might lead children to believe ultimately that they are entitled to have adult attention and to have their needs and desires met by adults. And indeed, children at GMCC do express themselves in terms of statements that expect approval (rather than direct requests for permission) and in terms of needs and wants they hope and maybe even expect to have fulfilled. Through the use of first names for everyone at the center, children are placed on a roughly equal level with teachers; this rough equality is further solidified when the teachers (who are directed not to be passive) play with them and become involved in their fantasy worlds. Equality is thus conferred on children; it need not be earned.

RMCD children may know they are loved by the teachers (who caress them and call them “honey”), but they also know that the teachers may not be able to cater to their distinctive needs. In fact, teachers are often too busy to play or to listen, and the clear separation between a child’s world and that of adults is signified not only in the phrase “go play” but also in the positional form of address that signifies that teachers are not peers. Children can acquire equality by doing something exceptionally good or unexceptionally bad, as when a teacher calls a child “girlfriend” while praising her poem or

mock threatens to fight with a child who is picking on another. But although teachers care deeply about the children, they do not have the time to display inordinate interest in their lives; children at RMCD are not treated as if they are so “precious” as to be constantly observed, constantly treated with care, or constantly worthy of an immediate response. “You get what you get and you don’t throw a fit,” is a clear statement that there are limits to the demands they can express. The teasing teachers engage in (“wanna fight”; “sick-o”) treats them less like delicate flowers and more like individuals who can stand up for themselves. And children have to earn praise. Simply doing is not sufficient; praise comes when the job is done and done well.

Lareau (2003) defines the world of middle-class children as engendering a sense of entitlement and that of working-class and poor children as engendering a sense of constraint. In many ways, the former does appear to be the lesson of GMCC and the latter the lesson of RMCD. But we should notice as well that constraint is present at GMCC: it emerges from a world where the rules are not spelled out clearly but where you are expected to learn, on your own, what constitutes acceptable behavior (behavior that is okay or that *is* a choice). Thus, although the children at GMCC might believe they are entitled to have their needs met, they are also learning to constrain their own behavior so as to be acceptable to their peers and their teachers. And some of the practices in which the teachers indulge appear to intrude quite deeply into the private and public lives of children: a child is urged to recognize and share his unhappiness (even if he initially did not think he was unhappy and might not have wanted to admit to it); children are asked to demonstrate skills of reasoning when they simply want to put the octopus in the pond. By way of contrast, the working-class world of constraint and the child care practices at RMCD entail more opportunities to experience freedom from adult supervision and intrusion, from having teachers mediate their responses to the unexpressed feelings of others, and from performance.

Conclusion

The two centers studied showed significant differences in both structural features and, more significantly for the analysis here, in processual ones. The latter differences correspond closely to observed differences in class-based parenting. GMCC, primarily serving the children of professionals, follows an approach close to that that Lareau has dubbed “concerted cultivation”; RMCD, serving primarily the children of the working class and the poor, follows an approach close to that Lareau has dubbed “the accomplishment of

natural growth.” These differences, we suggest, might well have significant consequences for the futures of the children who attend them with respect to such issues as school readiness, interpersonal skills, learning appropriate behavior, and attitudes of constraint and entitlement.

To be sure, the analysis here rests on observations in only two centers and on very limited quantitative data. Further studies would be needed to confirm the different approaches of day care centers serving different social classes of children and to understand more fully the sources (e.g., parent pressure; teacher and staff training) of those differences. Even so, this analysis makes a contribution to several issues of significance.

First, we suggest not only that day care centers can play a role in the reproduction of social class but also indicate some of the processes through which they may do so. Of course, not all the children attending GMCC are of middle-class origin; nor are middle-class children entirely absent from RMCD. But for those children who attend a day care center whose orientation matches that of their parents, the class influences are magnified rather than diminished or altered, by their out-of-home experiences. Moreover, there is reason to suspect that children who receive divergent messages (e.g., a concerted cultivation approach at home and an accomplishment of natural growth approach at day care) fare less well than those for whom the messages are more consistent (van Ijzendoorn et al. 1998); indeed, their parents also are less content with discordance (Uttal 1999; van Ijzendoorn et al. 1998).

Second, we have demonstrated the possibility of applying Lareau’s concepts to institutional care. Outside of the field of day care standards, authors who observe class differences in parenting are often very careful not to say that one style of child care is *better* than the other but rather to show that the different styles produce different kinds of people with different orientations and different skills.¹⁰ The approach, however, is entirely different when formal child care settings are evaluated. Here, scholars speak about “quality” and preferred approaches. By examining the degree to which quality assessments might embed within them class-based approaches to child care, these potential “biases” are revealed. Moreover, the search for similarities between the approach of parents and the approach used within a formal child care setting allows for research that can explore more fully the consequences for children for whom the two settings are congruent as well as the consequences for those for whom the two settings are discordant. Scholars can thus explore both the possibility of class reproduction and the possibility that the process will be interrupted.

Finally, we might note that many of those who write about the manner in which class reproduction occurs assume that institutions value the

middle-class approach. To be certain of this, however, would require an exploration of the processes within those institutions. The institutional application of Lareau's concepts might allow precisely that tool.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms.

2. We also suggest that these differences can occur independently of the class backgrounds of the individuals providing care. Although we have no data about the backgrounds of the teachers at either GMCC or RMCD, it was our impression that the majority of them came from working-class families. National data about center-based child care workers suggest that only a third of them have a BA and that among assistants, only 12 percent have this level of education (Burton et al. 2002, 24).

3. As an example of national differences, the large group size and high student-to-teacher ratio actively selected for preschool classes in Japan would utterly violate U.S. standards of care, although the Japanese prefer it because it teaches children to function well in large group settings of which they will be a part in adult life and teaches independence at an early age (Peak 1993; Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989). Closer to home, Cancian (2002) argues (much as we do) that many of the U.S. standards of quality care presume that a single style is to be preferred. This is the case for the prescription of an "authoritative" style of discipline in which parents openly communicate and reason with their children rather than an "authoritarian" style with its attempts to control children in accordance with an absolute set of standards (Cancian 2002; Hulbert 2003). Similarly, child care experts prescribe "responsive" care, which refers to a combination of warmth or affection, and following the child's lead, or responding to the child's cues, and listening to him or her, in contrast with "norms of warmth and affection that are more physical, less verbal, and do not necessarily follow the child's lead" (Cancian 2002, 71; Hulbert 2003). However, in both cases, research has shown that these different styles are located within, and preferred by, parents with different racial/ethnic and social class backgrounds.

4. As an employee, in neither case did the researcher work in the particular room at the time it was serving the particular children studied for this analysis, although she had worked with some of the children on previous occasions. Her experiences in these centers led to an interest in further study and account for the particular sites under investigation here.

5. Approval was granted for this research by the Middlebury College Human Subjects Review Committee. In addition, each parent at RMCD was given a letter that explained what research was going to be conducted and telling parents that they could have their children opt out of observation if they so desired. GMCC required more extensive parent participation and a returned agreement from each parent. Only one parent requested that a child not be a part of the study and no observations involving that child were recorded. The child was not at the center during the discrete observations of words of praise and words of correction but was present during the observations on interactions between children and on adults as resources; the accounts of these issues exclude that child.

6. Within each of the two centers under investigation for this study, we focused on the group of children aged three to five (although at RMCD, there were frequently children of other ages present in the same space). This age group was chosen because these children have been exposed for the longest period of time to the child care center's practices and will soon make their transition into school.

7. In addition to the brief time period of observation, a second obvious limitation is acknowledged: a single individual conducted all the observations and made all the decisions about the categories into which specific observation fell (e.g., did an interaction involve conflict). In another study, one would want to ensure intercoder reliability.

8. Part of the reason for this difference might have been because the RMCD group included several older children who were able to sustain their engagement in a single activity for a longer period of time; another part of the reason might have been because the GMCC children were in a smaller space and thus ran up against other children somewhat more frequently.

9. One explanation for the latter difference might have to do with the fact that the GMCC teachers are always available and often anticipate children's needs. Another explanation might have to do with the setup up each center: if children at RMCD want to use magic markers or crayons, they have to ask; at GMCC, more materials are readily available and within a child's reach. And indeed, at RMCD, more of the requests were to use specific materials or to engage in certain activities, while at GMCC, in all but one of the cases, children asked for permission to go to another one of the rooms in use for their group, generally for a specific purpose such as to get a drink or to get a particular toy.

10. For example, the advantage of concerted cultivation, Lareau (2003) writes, inheres in the fit between the capacities formed in that context and the demands of other institutions in our society. Those who can manipulate language easily and have confidence in their capacity to navigate within institutions will have an easier time in, and be more successful at, the activities of schools and other institutions that require verbal skill. On the other hand, Lareau acknowledges that individuals lacking those capacities for success in schools enjoy other capabilities, including the capacity to entertain oneself, to get along with siblings, and to understand at an early age the real value of money and the effort of daily life. Others writing in the same way make much the same kind of point. In Bourdieu's analysis, certain practices become valuable as "cultural capital," because they are the practices of the dominant groups; schools "emphasize the forms of knowledge and cultural ideals and styles that these dominant social groups cherish" (Swartz 1997, 199). Similarly, Bernstein (1971), while recognizing the advantage of the elaborated code of language use for school success, can write movingly about the advantages of the restricted code for clear expression of attitudes and feelings.

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