

# Standardized Childhood? Science, Institutions, and the Politics of Children

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- The rising debate over *how* institutions should be shaped for children and families.
- Persisting problems facing young children and the institutions that serve them.
- Organizational variety or “one best system”? The stories of OK versus LA.
- Disentangling *philosophy* from *science*, and the importance of debating both.



# Blossoming Policy (and Institutional) Attention to Child Development

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- Bush I and Dukakis – dueling child care proposals (1988).
- The “new” infant brain research – *Starting Points* and a maturing media strategy.
- Welfare-to-work and Clinton’s holding out for huge jump in child care spending (1996).
- Emerging *universal preschool* coalition goes Hollywood (circa 2003).



# Staying Clear on the Basics – Conceptual Framework

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- Developmentalists debate *universal ideals* (tied to physiological maturation) and cultural and class *variety* in child rearing (ecological view).
- Parallel debate in the sociology of institutions: *persisting values* and collective interests, or *adaptation* to environmental demands?
- Illuminates social justice questions: How to raise children, where, and who gains social authority to decide (and wins public dollars)?



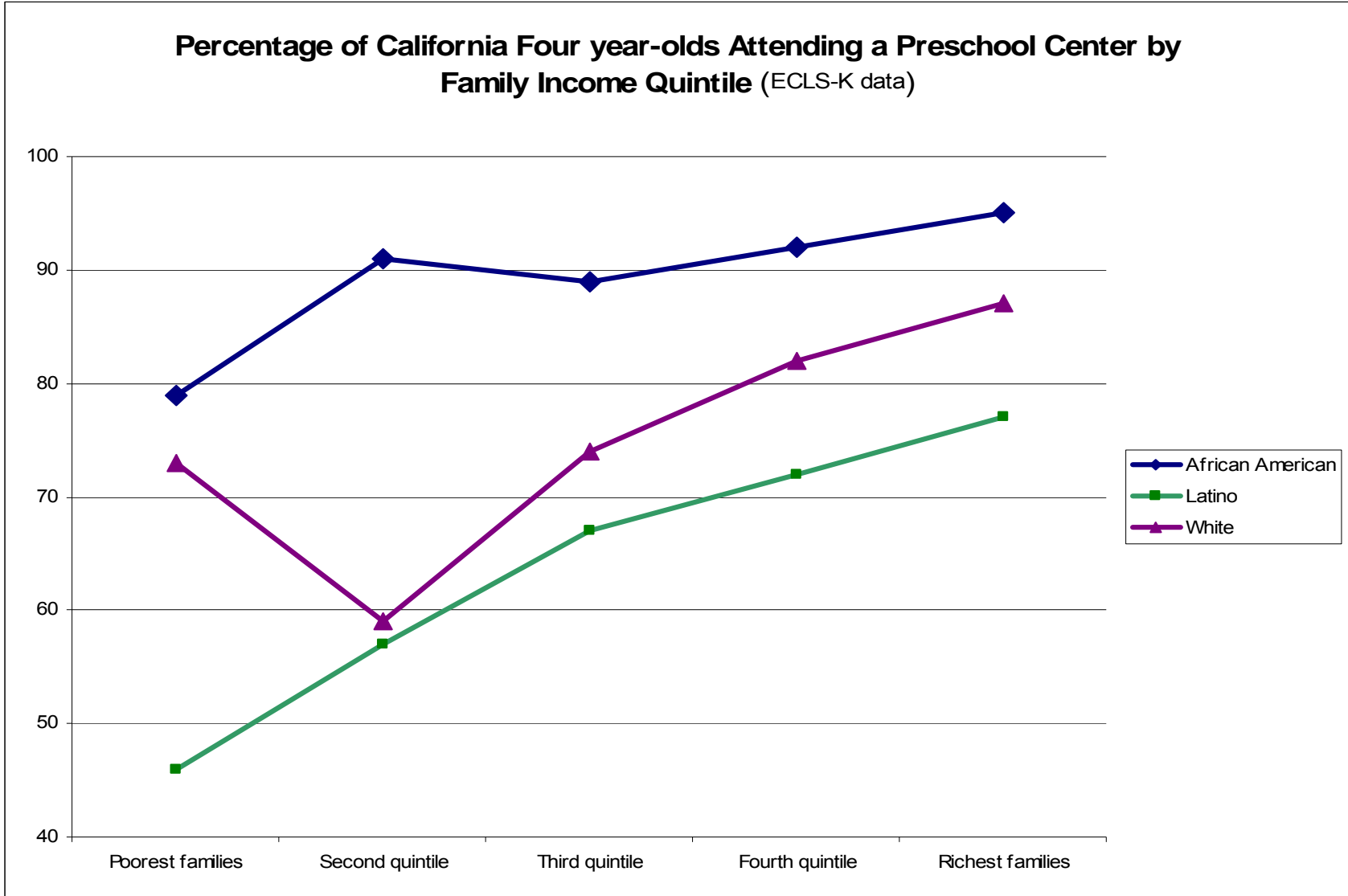
# Persisting Problems Facing Children, Families, and Organizations

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- *Affordability* of child care and preschool (ECE) options for parents.
- The unequal *supply* of preschool slots for children, age 2-4 years of age.
- Wide variation in *quality*, from infant care to preschool... building effective human-scale organizations.
- How to raise *private or public funding*?



# Unequal Preschool Enrollment Rates – Three Groups Disadvantaged



# Mixed Evidence on the Distribution of Quality across Class and Ethnic Groups

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- Average quality levels vary among states and neighborhoods, and by ECE type.
- Structural elements are comparatively high at the distribution's two ends.
- Social processes and how to define “curriculum quality” in a pluralistic society?
- Little known about bilingual processes inside ECE settings and classrooms.



# Contrasting Institutional Models – Pursuing Just Access to Effective Preschool

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*Oklahoma and Los Angeles compared...*

- Universal versus targeted.
- Organizational diversity or one best system?
- Mandated social relations inside classrooms, or incentives, models, and professional judgment in structuring classrooms?
- Democratic deliberations.



# How Science Helps in Designing Just Forms of Child Care and Preschool

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- Identifying which families face scarce access to affordable, high-quality ECE options.
- Pinpointing which elements of quality most effectively advance child development, for which groups of children.
- How does exposure to preschool interact with the quality of elementary schools to sustain positive effects, for which children?
- How can preschool practices scaffold-up from children's prior skills, language, and social norms?







# STANDARDIZED CHILDHOOD

THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL STRUGGLE  
OVER EARLY EDUCATION



BRUCE FULLER