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

- 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

- The “new” infant brain research – *Starting Points* and a maturing media strategy.
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

- **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

Percentage of California Four year-olds Attending a Preschool Center by Family Income Quintile (ECLS-K data)
Mixed Evidence on the Distribution of Quality across Class and Ethnic Groups

- 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

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

▪ 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