

Taking a Stand on Standardization

Standardized Childhood: The Political and Cultural Struggle Over Early Education.

Bruce Fuller. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007. 384 pp., \$29.95 (hardcover), ISBN-10 0804755795, ISBN-13 9780804755795; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN-10 0804761027, ISBN-13 9780804761024.

Where I Stand on Standardization

A Review by
Lilian G. Katz

These are very lively times in the field of early childhood education. Thus, a book with the title *Standardized Childhood* is bound to attract a good deal of attention. Several highly respected scholars in the field offer what the publisher calls “advanced praise” by promising readers “vivid and clear writing.” Although that promise is not fulfilled, the promise that the work is highly provocative certainly is fulfilled.

Among its most frequent provocations are confusion and frustration caused largely by the writing style. Fuller refers to children as “creatures” in several places (e.g., pp. xiv, 34, and 42). References to various individuals and groups involved in the current press toward the expansion and improvement of preschool programs include labels such as “romantics,” “liberal-humanists,” “academic skillers,” and “brain enthusiasts” (p. 50) or “well-meaning, yet elite actors” (p. 64). Indeed, among the most frustrating attributes of the book are its shifting writing styles: at times traditionally scholarly but more often journalistic. Just about every page includes disdainful references to those involved in the field, which distracts the reader from what seems to be the author’s main argument, namely, that the state will damage

the nation by imposing standards on a human endeavor as particularistic as child rearing.

To refer to the variety of views concerning appropriate pedagogical practices in early education as “culture wars” does not really help to clarify the complex issues involved in expanding and improving provisions for young children. Fuller labels the warriors on one side as “liberal-humanists” and on the other as “academic skillers.” Indeed, Fuller introduces into our language a new verb, that is, *to skill*. He contrasts “caring versus skilling” (p. 57) and refers to a “skilling model” (p. 99), a “skilling philosophy” (p. 119), a “skilling ideology” (p. 134), and more. But if readers are determined and patient, they can most likely benefit from the discussion of the wide range of issues involved in providing good experiences for preschool-age children around the country. His discussion of the processes and events involved in efforts to make preschool education available statewide, for example in California and in Oklahoma, gives readers a sense of the many levels and kinds of complexities encountered during these movements. Fuller raises good questions concerning, for example, the differences between preschool, especially if it is provided inside an elementary school, and child care, very likely provided in community or privately owned locations.

It is suggested in several sections of the book that there is an ongoing battle between the liberal-humanists, generally associated with the developmentally appropriate approach to preschool pedagogy and the long history of valuing the role of play in development, and the academic skillers, who are committed to getting preschoolers ready for school and for the tests associated with primary education institutions today. Fuller does not clearly or openly take a stand on these two opposing positions. Nor does

he attempt to offer an alternative one. But he does refer to the intimidating range of complex issues that must be addressed by the field if it is to realize its full potential to get our young children off to a good start. The total number of references footnoted in the book comes to 551!

Among the complexities in many parts of the country, Fuller takes us close to the issues involved in making good preschool provisions for the children of Latino families. Like many others who are justly concerned with these issues, he tends to romanticize the rural and Mexican families and the apparently close family ties of preindustrial communities, and to write disdainfully of middle-class American families. The phrasing of the observations expresses such disparagement for American middle-class families, almost as though the last thing anyone would want is for low-income and immigrant families to become middle-class Americans. Occasionally Fuller falls into the fairly usual pattern of attributing pure motives to parents versus doubtful ones to early childhood educators. He fails to acknowledge that parents are just like people: Some are more understanding and insightful about the needs of their children than are others. Building positive relationships with parents has long been a high priority among preschool practitioners. But in addition to all their other responsibilities, this goal is a very difficult one for them to accomplish. Fuller’s discussion of Latino families and their culturally linked common sense, as he calls it, provides useful insights into their views but offers little in the way of effective strategies by which to increase their input into their children’s programs. As he says, there is a big question of whether the preschool institution “acts to tighten or to fray the social fabric of Latino families” (p. 261).

The concluding chapter of this rich, although confusing, exploration of the issues involved in the current trend toward the

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universal availability of preschool education challenges readers to consider what Fuller sees as the major issues. This movement clearly has serious implications for the private sector that provides a large proportion of child care for working mothers. There are complex issues involved in helping the increasing number of children for whom English is a second language, as well as the increasingly wide variety of first languages of children around the country. Thus the shortage of bilingual and multilingual preschool practitioners is another complexity to be dealt with. Questions are also constantly raised about whether preschool programs that are offered for 2½ hours are really worth the effort. If not, should programs last 6 or 7 hours or even longer? On what bases should such a question be answered? Cost? How can preschools accommodate mothers' wide-ranging working hours? How can effectiveness be improved? What criteria of effectiveness should be used? How should staff address the diversity of goals the parents have? What are the appropriate adult-staff ratios for various age groups? What training and qualifications should be required for practitioners? What can be done to improve the compensation so as to increase staff stability? This very preliminary list of questions must be addressed as the trend toward more preschool provisions seems to be moving ahead.

Fuller discusses most of the questions posed above. The discussions imply that the movement to increase the availability of preschool education includes making it compulsory. But such legal pressures on parents are not at all certain. He states that preschools are "becoming increasingly standardized—even serving as pedagogical agents of a monochromatic state." The basis for this fear is not at all clear. It is also not clear why Fuller is so anxious about the possibility of standardizing childhood, and as he says, "building a tighter, more uniform way of raising young children" (p. 295).

If it were to be the case that preschools around the country implemented exactly the same pedagogical practices, then it is most likely that its effects would be to increase the differences among the children. In principle, if we use a homogeneous treatment with a group of children who are different in more ways than we can discuss here, then we are sure to get a heterogeneous outcome. There may indeed be

some homogeneous outcomes that are desired; for example, all children should strengthen their intellectual dispositions, should experience a sense of belonging, and so forth (see Katz, 2007). For those effects that we want to have on all children, then surely heterogeneous practices—and a wide variety of practices—are required. If there is a main point being made in this book then perhaps it is that districts and communities and local agencies should make the important decisions so as to avoid the inherent dangers in setting national and state standards.

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"Are We Getting It Right?" The Controversy Over Universal Pre-K

A Review by
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Perhaps it is the reference to his role as Meathead in *All in the Family*, played by Rob Reiner, presumptive leader of the Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) movement in California, that gives it away. Or to the UPK advocates who in their fervor, and frequent uses of "the research says . . .," appear to him to suffer from Tourette's syndrome. Or to the publicists whose cost-benefit sales pitch on prekindergarten is described as beyond all semblance of reality. Really, it is not that Bruce Fuller, author of *Standardized Education*, is opinionated or anything about the move to bring universal prekindergarten access to

the public schools. He just thinks that it is a bad idea.

Standardized Education recounts, in riveting detail, the story of how early education reformers created a political movement to extend public school downward—to carve out a critical niche for prekindergarten. Recognizing that the argument for expanding Head Start or child care vouchers for poor families might smack of welfare in another form and potentially never gather the political clout for improving early childhood education, these reformers set their sights high—at attracting the middle class. To do so, they allied themselves with the powerful school accountability movement, suggesting that a universal effort to put prekindergarten in public schools could improve all children's achievement. This effort, to sell prekindergarten as a cure-all for all that ails education, turned out, according to Fuller, to sell out early education. In pushing an agenda toward educating the very young, he argues that UPK advocates have undermined parental choice and veered off toward a one-size-fits-all standardization of early childhood.

Why UPK? Because most policy makers believe that the system of early education is broken. In fact, there is no system. Although the progressive targeting of public funds to widen access to preschools, family child care homes licensed by the state, and vouchers that support family members who care for young children has helped some in recent years, early education, especially quality education, is still often out of reach for those in economically vulnerable circumstances. Sharp disparities exist across social class and ethnic groups in access to quality early education and preschools, only fueling the already daunting gap prior to kindergarten.

But here is where Fuller's analytic prowess kicks in. UPK advocates argue that these disparities would close if preschool for all were mandated, or at the very least funded. It would attract the middle class, whose members would demand quality and increase the number of slots for poor children. However, here is the fundamental flaw in UPK advocates' logic, says Fuller. Even when slots at preschools are available, poor families, particularly Latinos, do not take them. Almost 80% of 3- and 4-year-old children from upper-income families are enrolled in preschool, compared with just 45% from poor families.

Perhaps then the fractured system of early education is not so fractured after all, he considers. Perhaps it actually reflects a healthy diversity and preference in the way families raise children. Some might wish for less institutional forms of child care—home care, informal family care, or community-based care—that are more closely aligned with the family’s culture and values. By building a one-best system of preschooling largely attached to the public schools, UPK advocates may be narrowing choice, closing down options, and ignoring the thousands of caregivers who are responding to and respecting parents’ values, cultures, and language preferences in early care. UPK might build a tidier system but one not particularly responsive to America’s rainbow of families.

It is an intriguing argument and one that should be taken seriously. Political leaders today feel unrelenting pressure to demonstrate that public institutions can show real effects. Thus there is the potential of unintended consequences. The “be careful of what you wish for” here could be a system that becomes ever more focused on cognitive achievement and assessment, leaving behind decades of research about child development and early care and education. One only needs to look at the average kindergarten today, once a place for children’s play and social development now subject to stringent academic standards, to heed his message.

Fuller sets out his arguments by first examining the historical contest over early education. Here, and throughout the book, he is on the side of families and communities. Institutionalizing 3- and 4-year-olds into preschool as an optimal setting, he argues, represents a bold departure from the past, where parents and communities once packed a bigger punch in shaping young children’s learning. Subsequent chapters return to these themes, highlighting his ideal of early education in a chapter called “Welcome to the Rainbow Room,” a metaphor for the kind of sensitivity to diversity of care that he believes is the centerpiece of early childhood.

He contrasts this ideal with the political machinations of the UPK movement in Oklahoma, a success story for advocates, and in California, where the movement failed in its initiative. I suspect that those in Oklahoma and California might have a

few bones to pick with Fuller’s retelling of events, but at the very least it is highly revealing of the backroom and bare-knuckle politics of the UPK movement, with enough good guys and bad guys to cast a good Western. Some readers are likely to get lost in this dizzying array of characters and events and retreat back into the safe and cloistered ivy walls of academe. But what these events clearly show, according to Fuller, is that UPK advocates seem willing to pay any price to win, even if it means transforming the very conception of how young children develop. It is a tale worth remembering.

Fuller is at his best in Chapter 6, where he looks beyond the advocates’ message to examine the research benefits of preschool. Here, he has the audacity and the good sense to argue for policy-“irrelevant” research. He is absolutely on target. The field of early childhood has often fallen prey to the advocates’ position, leading to rather simplistic and crude causal models that claim “it works.” Rather, this chapter questions what “it” should be and whether our search for the magic bullet of prekindergarten is worth the small bump of one fifth to one fourth of a standard deviation in achievement for children who go on to kindergarten. This chapter is followed by an in-depth look at early learning in Latino communities, designed to further elucidate his notion that one size does not fit all. It should be required reading for early childhood educators.

Strengthening the capacity of families to raise their own children, a central premise throughout the book, might smack of old-fashioned conservatism. But as Fuller rightly notes, the traditional liberal-conservative disputes over child rearing in recent years have moved strikingly toward a similar agenda, one that is focused on learning for productivity and boosting our competitiveness in the global market. Rather, his argument strikes me more as leaning toward a libertarian position, believing that the future of civil society rests not on governmental standardization and homogenization but on stronger families and stronger communities.

This is a book that you will either love or love to hate. I think it is a gem. Although I cannot say I agree with all its assumptions and opinions, I can say that Fuller has written one of the most thorough and thought-provoking analyses of a

political movement and a cultural struggle over early education. It is a bold and courageous account that will arguably stir a great deal of controversy. I would like to think that Fuller intended it to be so. In fact, I think that its greatest contribution to the field could be: Let the debate over early education begin.

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Misplaced Fears: Fact and Fancy in Standardized Childhood

A Review by
W. Steven Barnett

“No one is more susceptible to an expert’s fearmongering than a parent.” So notes economist Steven Levitt, who goes on to point out that parents often fear the wrong things because “the facts they do manage to glean have usually been varnished or exaggerated or otherwise taken out of context to serve an agenda that isn’t their own” (Levitt & Dubner, 2005, p. 149). Bruce Fuller’s *Standardized Childhood* is not a parenting book in the usual sense, but the modus operandi is the same, and Fuller places his book as firmly in this genre as he can by framing the book’s topic as “child rearing,” even titling his preface “Who Defines Childhood?” Reading beyond the first few pages reveals that this is, in fact, a book about the purportedly troubling government role in preschool education. From the start, the reader encounters toddlers barely out of diapers confronted by the threat of “one best system of childhood” (p. xi).

The book’s central thesis is that a monolithic, bureaucratic state seeks to impose a centrally regulated, highly uniform preschool system on America’s children

and families. It asserts that the state's goal is to ensure "that all children speak in one exclusive language, read identical textbooks, and recite officially sanctioned knowledge" (p. xxiii). Ultimately, the state seeks to "disempower parents from the most essential human task of all: raising our young children" (p. xxii). Yet the evidence cited by Fuller indicates that compared with parents, preschool education, has, at best, modest effects on child development. Even if government *could* impose a centrally regulated, highly uniform preschool system on all Americans, it could not thereby displace parents as the most important influences on their children. And no one is attempting to do so.

In Fuller's story, preschool education is a "a well-oiled military-like campaign" (p. 30) of elected high officials, public schools, teacher and service employee unions, "wide-eyed and wealthy men" (p. 289), and big foundations and their hired hands, against a "democratic arrangement of organizations" (p. 296) composed of moderate churches, ethnic leaders, community-based organizations (for-profit and nonprofit child care), and other "strong, locally rooted elements of civil society" (p. 289). Yet this us-versus-them approach is contrived. After all, unions and foundations are community-based elements of civil society. Public schools are community based and subject to democratic, if imperfect, processes. Child care centers, many of them businesses, are often not community based or part of civil society, much less democratic.

These contradictions become evident when Fuller tries to convey his central thesis with the story of Rob Reiner, a potential gubernatorial candidate who had successfully led a prior early childhood initiative (Proposition 10) and took on a new ballot initiative to offer high-quality preschool education to all California children funded by a tax on the very rich. In Fuller's story, Reiner is a prekindergarten Goliath with "bent ideals and shrewd tactics" (p. 186) brought down by the little people. The unvarnished facts look rather different. Reiner was the victim of a smear campaign, and although he was later exonerated of misusing public funds, he was neutralized as a supporter of the initiative. His opponents included the governor, legislative leaders, the state Chamber of Commerce and Business Roundtable,

the California Taxpayers Association, the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, the *Wall Street Journal*, and 43 California newspapers. These powerful forces—elected officials, wealthy businesspeople, and the media—defeated a popular referendum that sought to go around them.

Two other state stories contradict Fuller's thesis. In Florida voters had to bypass their governor and legislature to obtain publicly funded prekindergarten for all. With leadership from retired newspaperman David Lawrence and Mayor Alex Penelas, Florida voters put on the ballot and passed a constitutional amendment requiring the state to offer high-quality preschool education to all 4-year-olds. Unlike the California initiative, the one in Florida identified no specific funding source, and it passed overwhelmingly, although Florida politicians continue to resist the public mandate for high quality. In New Jersey, the state's supreme court ordered high-quality preschool education for all 3- and 4-year-old children in 31 high-poverty school districts. Several additional state supreme court rulings were required before the governor and legislature complied.

Of course, there are states where legislative leaders or governors have championed increased access and higher quality: Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and even this year's proposed expansion in New Jersey. However, none of these states have highly uniform preschool education systems, and most include a substantial private sector (Barnett, Husted, Hawkinson, & Robin, 2006). Standards vary among the states, from truly minimal to high but limited in scope. A few states have no class size or ratio limits. Twenty states do not require all prekindergarten teachers to have a 4-year college degree. Many states leave key decisions up to local discretion. No state mandates a single prekindergarten curriculum.

Perhaps the most serious limitation of *Standardized Childhood* is that it is not a reliable reporter of facts. I highlight three errors in reporting the research literature in order to illustrate the nature, if not the full extent, of the problem.

First, to support a claim that highly effective preschool education is too costly to be realistic, Fuller compares the \$15,166 cost of

the Perry Preschool program with the annual costs of Head Start and state prekindergarten. He further states, "No state is contemplating spending over \$16,000 per child for a preschool and home visiting program" (p. 195). However, the \$15,166 is not Perry's annual cost but is very nearly the cost of 2 years, which is how long most children participated. Head Start's 2-year cost per child exceeds \$14,000 and by some estimates \$18,000 (Besharov, 2007). Even with Oklahoma's low cost of living, the annual unit cost of its state-funded prekindergarten exceeds \$6,000. New Jersey spends more than \$22,000 per child for its 2-year, court-ordered Abbott preschool program, which starts at age 3. Fuller repeats the same error with the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, comparing the cost of more than 1 year of the Chicago program with annual *state* expenditure (rather than full cost) per child for Georgia prekindergarten.

Second, to support claims that middle-income children benefit little from preschool education and that quality does not matter, he misrepresents the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) study of early child care. According to Fuller, the "NICHD team, following mainly middle-class families, found significant but short-lived benefits from preschool attendance, even after they took center quality into account" (p. 55). Here is what the team actually wrote:

Consistent with our findings before children's school entry (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002), we detected relations between child-care quality and cognitive development through Grade 3, as revealed by the Woodcock-Johnson Applied Problems (mathematics), Picture Vocabulary (reading) and Memory for Sentences (cognitive processes). Indeed, no Quality \times Age interactions emerged during the primary grades, suggesting that positive links involving good-quality child care neither dissipated nor intensified through Grade 3. (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005, p. 564)

Third, in his discussions of curriculum, Fuller misrepresents studies of natural variation as randomized trials. According to Fuller,

Richard Marcon designed a true experiment to assess the relative benefits of these two instructional strategies. . . . His team found that both the child-directed and

the intense academic skilling strategy boosted children's language and social outcomes more than a blended approach did. (p. 216)

The author of the study is Rebecca Marcon, and the study is not an experiment. Marcon (2002) explicitly cautions readers that the "quasi-experimental design used in this research does not establish causality" (p. 21). Fuller also misrepresents her findings. Similarly, Fuller labels as an "experimental study" (p. 263) another quasi-experimental study, that by Rodriquez, Diaz, Duran, and Espinosa (1995).

Although *Standardized Childhood* is primarily a screed against higher quality standards and expanded access to preschool education, it does offer alternative policies. Fuller suggests consolidating \$18 billion in federal support that includes Head Start into a single voucher system for low-income families. He also recommends that states hold local councils accountable for demonstrating gains in child development. Presumably this requires widespread testing, and he adds that the "role played by parents in bolstering children's gains should be tracked as well" (p. 288). This seems odd, given his desire to protect families from a "brave new world" of government intervention. Much of his plan is already in place in Florida, where the state pays about \$2,500 per child for 3 hours each school day at a public or private preschool program chosen by the parent. Parents pay the rest of any fees. Funds pass through local unelected councils. Standards are minimal. All children are tested at kindergarten entry, and their scores are used to attribute effects to providers without even a pretest. I see only one major problem. Florida's children, particularly the most disadvantaged, are unlikely to receive the "high-quality education" voters demanded until standards and funding levels are raised.

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A Response to "Where I Stand on Standardization" by Lilian G. Katz and to "Misplaced Fears: Fact and Fancy in Standardized Childhood" by W. Steven Barnett

Response by
Susan B. Neuman

Nothing warms the hearts of most academics quite like a good controversy. Unlike politics, where a controversy can get you stuck in the middle of an endless war, in academics the stakes are not usually very high. Comparatively speaking, our debates are rather mild. What research has made a difference? What research has made a

difference that should not have? What research has not made much of a difference that should have? We can debate these questions for decades (and have), we will probably never know the answer, and it absolutely will not make a difference. If we actually had a definitive answer, that would end the fun, and then we would all be forced to pay attention to more serious matters.

But this is not the case in early education. It matters. Behind closed doors—today—children are being warehoused in unsafe, unlicensed storefronts, church basements, and windowless, claustrophobic rooms by poorly trained workers who are barely making enough to buy groceries for their families. Large amounts of time, sometimes as much as 12 or more hours a day, are spent in these settings where children become so starved for nurturance, attention, and stimulation that they can concentrate on little else. The crisis in early education is real, and it is hardly remarkable that these children often come to school unprepared for the rigors of formal learning.

It is these troubling circumstances that have brought dedicated professionals, including my esteemed colleagues Steve Barnett and Lilian Katz, to work toward solutions, not in some distant future scenario, but now—so as not to lose a future generation of children. And what some suggest is that the most sustainable and viable solution is to get these children into public education sooner rather than later. The Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) movement is designed to create a prekindergarten through 12th-grade system. Further, by engaging middle- and upper-middle-class families, universal prekindergarten could potentially add higher quality to the mix, ending the too common circumstances wherein poor children get poor programs.

The UPK advocates have received more than a jolt of controversy from Fuller's *Standardized Education*. He punches. He questions, probes, and sometimes outrageously argues against handing over early education to public school educators. He asks a legitimate question: Can a centrally regulated mass institution (like the public schools) be responsive to America's rainbow of families?

It seems to me that the very same academics who now deplore his message actually raised a similar issue not too long ago. In 2001, at the very beginning of his presidency,

then President George W. Bush proposed to move the Head Start program from the federal Department of Health and Human Services to the federal Department of Education. Bush, too, argued for a seamless education system, starting at prekindergarten, so that more children could take advantage of high-quality education and transition better to more formal schooling. He even suggested that such a move could lead to higher standards for teachers, with higher pay, and he more or less hinted that greater funds would be forthcoming if such a move were made.

Quite rightly, for highly legitimate reasons those in the early education community railed against this effort. They argued that parent involvement, so critical to the Head Start program, had never been a centerpiece in public education (Title I is required to include parent involvement activities, although in many cases you would never know it). They also recognized that the hard-won battle to acknowledge the whole child in learning—the health, social-emotional, and physical well-being of the child—was absolutely central to the program, a view that has never received wide-scale recognition in the public schools. Their efforts stopped the president's initiative cold.

But in its place he announced the unfunded "Good Start, Grow Smart" White House initiative to demand that Head Start become more accountable for gains in reading and writing. This led to the infamous National Reporting System, an assessment package with little evidence of validity and reliability that proceeded to test all 3- and 4-year-olds in Head Start. And what was once a shining example of early education—Head Start—was now seen as a highly flawed academic program, and it subsequently was level funded.

Fuller's account is edgy, no doubt. However, I applaud his willingness to be controversial, to raise questions about the very real concerns of putting public education in charge of early childhood. In the UPK scenario, children and their families will enter a system that has not been particularly responsive to community action, a system that is highly focused on cognitive development and academic accountability. Although I am not convinced, as Fuller is, that we can resolve problems in early education without additional government

support, I, too, am concerned about the overselling of prekindergarten. The early years are just too precious to get it wrong.

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A Response to "Where I Stand on Standardization" by Lilian G. Katz and to "Are We Getting It Right? The Controversy Over Universal Pre-K" by Susan B. Neuman

Response by
W. Steven Barnett

It is always a pleasure to find that other reviewers are of like mind about a book. I find Katz's assessment that *Standardized Childhood's* "most frequent provocations are confusion and frustration" right on target. Her nuanced approach to key questions about families and the design of preschool programs and policies takes readers further in three paragraphs than Fuller's book does in 300 pages. On the other hand, Neuman calls this book a "gem," that is "bold and courageous" and encourages us to "heed his message." She applauds Fuller's "analytic prowess" and wants readers to know that "he is on the side of families and communities." I could not disagree more.

What Neuman found praiseworthy in *Standardized Childhood* brings me back to what makes this book disappointing—so much of it is inaccurate. According to Neuman, Fuller's analytic prowess is demonstrated in showing that poor families, particularly Latinos, do not want preschools when they are made available. Yet the evidence is quite to the contrary. Programs linked to the schools with high standards for quality have attained high enrollment rates of Latino children in New Jersey. Oklahoma's high-quality universal programs have high enrollments across the board. In Florida, the primary reason Latinos are less likely to use that state's universal preschool program is that they are less likely to know about it.

Neuman embraces a number of other inaccuracies from Fuller, so let me set the

record straight. No one seriously argues that high-quality preschool education for all is a panacea for all our educational problems. Public prekindergarten programs have been found to produce more than a "small bump" in achievement at kindergarten entry. Neuman may agree with Fuller that public schools are a threat to good education and parental choice, but public education is not monolithic, and most states seeking to provide preschool for all use a mix of public and private providers with considerable diversity and local control. Many who are concerned that young children acquire skills and knowledge do not encourage the abandonment of play but emphasize the need for rich dramatic play. Large-scale studies in California and New Jersey find that preschool programs linked to the public schools are more, not less, developmentally appropriate than private programs. Finally, I simply cannot let pass the notion that Fuller adopts a "libertarian" position—far from it. He believes that "until our society becomes committed to distributing work and income more equitably, education reforms will hold little effect" (p. 277).

As this is far from a complete list of corrections to Fuller's errors, I feel obligated to offer further examples so that readers understand the seriousness of the problem. The first is Fuller's argument that enrollment rates have leveled off at 70% in Oklahoma, Georgia, and New Jersey's Abbott prekindergarten programs because these programs do not meet parents' needs for child care (p. 55). Yet Oklahoma's enrollment rate across state prekindergarten, preschool special education, and Head Start is 90%. In Georgia, enrollment runs below 70%, but prekindergarten is not an entitlement in Georgia, and the waiting list had more than 8,000 children in January 2008. In New Jersey, districts that truly offer prekindergarten to all families routinely exceed 90% enrollment. The second example is Fuller's claim that advocates overstate the evidence, as "only three longitudinal studies of high-quality preschools have been completed" (p. 195). Depending on the definition of "high-quality," one might argue about whether the number of longitudinal studies is closer to 10 or 50, but it is much larger than 3.

Finally, I return to two central arguments of *Standardized Childhood*. According to Fuller, the “promise that all children will benefit markedly from preschool is simply not backed by the evidence” and “to give entitlements to all families is politically attractive, but it is infamously ineffective at closing achievement gaps” (p. 285).

Research on prekindergarten in Oklahoma and in other countries flatly contradicts the first contention. Studies comparing the effects of prekindergarten on later test scores across countries flatly contradict the second. The relationship between prekindergarten enrollment and educational inequality tends to be U-shaped, with inequality first rising

but then falling as enrollment approaches 100%. To quote an old axiom, Get the facts, or the facts will get you. Misinformation and misplaced fears are a sure recipe for bad policy.

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