

Jennifer Torres – Research Interests
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Broadly, my research interests center on child care: I want to understand the extent to which child care providers claim a role in early childhood education, the extent to which parents consider day care part of their young children's schooling — and how those perceptions shape the child care experiences of families and children, especially children of color.

Nearly 64 percent of young children in San Joaquin County live in homes where all parents work (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). How those children spend their days matters. Some research suggests, for example, that high quality child care can mean higher elementary school achievement for low-income children (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2009). When it comes to very young children, though, ideas about what constitutes high quality child care seem so entangled with ideas about good parenting (or, to put a finer point on it, good mothering) — assumptions that vary across cultures (Sanders, Deihl, & Kyler, 2007; Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers-Piérola, 1995). Do professionals gauge child care quality by the same measures as parents? Latino parents? Immigrant parents? I would like to know where opinions diverge, how they are reconciled, and how parents come to understand what quality in child care means.

Finally, I would like to find a way to braid journalism into my research. I have not worked out how exactly, but I have found examples, assuring me, at least, that it can be done: a study on the ways news coverage of brain development contributes to public misunderstanding of early childhood (Thompson & Nelson, 2001), and another on how gender issues skewed reporting on the debate around child care in a political campaign (Rinehart, 2008). As a starting point, I am interested in how American news outlets frame child care. Do they treat it as an educational issue, a labor issue, or something else? Whom do journalists turn to as experts on the subject, and whose voices do they amplify or exclude within the conversation?

References

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