

‘Universal’: the term is not universal

Free

Compulsory

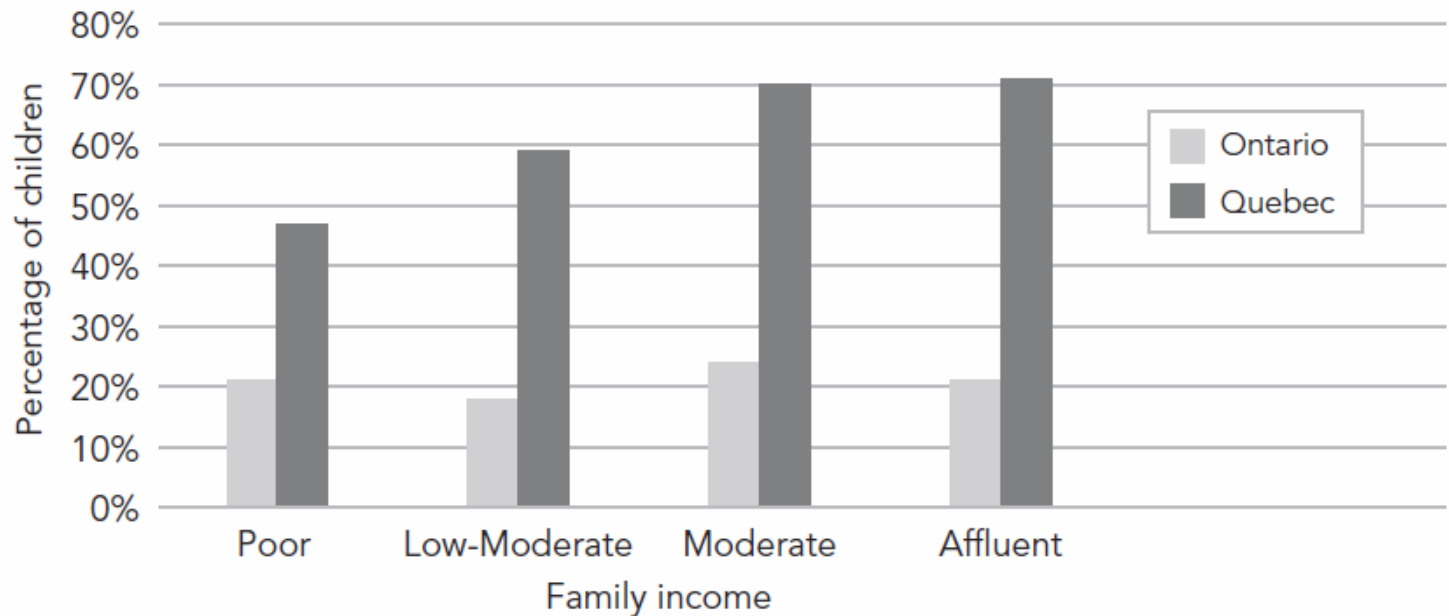
The same for everyone

Not necessarily

Universality promotes access

FIGURE 4.6

Children 2 to 4 years attending ECE centre by income, Ontario and Quebec, 2008–2009

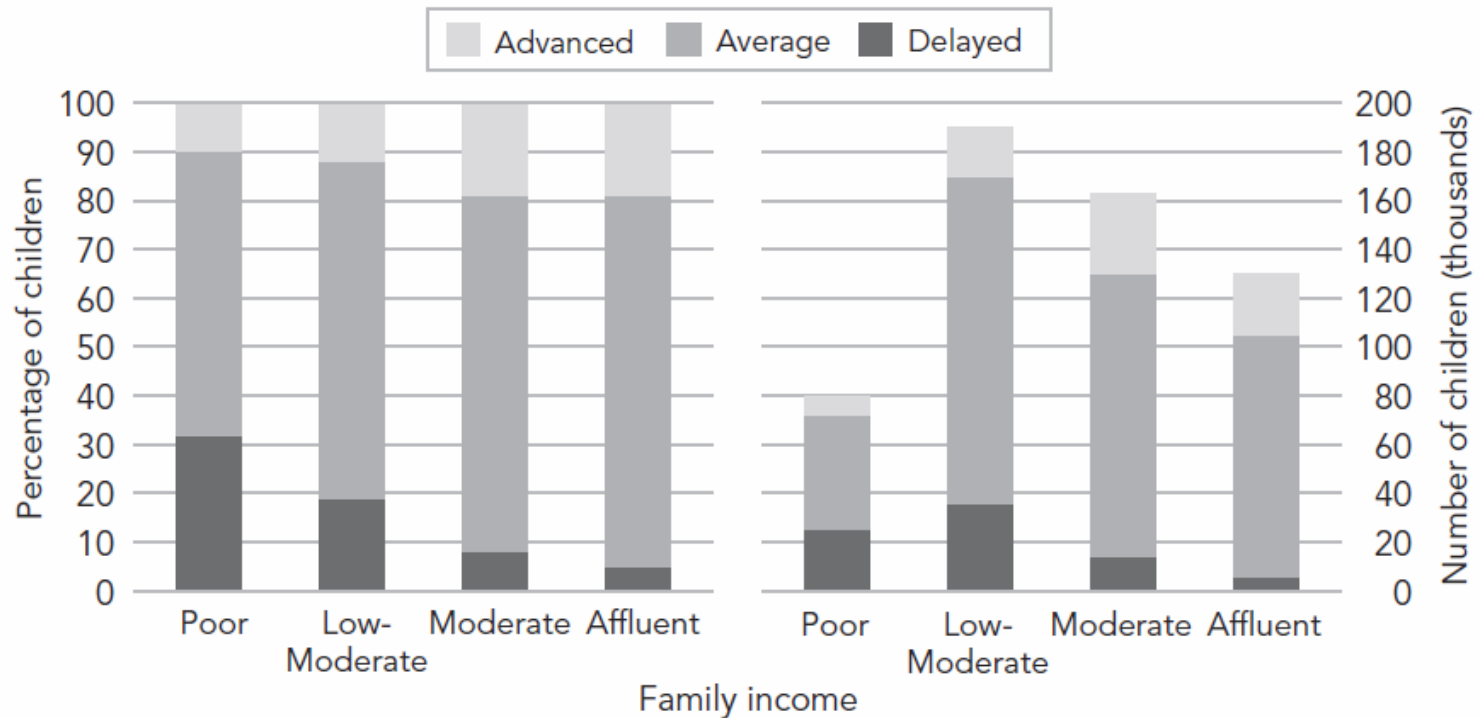


Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada. National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. Cycle 8, 2008–2009. Special tabulation.

Universality more effective at addressing vulnerable children

FIGURE 2.9

Vocabulary skills in children ages 4 and 5 years by family income



Universal programs promote better outcomes for disadvantaged children

British study found that children from poor families who went to preschool with middle class children did better than those who were educated in social and economic isolation. (Sylva et al, 2009)

Review of Georgia's universal preschool program found children from low-income families did better in reading and math in socially mixed classes. (Akerman et al, 2009)

Study of France's universal école maternelle found a narrowing – not elimination - of the achievement gap between children from disadvantaged and middle income families. The more time the spent in preschool the greater the advantage. (Jeantheau & Murat, 1998).

Targeting drags down achievement

Students who attended Jr HS schools with high proportions of low-income students made less academic progress , regardless of their own background. By the end of junior HS students were generally more negative about school than they had been at the end of primary school. (Sammons et al 2011)

OECD 12 country review found many of the targeted pre-school education programs did not meet efficacy or quality criteria. Programs were often temporary projects. The scale reached did not match demand. (Leseman, 2002)

Universality promotes quality

U.S. study that early learning classrooms comprised of about 60 percent of children from low-income homes were rated significantly lower in quality indicators of teaching, teacher–child interaction and provisions for learning than classrooms with fewer low-income children. (Pianta et al, 2005)

Universal platform tends to support parent compliance with intervention services. (HERG, 2012)

Other targeting challenges

- Eligibility testing is expensive
- A family move, a change in employment status or slight income changes can result in loss of service
- Stigma – eligible families don't apply because of social perceptions or distaste of red tape
- Not enough service to accommodate eligible families

Comprehensive service delivery

- Children age out of service without transition supports
- Middle-income children who could benefit are excluded
- Service coherence is impeded by multiple targeted programs