PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social Inclusion Through Early Childhood Education and Care

Martha Friendly and
Donna S. Lero

JUNE 2002

PERSPECTIVES
ON SOCIAL
INCLUSION

Social Inclusion Through Early Childhood Education and Care

Martha Friendly and Donna S. Lero

Laidlaw Foundation

Martha Friendly is the coordinator of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit,
Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto;

Donna S. Lero, PhD, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition,
University of Guelph, where she is also Research Director of the Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being.

Table of Contents

About the Laidlaw Foundation

The Laidlaw Foundation is a private, public-interest foundation that uses its human and financial resources in innovative ways to strengthen civic engagement and social cohesion. The Foundation uses its capital to better the environments and fulfill the capacities of children and youth, to enhance the opportunities for human development and creativity and to sustain healthy communities and ecosystems.

The Foundation supports a diverse portfolio of innovative and often unconventional projects in three program areas: in the arts, in the environment and improving the life prospects for children, youth and families.

Working for social inclusion is a theme that underlies much of the Foundation's activities. The key words in the Foundation's mission — human development, sustainable communities and ecosystems — imply that achievement will rely on the enhancement of capacity and capability. Not only is social inclusion being developed as an emerging funding stream, it is an embedded Laidlaw Foundation value, both structurally and programmatically.

Nathan Gilbert
Executive Director

For more information about the Laidlaw Foundation please contact us at:

The Laidlaw Foundation
Tel: 416 964-3614
Fax: 416 975-1428
Email: mail@laidlawfdn.org
www.laidlawfdn.org

Foreword:

The Laidlaw Foundation's Perspective on Social Inclusion

The context for social inclusion

Children have risen to the top of government agendas at various times over the past decade, only to fall again whenever there is an economic downturn, a budget deficit, a federal-provincial relations crisis or, most recently, a concern over terrorism and national security. While there have been important achievements in public policy in the past 5 to 10 years, there has not been a sustained government commitment to children nor a significant improvement in the well-being of children and families. In fact, in many areas, children and families have lost ground and social exclusion is emerging as a major issue in Canada. Examples abound and include these facts.

- the over-representation of racial minority families and children among those living in poverty in large cities, and the denial of access to many services by immigrant and refugee families;

- the 43% increase in the number of children in poverty in Canada since 1989, the 130% increase in the number of children in homeless shelters in Toronto, as well as the persistence of one of the highest youth incarceration rates among Commonwealth countries;

- the exclusion of children with disabilities from public policy frameworks (e.g. the National Children's Agenda), from definitions of 'healthy' child development and, all too often, from community life.

These situations provide the context for the Laidlaw Foundation's interest in social inclusion. The Foundation's Children's Agenda program first began exploring social inclusion in 2000 as a way to re-focus child and family policy by:

- re-framing the debate about poverty, vulnerability and the well-being of children in order to highlight the social dimensions of poverty (i.e. the inability to participate fully in the community)

- linking poverty and economic vulnerability with other sources of exclusion such as racism, disability, rejection of difference and historic oppression

- finding common ground among those concerned about the well-being of families with children to help generate greater public and political will to act.

The Foundation commissioned a series of working papers to examine social inclusion from a number of perspectives. Although the authors approach the topic from different starting points and emphasize different aspects of exclusion and inclusion, there are important common threads and conclusions. The working papers draw attention to the new realities and new understandings that must be brought to bear on the development of social policy and the creation of a just and healthy society.

These are:

- Whether the source of exclusion is poverty, racism, fear of differences or lack of political clout, the consequences are the same: a lack of recognition and acceptance; powerlessness and 'voicelessness'; economic vulnerability; and, diminished life experiences and limited life prospects. For society as a whole, the social exclusion of individuals and groups can become a major threat to social cohesion and economic prosperity.

- A rights-based approach is inadequate to address the personal and systemic exclusions experienced by children and adults. People with disabilities are leading the way in calling for approaches based on social inclusion and valued recognition to deliver what human rights claims alone cannot.

- Diversity and difference, whether on the basis of race, disability, religion, culture or gender, must be recognized and valued.

The 'one size fits all approach' is no longer acceptable and has never been effective in advancing the well-being of children and families.

- Public policy must be more closely linked to the lived experiences of children and families, both in terms of the actual programs and in terms of the process for arriving at those policies and programs. This is one of the reasons for the growing focus on cities and communities, as places where inclusion and exclusion happen.

- Universal programs and policies that serve all children and families generally provide a stronger foundation for improving well-being than residual, targeted or segregated approaches. The research and anecdotal evidence for this claim is mounting from the education, child development and population health sectors.

Understanding social inclusion

Social exclusion emerged as an important policy concept in Europe in the 1980s in response to the growing social divides that resulted from new labour market conditions and the inadequacy of existing social welfare provisions to meet the changing needs of more diverse populations. Social inclusion is not, however, just a response to exclusion.

Although many of the working papers use social exclusion as the starting point for their discussions, they share with us the view that social inclusion has value on its own as both a process and a goal. Social inclusion is about making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and

contributing members of society. It is, therefore, a normative (value based) concept - a way of raising the bar and understanding where we want to be and how to get there.

Social inclusion reflects a proactive, human development approach to social well-being that calls for more than the removal of barriers or risks. It requires investments and action to bring about the conditions for inclusion, as the population health and international human development movements have taught us.

Recognizing the importance of difference and diversity has become central to new under-

standings of identity at both a national and community level. Social inclusion goes one step further: it calls for a validation and recognition of diversity as well as a recognition of the commonality of lived experiences and the shared aspirations among people, particularly evident among families with children.

This strongly suggests that social inclusion extends beyond bringing the 'outsiders' in, or notions of the periphery versus the centre. It is about closing physical, social and economic distances separating people, rather than only about eliminating boundaries or barriers between *us* and *them.*

The cornerstones of social inclusion

The working papers process revealed that social inclusion is a complex and challenging concept that cannot be reduced to only one dimension or meaning. The working papers, together with several other initiatives the Foundation sponsored as part of its exploration of social inclusion , have helped us to identify five critical dimensions, or cornerstones, of social inclusion:

Valued recognition– Conferring recognition and respect on individuals and groups. This includes recognizing the differences in children's development and, therefore, not equating disability with pathology; supporting community schools that are sensitive to cultural and gender differences; and extending the notion to recognizing common worth through universal programs such as health care.

Human development – Nurturing the talents, skills, capacities and choices of children and adults to live a life they value and to make a contribution both they and others find worthwhile. Examples include: learning and developmental opportunities for all children and adults; community child care and recreation programs for children that are growth-promoting and challenging rather than merely custodial.

Involvement and engagement – Having the right and the necessary support to make/be involved in decisions affecting oneself, family and community, and to be engaged in community life. Examples include: youth engagement and control of services for youth; parental input into school curriculum or placement decisions affecting their child; citizen engagement in municipal policy decisions; and political participation.

Proximity – Sharing physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions, if desired, and to reduce social distances between people. This includes shared public spaces such as parks and libraries; mixed income neighbourhoods and housing; and integrated schools and classrooms.

Material well being – Having the material resources to allow children and their parents to participate fully in community life. This includes being safely and securely housed and having an adequate income.

Next steps: Building inclusive cities and communities

Over the next three years, the Children's Agenda program of the Laidlaw Foundation will focus on *Building inclusive cities and communities.* The importance of cities and communities is becoming increasingly recognized because the well-being of children and families is closely tied to where they live, the quality of their neighbourhoods and cities, and the 'social commons' where people interact and share experiences.

The Laidlaw Foundation's vision of a socially inclusive society is grounded in an international movement that aims to advance the well-being of people by improving the health of cities and communities. Realizing this vision is a long-term project to ensure that all members of society participate as equally valued and respected citizens. It is an agenda based on the premise that for our society to be just, healthy and secure, it requires the inclusion of all.

Christa Freiler
Children's Agenda Program Coordinator
Laidlaw Foundation

Paul Zarnke
Chair, Children's Agenda Advisory Committee
Laidlaw Foundation

Acknowledgements

*This series is dedicated to the memory of
Dr. Jennifer Keck who died on June 12, 2002
after a long battle with cancer.*

*Jennifer was a key member of the editorial committee,
an insightful and passionate reviewer of the working papers,
and an unwavering advocate for
social justice and the social inclusion of all people.*

Social Inclusion Through Early Childhood Education and Care

Social Inclusion Through Early Childhood Education and Care

"Comprehensive early childhood care is a key to creating a world characterized by hope and change rather than by deprivation and despair and to building countries that are thriving and free" (United Nations Children's Fund, 2001).

Introduction

This paper explores how childhood education and care services contribute to social inclusion in society. Its basic premise is that *"the process of development is an expansion of human freedom"* (Sen, 1999: 1). It draws on Amartya Sen's conception that a society that promotes a high degree of social inclusion is one in which members participate meaningfully and actively, have varied opportunities for joining in collective experiences, enjoy equality, share social experiences, and attain fundamental well-being. In this sense, an inclusive society provides equality of life chances and offers all citizens a basic level of well-being (ibid., 2000). Our definition of social inclusion features an active, transformative process of policy and program development designed to reduce barriers, promote human development, create the kind of community-based infrastructure that directly contributes to children's development and provide opportunities for children and families to participate meaningfully in their communities and to be valued. We make the case that, under the right conditions, early childhood education and care, or ECEC, can be a primary means to enhance this kind of social inclusion.

The paper's main purpose is to examine the circumstances under which ECEC services contribute to this conception of social inclusion, and when they don't. The following section examines the key concepts upon which this is based. Then, applying a framework drawn from an international policy study, we consider the specific policy and program elements that enable ECEC services to contribute to social inclusion. Finally, we examine whether the current ECEC situation in Canada is constructed and supported in ways that contribute to social inclusion, what changes are needed to enable it to do so, some implications for practice and future policy directions.

The definition of ECEC employed here is one commonly used in Canada and internationally to describe ECEC broadly and holistically to:

> *reflect the growing consensus in OECD countries that "care" and "education" are inseparable concepts ... the use of the term ECEC supports an integrated and coherent approach to policy and provision, which is inclusive of all children and all parents regardless of employment or socioeconomic status. This approach recognizes that such arrangements may fulfill a wide range of objectives including care, learning and social support (OECD, 2001: 14).*

At a practical level, this encompasses

childcare centres and other "care" services like family daycare as well as kindergartens and nursery/preschools whose primary purpose is "early childhood education". Some elements of family resource programs (which tend to be more focused on supporting parents than on providing "care" or "early childhood education") are included as well. These are all intended to enhance child development and well-being, and to support parents in a variety of ways, in and out of the paid workforce.

Basic Concepts

The approach to social inclusion and early childhood education and care used in this paper is based on four concepts. The first is that the development of talents, skills and capabilities in the early years has an effect not only on childhood well-being, but also on the social, educational, financial and personal domains as children mature into adulthood. This concept of social inclusion as *"the goal and the process of developing the talents, skills and capabilities of children to participate in the social and economic mainstream of community life by providing the opportunities and removing the barriers for children"* (Freiler, 2000) provides a key rationale for the importance of investing in ECEC. According to Sen's conception, the capabilities *"that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experiences as children"* (1999: 5) and expand the possibilities that people can *"lead the kind of lives they value"* (1999: 18). Thus, what happens in the early years has implications *"not only for what happens in childhood but also for future life"* (1999: 2). In this paradigm, political, social and economic institutions have important roles as agents that support and enhance human development and thus, freedom. That *"the child is father to the man"* is one important reason it is imperative that ECEC environments are designed to be truly developmental.

Second, the family and its environment – shaped by class, income and culture – have a significant impact on the developing child.

The family's experience of exclusion and inclusion affects not only its adult members, but also its children during childhood and over the life cycle. Children are dependent on their families for income, care, food, shelter, health and safety and relationships. Consequently, while children's well-being and future prospects can be affected directly by developmental, enriching environments, they are also enhanced if their families are sustained economically and socially through employment, income security and community supports. In this way, social exclusion and inclusion are mediated through the family as well as directly experienced by the child. This suggests why it is important for children as well as for parents that ECEC services are sensitive to parents' employment, training and social needs as well as supportive of child development and well-being.

A third basic concept is that social inclusion is not merely the converse of social exclusion but is used to connote an assertive approach, not just amelioration of deficits. Thus, social inclusion is not only about mitigating vulnerabilities in a remedial approach to life chances, but also about *"developing talents, skills and capabilities"* (Freiler, 2000) in a more proactive, hopeful model. In this conception, social inclusion is not only about reducing risk, but also about ensuring that opportunities are not missed. This has significant implications for whether ECEC services are mostly offered

to those presumed to be at risk, or are freely available for all children in a universal model.

A final concept relates to the nature of childhood. We propose that while developing talents, skills and capabilities in early childhood is appropriate and important, children are not merely adults-in-training. Thus, children should be valued as children, not simply for what they may become later on. This relates to the extent to which developmental capabilities are valued primarily because they create human capital for the future labour force, or because children are valued as citizens with entitlement to a fair share of society's resources. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child fully reinforces this idea of children as citizens with at least equal,

if not predominant rights. Internationally, this has become a mainstream theme in discourse about children:

> *Many countries are seeking to balance views of childhood in the "here-and-now" with views of childhood as an investment with the future adult in mind. These diverse views have important implications for the organization of policy and provision in different countries (OECD, 2001: 38).*

The nature and content of ECEC programs - how didactic they are or whether they are attuned to the whole child - depends in part on where the balance of these views about the nature of childhood falls.

The Context for Early Childhood Education and Care

Key social, demographic and economic trends in Canada that are consistent with international trends – together with knowledge derived from human development research – have implications for ECEC policies and programs.

First, the demographic environment in Canada includes a shrinking child population. In the 1990s, child populations in Canada, particularly those under age six, declined, especially in regions that experienced out-migration (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2000). Concern about low birth rate has not been as pronounced in Canada (outside of Quebec, at least) as it has been in Europe; this may be related to the fact that Canada relies heavily on immigration as a source of workers. While Canada has long been a diverse nation, immigrants and refugees now form a substantial portion of the population in some cities, with First Nations and other Aboriginal people a majority in some regions. Canada's diverse eth-

nic, racial, cultural and linguistic flavour together with its unique approach to multiculturalism has implications for the form and content of ECEC services.

Another trend that forms part of the context for ECEC is that in the past two decades, child and family poverty has increased; in 1998, 19 per cent of Canadian children were calculated to live in poverty (Campaign 2000, 2000) with the risk of poverty disproportionately high for children living in lone-parent families. Poverty is more common among families with younger children (both two- and single-parent families), and is also more likely to be more severe and of longer duration (National Council of Welfare, 2001). According to recent analyses by Statistics Canada of child poverty based on after-tax income, 29 per cent of children under six years of age were poor in at least one year between 1993 and 1998 (Morisette and Zhang, 2001). Moreover, more than 15 per cent of children

under six years of age were poor for three or more years during that six-year period – and this does not include children living in the Yukon or Northwest Territories or on reserves, a much higher proportion of whom are very poor. The timing, severity and duration of early childhood poverty has been shown to have long-lasting effects on children's language and cognitive development and school performance, and be associated with increased stresses on parents (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), all of which contribute to a trajectory of compromised life chances.

Some countries have redistributive policies intended to raise incomes for families with young children. In Canada, a new national child benefit (NCB) was introduced in 1998 to provide financial support to low- income families with employed parents. Both the NCB and provincial welfare reforms are prompting (or forcing) more parents with young children into the labour force, often into low-waged insecure jobs. This policy design requiring parental employment has very significant implications for how ECEC services are designed and distributed.

A third cross-national social and economic change in families of primary importance to ECEC is the shift from a single-breadwinner family model to one in which the norm and the expectation is that both fathers and mothers will be employed while their children are young. Canadian employment patterns among mothers with young children have changed dramatically over the last quarter century. In 1976, the labour force participation rate for women with children under age 16 was 39 per cent. In 2001, 62 per cent of mothers of children younger than three years were employed, as were 67 per cent of women whose youngest child was between three and five years of age (Statistics Canada, 2002); the majority were employed full time.

Having two earners in the family has been critically important for maintaining economic security over the last decade when many parents experienced unemployment or had to adapt to the increased casualization of the labour force, and declining or stagnating income. In 1997, the earnings of wives in dual-earner families accounted for almost one-third of family income. Where family incomes improved over the last decade, it is largely due to having two earners working longer hours. Current studies reflect the growing stress parents experience due to increased work demands, longer hours, limited flexibility and concerns about their children's well-being (Johnson, Lero & Rooney, 2001).

At the same time, the increased prevalence of single-parent families with young children means that these factors are even more salient for these mothers who are more likely to be poor, and, if employed, to have low-waged jobs that are more insecure with fewer benefits. An important additional point that is worth noting is the timing of parental separation and divorce. Not only are more children experiencing life in single-parent families, but they are doing so at increasingly younger ages (Marcil-Gratton & Le Bourdais, 1999). This has implications for the need for high quality ECEC programs for children and parents during the very years that are most critical for child development.

Finally, maternity and parental leaves are part of the context for ECEC services as these determine when parents begin to need alternative care for very young children. Typically, in contrast to 25 years ago, women now have a continuous attachment to the labour force throughout the childbearing years. Almost 90 per cent of Canadian women who were employed when pregnant returned to work within a year after birth, with 60 per cent having returned within six months after childbirth. Most countries provide paid maternity and

parental leaves that vary considerably in the extent and nature of coverage, flexibility and adequacy of income replacement. Canada has improved the length of its payment period twice in the past 15 years so that payments of about a year are now available for eligible parents although the length of the leave period varies by province. The benefit level, however, is low at 55 per cent of insurable earnings to a ceiling of $413 a week, and the eligibility criteria (under Employment Insurance) exclude many new mothers and fathers.

In addition to these demographic, social and economic elements, research on human development and conceptions about prosperity in modern societies also contribute heavily to the context for early childhood education and care. In the past decade or so, there has been a convergence of ideas about the importance of learning and skills development in creating

"knowledge economies". Courchene (2001) argues that universal ECEC must be part of a strategy for human capital that some consider to be critical for modern, competitive countries. While others question whether a traditional economically driven human capital approach provides a complete rationale, (for example, Keating, 2001), human capital rationales form part of the international and Canadian context for ECEC. The importance of *"valuing and supporting universal early childhood education, making it an integral part of the learning system so that all children develop the literacy skills they need to become lifelong learners"* (Lowe, 2001: 1) is well supported by research and has gained considerable currency. As the OECD points out, *"The early years are increasingly viewed as the first step in lifelong learning and a key component of a successful educational, social, and family policy agenda"* (OECD, 2001: 6).

Goals and Objectives of ECEC

The objectives that provide the rationale for ECEC have shifted again and again over the years as social needs, cultural attitudes and political priorities have come and gone. In Canada, since the 1980s, rationales for ECEC have included:

fulfilling children's right to well-being and development;
school readiness and later educational outcomes ("readiness to learn");
women's equality;
mothers' participation in the workforce;
alleviating child and family poverty;
balancing work and family responsibilities;
supporting "at-risk" children and families;
equity for children with disabilities;
supporting parents in their parenting role;
lifelong learning (for children and mothers);

social integration of newcomers;
sustaining social cohesion.

Some of these purposes are focused on children (well-being and development; school readiness; lifelong learning; equity for children with disabilities). Others – women's equality and labour force participation; balancing work and family; alleviating poverty and unemployment; supporting at-risk families; supporting the parenting role – are more focused on families or adults. Others are more associated with the community or the larger society (alleviating socially unacceptable behaviour presumed to be connected to "at-risk" status; social integration; social cohesion). Some of these purposes are closely connected to another; for example, healthy child development, school readiness and lifelong learning are closely associated with one another as are mother's participation in the

paid workforce, women's equality, lifelong learning and alleviating poverty. While Canada has taken what can be described as a serial approach to ECEC, there is now wide agree-ment that these policies and programs can – if well designed – serve a number of objectives simultaneously.

Considering Four Goals for ECEC that Contribute to Social Inclusion

The purposes for ECEC identified above embody four overall goals that are associated with social inclusion. The following section, organized by these four goals, explores the linkages between social inclusion and early childhood education and care in more detail.

Goal 1: Enhancing children's well-being, development and prospects for lifelong learning

The child developmental dimension of social inclusion is linked to opportunities for full realization of capabilities during childhood and, in the longer term, to the adult the child will ultimately become. If social inclusion over the lifespan is enhanced by full development in early childhood of talents, skills and capabilities, ECEC programs that support this can play a significant role.

Persuasive evidence backs the idea that social determinants have significant implications for lifelong mental and physical health (Keating & Hertzman, 1999). Many factors affect whether children develop into healthy adults – innate characteristics, prenatal conditions, the physical environment, nutrition, family attributes and interaction, the community, institutions of learning, civil society and the socio-economic environment. These factors affect one another, combining in complicated ways to produce children in good health who are confident, content, competent, resilient and socially responsible or, conversely, contribute to maturation of children who lack these attrib-utes. Although ECEC outside the family is one among a number of factors that make a difference, it can have a profound effect on child development – indeed, it can be a determining factor.

The idea that high quality ECEC services play an important developmental role in early childhood is well supported by research. If an ECEC program is high quality, it provides intellectual and social simulation that promotes cognitive development and social competence with effects that can persist into elementary school to establish a foundation for later success. The findings about the benefits of ECEC programs pertain regardless of social class (although poor children may derive more benefit) and whether or not the mother is in the paid workforce (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Bryant & Clifford, 2000; Lamb, 1998).

It is important to note that the positive effects of ECEC programs only occur if the services are high quality; poor quality programs may even have a negative effect. Research shows that the quality of ECEC services is critical in determining how developmentally effective they are. Indeed, *"the positive relation between childcare quality and virtually every facet of children's development that has been studied is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science"* (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2001: 313). While acknowledging that cultural variations shape the content and meaning of "quality" (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999), it is generally agreed that "high quality" is shorthand

for characteristics of ECEC services that go beyond basic health and safety requirements to those that support children's development and learning. "High quality" ECEC services employ staff who are educated for their work, have decent working conditions and wages; work with groups of children of a manageable size; provide challenging but non-didactic, creative, enjoyable activities for children; and ensure consistent adult and peer groups in stable social and physical environments. "High quality" ECEC services are also understood to be responsive to diverse populations of children and parents, include children with disabilities in a meaningful way and be adequately supported by infrastructure like regulation and funding (Doherty, 1993; European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996; Penn, 1999). Research shows that ECEC services that have these characteristics enhance children's development of talents, skills and capabilities in childhood and that these effects persist into adulthood.

While considering these developmental aspects of ECEC associated with social inclusion, it should be noted that the child development literature is often inclined to treat "development" as normative. That is, healthy development is usually conceptualized and measured using developmental milestones – physical, motor, intellectual and social – linked to age. The Roeher Institute points out that *"all children have a unique developmental and learning path"* and that an inclusive approach to children with disabilities requires alternative ways of approaching developmental outcomes and learning (2001). (Inclusion in ECEC for children with disabilities is considered in a later section).

Finally, it should be observed that while the ECEC research literature cited here is not explicitly about human capital, it tends to be more focused on the child's value in the future

– value added by enhanced language, cognitive, social and emotional development – than on children's well-being at the present time. A complementary idea is that ECEC services can help create a good quality of life for children "here-and-now". This treats childhood as an important phase of life, not merely as a way station to adulthood, and the child as active and competent. This also presumes that ECEC programs are part of children's culture – an institution for meeting children's own interests, respecting *"children's need to be children on their own premises and based on their own interests"* (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs, 1998:42). As a Danish study described this:

> *For the children, day care became an important extension of the exclusive private sphere that they shared with their mothers (and, in some cases, siblings), exposing them to a wider playful social world, expanding the circle of nurturing adults and enabling the children to form an independent peer social network (Polakow, Halskov and Jorgensen, 2001: 156).*

Goal 2: Supporting parents in education, training, employment and child-rearing

ECEC services can support families by helping reduce social exclusion linked to poverty, unemployment and marginal employment, disempowerment and social isolation. This applies both to the family as a unit and to women (a group with specific needs that may or may not be the same as those of the family unit). These effects advance the interests of the family and its members and also can be mediated through the family to the child.

Canadian women are in the paid labour force for two reasons: first, financial pressures on families – especially those who are poor,

working class, and lone parents – and, second, modern perceptions that paid employment is an appropriate role for women. Whatever the motivation, dependable care for children is essential if mothers who would have been expected to provide it a generation ago are to participate in the labour force, training or education. Without access to reliable ECEC, women may be compelled to remain out of the paid labour force, work at poorly paid part-time employment, or not take advancement; some are forced into dependence on public assistance and poverty. Thus, ECEC services are fundamental if mothers are employed and are essential for reducing family poverty by permitting parents – in dual- or single-parent families – to be educated, participate in training, or be employed. Indeed, without alternative childcare, poor families may never be able to escape poverty. In this way, poor accessibility to adequate childcare contributes to gender exclusion from the labour force and to marginalization for women across classes.

ECEC as a support to parental employment is connected to social inclusion for children as well as parents as social exclusion and inclusion are mediated through the family as well as directly experienced by the child. Children in poor families may experience the effects of social exclusion in childhood by not being financially able to participate in school and neighbourhood activities, being ill-housed, ill-clothed and even hungry while the intellectual, social and financial effects of poverty may persist over the lifespan. The timing, severity and duration of early childhood poverty has been shown to have long-lasting effects on children's language and cognitive development and school performance, and be associated with both increased stresses on parents and poorer neighborhoods as the environment in which young children live (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), all of which contribute to trajectories of compromised life chances and reduced human

and social capital. Thus, children's possibilities are enhanced if their families are sustained economically and socially. While paid work may not necessarily mean that family income provides an adequate living standard, without income from employment, families and their children lack even the possibility of escaping poverty.

Goal 3: Fostering social solidarity and social cohesion

In addition to enhancing children's well-being and supporting families, ECEC programs as community institutions have the capacity to foster neighbourhood, community and inter-personal co-operation and social solidarity:

> *Early childhood institutions...are forums located in civil society. They make important contributions to other projects of social, cultural and political significance.… Further, early childhood institutions can play an important part as the primary means for constituting civil society...and for fostering the visibility, inclusion and active participation of the young child and its family in civil society (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999: 7).*

Community-based ECEC services can be a focal point for parents, childcare providers, health and social service professionals and community volunteers, exemplifying and helping build social cohesion at the community level. Inclusive ECEC services can enhance social solidarity in the long-term through their impact on children as future adults since early childhood is a critical period not only for language learning but for the early stages of understanding concepts of difference and diversity, and establishing the basis for tolerance and acceptance of difference.

Community-based ECEC programs can

also be community institutions that facilitate parents' participation in common activities related to the well-being of their children, strengthening solidarity within a geographic community and across class, ethnic and racial boundaries. Parents who are new to a neighbourhood or are new immigrants or refugees can develop friendships, expand their social networks, access services and supports and contribute to their communities by participating in community-based early childhood programs that are holistic and welcoming in their approach and well connected to other community supports and services.

Based on the 1996 census, Statistics Canada has reported that 17 per cent of the population have a mother tongue other than French or English (1997). ECEC services provide opportunities to include and unite families from diverse origins through participation in common environments related to their children, demonstrating to adults and children alike that co-operation among social classes and ethnic groups is possible and valued. Thus, social integration across cultural, racial and linguistic communities in an environment that both informs about and values diversity can be an important contribution of ECEC programs. Canadian research shows that *"while much needs to be done"*, ECE (training) programs *"are beginning to make the required changes"* (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Chud & Lange, 1995: 77).

In these ways, high quality, inclusive ECEC services that include parents, coordinate community resources and validate cultural diversity have the capacity to promote equity among classes, levels of ability, racial and ethnic groups, and generations, and to enhance social cohesion.

Goal 4: Providing equity for diverse groups in society

The definition of an inclusive society given at the beginning of this paper is key to this final goal for ECEC services – that of providing equity. If an inclusive society is one that provides *"equality of life chances"* as in Sen's definition, all of ECEC's goals and objectives can be seen as linked to the goal of equity either through development of capabilities or access to society's resources as have been discussed in previous sections. For two groups, however – women and children with disabilities – access to ECEC services is a particularly important equity and social justice issue.

The word "inclusion" has a specific meaning when it is used to refer to an environment in which children with disabilities, special learning needs and chronic health problems are welcomed into and are enabled to participate in programs alongside typically developing peers (Odom, Peck, Hanson, Beckman, Kaiser, Lieber, Brown, Horn & Schwartz, 1996). The history of inclusive practice in ECEC (Irwin, 1992; Irwin & Lero 2001) indicates both that progress has been made to ensure that all children have the opportunity to participate in ECEC programs, and that there is still a need to ensure that such opportunities are real, not merely rhetorical.

Ensuring the rights of children with disabilities and their parents is a matter of social justice. Over the last several decades, many countries have progressed from neglect and institutionalization to the development of separate schools and facilities, more recently adopting approaches that ensure that all individuals have the right to full participation in their community and in society – in schools, workplaces, and public settings, including ECEC programs. For young children and their parents, the opportunity to participate in and benefit from appropriate supports is critical for children's development, for supporting parents

and for normalizing their lives.

Research demonstrates that with appropriate training and specialized support, inclusion in ECEC programs can benefit children with disabilities especially when teachers promote social integration (Jenkins, Odom & Speltz, 1989). Effective inclusion of children with disabilities is now regarded as a characteristic of high quality programs and is becoming well accepted as a goal and standard of practice. Research conducted in Canada indicates that most ECEC directors and teaching staff believe that most children with disabilities can, and should, be accommodated (Irwin & Lero, 2000).

That "childcare is the ramp that provides equal access to the workforce for mothers" (Abella, 1984: 178) is not a new idea and was discussed in a different context in an earlier section. However, framing this as an equity issue goes beyond the pragmatic consideration of whether mothers of young children have

access to childcare so they can be in the workforce. The argument that universal childcare is required to support women's equality as a basic citizenship right is associated with the idea that social rights constitute a key element of citizenship, and that a woman's position in the family is important in determining her relationship to the public sphere. While from a practical point of view, the burden of household and caring work has huge implications for women's economic and social status, this in turn is, as well, a matter of citizenship rights. Additionally, whether or not women are in the paid labour force, opportunities for personal development, participation in the community, development of skills and access to a range of formal and informal supports and services are fundamental to social inclusion and full citizenship. Thus, ECEC must be a cornerstone of any consideration of women's equality. Simply put, without full access to ECEC services, equality for women cannot be a reality.

What are the Conditions that Enable ECEC to Contribute to Social Inclusion? A Policy Framework

Thus far, this paper has discussed how ECEC can contribute to social inclusion. But while ECEC services have the capacity to play a role – even a central role – in creating a socially inclusive society, they will be able to do this in a fully effective way only if certain characteristics of public policy and service delivery are present. The empirical research that has been cited in the previous sections of this paper provides ample evidence for how ECEC is linked to a range of aspects of social inclusion. A recent comparative policy study provides an opportunity for a comprehensive, systematic assessment of these links.

Conducted by the Organization for

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) between 1998 and 2001, the Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care provides an evidence-based framework for examining the enabling conditions for socially inclusive ECEC and their implications for public policy. The study, in which 12 member nations of the OECD participated , begins with the observation that early childhood education and care has experienced a surge of policy attention in OECD countries over the past decade. Detailed studies of ECEC policy and provision in the 12 participating countries led to the study's conclusion that eight interrelated aspects of policy

and program are the *"key elements … that are likely to promote equitable access to quality ECEC"* (OECD, 2001: 125). The research found that provision of quality, equitably accessible ECEC services is more likely if the following eight elements, or "policy lessons" are present. These form a useful framework for examining the conditions under which ECEC contributes to social inclusion.

Policy lesson 1

A systematic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation. The Thematic Review emphasized the importance of a clear vision of children as a social group to underpin ECEC policy. A systematic and integrated approach requires a coordinated policy framework and a lead ministry that works in cooperation with other departments and sectors.

Policy lesson 2

A strong and equal partnership with the education system suggests that the nation supports a lifelong learning approach from birth to encourage smooth transitions for children and recognize ECEC as a foundation of the education process.

Policy lesson 3

A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support is linked to equitable access so all children can have the equal and fair opportunities provided by high quality ECEC regardless of family income, parental employment status, special educational needs or ethnic/language background.

Policy lesson 4

Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure. The Thematic Review found that while a combination of sources may fund ECEC, substantial government investment is required to support a sustainable system of quality, accessible services.

Policy lesson 5

A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance begins with the premise that all forms of ECEC should be regulated and monitored. Defining, ensuring and monitoring quality should be a participatory and democratic process. Pedagogical frameworks focusing on children's holistic development and strategies for ongoing quality improvement are key parts of this element.

Policy lesson 6

Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision is a foundation for quality ECEC services, which depend on strong staffing and fair working conditions. Strategies for recruiting and retaining a qualified, diverse, mixed-gender workforce and for ensuring that a career in ECEC is satisfying, respected and financially viable are essential.

Policy lesson 7

Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection with coherent procedures for collecting and analyzing data on the status of young children, ECEC provision, and the early childhood workforce are required.

Policy lesson 8

A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation requires sustained investment to support research on key policy goals and is a necessary part of a process of continuous improvement.

In summary, the Thematic Review found that

countries that have adopted some or all of these elements of successful policy share a strong public commitment to young children and their families. In different ways, these countries have made efforts to ensure that

access is inclusive of all children, and have initiated special efforts for those in need of special support. Quality is high on the agenda as a means to ensure that children not only have equal opportunities to participate

in ECEC but also to benefit from these experiences in ways that promote their development and learning (OECD, 2001: 135).

Does ECEC Contribute to Social Inclusion in Canada? If so, how? If not, why not?

This paper has examined how, and under what circumstances ECEC contributes to social inclusion. It makes the case that, under the right circumstances, ECEC is an important vehicle for bringing about social inclusion for children, families and communities. The following eight questions, derived from the preceding "policy lessons" offer a systematic way of examining Canada's approaches to ECEC policy and service provision to assess their contribution to social inclusion.

1. Is a systematic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation utilized?

It has been well documented that Canada does not have a systematic, integrated approach to ECEC in either policy or service delivery (Friendly, 1995; Beach & Bertrand, 2000). There are childcare centres, kindergartens, nursery schools, preschools, parenting programs and an array of funding arrangements. But Canadian ECEC has developed so incoherently that although each province and territory has a tangle of programs, only a small minority of children and families has services that provide the reliable "care" parents need, or the early childhood education programs that benefit development and a sense of community. Rather than a coherent policy approach, a mix of piecemeal solutions has arisen to

address narrowly defined issues serially.

This absence of a systematic approach is directly linked to poor accessibility. Few Canadian children under the age of five have a chance to participate in high quality ECEC programs that benefit their development and only a minority of parents can rely on the "care" that they need to train or work. From the perspective of child development, fragmentation of services engenders inconsistency, so are a poor fit with knowledge about the kinds of environments that enhance child development. In a more societal sense, families and children have to fit into narrow eligibility categories, segregated into class, income, racial and lifestyle "silos" to qualify for different ECEC programs. This weakens solidarity and undermines the potential that ECEC services have to serve as focal points for building community solidarity and social cohesion. Overall, Canada's fragmented approach to ECEC policy development and implementation is a major barrier to the potential these programs have to play a role in building equity or community and developing skills, talents and capabilities for children and families.

2. Is there a strong and equal partnership with the education system?

Although, "care" and "early childhood educa-

tion" are inevitably tied together, Canadian ECEC does not blend these two functions. Generally, kindergarten (public education) is regarded as a foundation for lifelong learning and treated as a public good while "care" services remain a poor cousin. Responsibility for "care" is primarily private rather than public; care services are targeted rather than universal; of uneven quality so that whether they are "educational" is questionable; in short supply, and are heavily dependent on user fees and donations rather than publicly funded. While Quebec has taken a positive step with introduction of full-day public kindergarten for all five-year-old children and acknowledged the educational value of universal, publicly funded care for children from birth to age 4, ECEC partnerships between social service authorities and education systems (for example, locating childcare centres in schools) have been eroded in other provinces. Overall, the partnership between childcare and the education system in Canada is limited, not *"strong and equal"*.

3. Is there a universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support?

This is essential for ensuring that all children have opportunities to attend quality ECEC regardless of family income, parental employment status, special educational needs or ethnic/language background. While there are universal approaches to ECEC in public kindergarten for five-year-old children and in Quebec, generally, Canadian practice and this policy lesson diverge considerably.

To be universally accessible, ECEC services must be available, affordable and appropriate, requiring an adequate supply of services while costs to parents must be affordable (either free, very low cost, or geared to

income). In addition, services must fit the needs and characteristics of the family and the child; that is, they must be age and culturally appropriate and responsive to parents' work schedules. And they must go beyond being merely available to families and children with special needs to *"pay particular attention to children in need of special support" (OECD, 2001:126)* .

Overall, most Canadian ECEC services serve only small proportions of preschool-age children (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2000). In addition to short supply, the current financing system for regulated childcare establishes financial barriers to access; participation in regulated childcare is primarily supported by parent user fees that are barriers to access for poor families. While systems of fee subsidies are in place in all regions, modest and middle-income families are not eligible for them and underfunding means that subsidies are not available even to families who qualify (Friendly, 2001). This restricts both parents' access to employment and children's access to developmental opportunities, and ultimately contributes to the social exclusion linked to these barriers. Research with parents of children with disabilities underscores this: without access to ECEC, after-school and summer programs and respite care, parents and their disabled children are excluded from many activities and opportunities (Irwin & Lero, 1997).

Further, targeting in one way or another is a barrier to equity in almost all of Canada's ECEC services (except kindergarten) (Doherty, 2001). This results in segregation of families by class and circumstances and is a key factor that mitigates against ECEC's contribution to social inclusion. Reversion to emphasis on targeting in ECEC seems to be associated with renewal of distinction between deserving and undeserving recipients of social goods that has become prevalent in Canada in the 1990s (Mahon & Phillips, 2002). The stigmatizing effects of tar-

geting may, as Klasen describes, have the effect of furthering social exclusion (1997). While means-tested subsidies may permit participation in childcare services, having to undergo a humiliating testing process can contribute to a low-income parent's sense of exclusion and low self-esteem. At the same time, identifying services as intended for low-income or "at-risk" children and families not only problematizes or even pathologizes the recipients, but can have the effect of making the services undesirable to modest- and middle-income families.

Generally, ECEC in Canada is not moving towards *"a universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support."* (OECD, 2001:126). Instead, it is best described as a situation of scarcity, eligibility based on narrow categories, children in need of special support being left unserved and a renewed trend towards targeting.

4. Is there substantial public investment in ECEC services and infrastructure?

As described earlier, there are multiple ECEC policy, programs and funding routes. Even regulated childcare has multiple funding routes – fee subsidies, operating and wage grants, tax measures and vouchers. Overall though, regulated childcare is primarily a user pay program.

Cross-Canada data show that 49 per cent of an average full-day childcare centre's revenue came from parent fees in 1998 (Goelman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange & Tougas, 2000) although provinces spent more than $1 billion dollars on regulated childcare, an average expenditure of $206 per child 0-12 (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2000). (Figures for total spending on kindergarten are not available).

In addition, the federal government allo-

cated $300 million (in 2001, rising to $500 million in 2004) to the provinces for four categories of children's services, one of which is "early learning and care". An estimate based on an economic analysis by Cleveland & Krashinsky (1998), calculates universal ECEC for Canadian children aged 1–6 years to cost $7.4 billion net (Friendly & Rothman, 2000). As a point of comparison, the European Union proposes national spending on ECEC of 1 per cent of GDP (European Commission Network on Child Care, 1996). (Canada's GDP was somewhat more than $1 trillion in 2000). Canadian and American research shows that financing is directly linked to accessibility and quality (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990; Goelman et al., 2000). The OECD Thematic Review suggests that while funds from parent fees and other sources can make a contribution to ECEC, ensuring equity by providing access to high quality ECEC requires secure, substantial and coherent government funding to services and to infrastructure.

5. Is there a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance?

As described, research documents the characteristics of ECEC services that determine whether they are likely to meet not only basic health and safety requirements, but also provide environments that ensure development and learning. Two structural elements have been shown to be key in determining the likelihood that high quality will occur in an ECEC program. The first of these – financing – was discussed in the previous section. The second – regulation – has been shown to be linked to quality through the form and content of programs, especially staffing (Gallagher, Rooney, & Campbell, 1999).

In Canada, many studies and reports have

identified concerns about quality in regulated childcare services (e.g., Lyon & Canning, 1997; Doherty & Stuart, 1997). A Canada-wide study of quality in centre-based childcare found that:

> *fewer than half of the preschool rooms (44.3% and slightly more than a quarter of the infant/toddler rooms (28.7%)) are providing activities and materials that encourage children's development. Instead, the majority of the centres in Canada are providing care that is of minimal or mediocre quality. The children's physical and emotional health and safety are protected but few opportunities for learning are provided (Goelman et al., 2000: ix). (A companion study on regulated family daycare had similar findings (Doherty et al., 2000b).*

Analysis of the YBIC! centre-based data confirms what other research has shown – significant provincial differences suggest that strength of regulation is one of several key factors that influence the quality of the services (Doherty & Friendly, 2002).

At the same time, many Canadian pre-school age children are in unregulated ECEC environments that provide "care" while mothers work. Care provided by unregulated family child care providers and by individuals who provide care in the child's own home function outside of any system of quality assurance altogether, other than parental monitoring. While research on the precise details of these arrangements is sparse, enough is known to suggest that the majority of preschool-age children whose mothers work outside the home spend a good deal of time in environments that are unlikely to be developmental environments.

The OECD study suggests that while ensuring minimum standards through regulation is fundamental, it is also important to

involve parents and professionals in a participatory and democratic way. The findings from the Thematic Review also advise that equal access to quality means that regulation needs to apply to all ECEC settings, and that governments at national, regional and local levels play key roles in assuring quality.

To date, there has been only limited discussion in Canada about the complex pieces that make up this policy lesson. Even in regulated childcare, there is little discussion about systematic strategies for ongoing improvements in quality. The kind of approach to quality that the Thematic Review links to the high quality, equitable ECEC services that contribute to social inclusion is not yet a reality in Canada.

6. Are there appropriate training and working conditions for staff?

As human relationships and interaction make up the substance of a child's ECEC experiences, caregivers or teachers are the essence of ECEC programs. Research shows that adequate training and fair working conditions – wages and benefits, working environments, turnover, training and morale – are all strongly and directly associated with the quality of a child's experience, to child development and, ultimately, to social inclusion (Goelman et al., 2000; Whitebook et al., 1990).

There are few points about ECEC about which there is better agreement than the inadequacy of the working conditions and training in regulated childcare (Environics Research Group, 1998). A national study of the "childcare workforce" concluded that Canadian society places little value on the work and skills of the women who care for young children. It found that Canadian caregivers receive little public support, few resources, and unaccept-

ably low wages. Education in the field is poorly coordinated and there are many gaps in training (Beach, Bertrand & Cleveland, 1998).

The OECD's observation that while *"most staff working with 3-5 year olds in publicly funded settings are trained at a high level… those working with children under age three in the welfare sector tend to have lower levels of training, compensation and poorer working conditions than education staff"* (OECD, 2001: 132) in some ways describes Canada's situation. Where Canada diverges, however, is linked to the absence of publicly funded ECEC services even for 3-5 year olds. Wages and working conditions for staff caring for over-threes in Canada (other than public kindergarten) are more like those described in services for younger age groups elsewhere. Poor working conditions, public recognition and training for staff in ECEC programs have a direct link to whether these programs are high quality enough to be developmental and thus present an impediment to ECEC's contribution to social inclusion.

7. Is there systematic attention to monitoring and data collection?

The absence of consistent data on Canadian ECEC has been frequently noted (Beach et al., 1998). An analysis of Canadian ECEC data needs concludes that Canada essentially has no reliable, consistent, comparable data on various aspects of ECEC that can inform policy or improvements to service provision, or assess changes and effects on children and families over time (Friendly, Cleveland, Colley, Lero & Shillington, in preparation). The Thematic Review concluded that systematic attention to data collection requires *"coherent procedures for collecting and analyzing data on the status of young children, ECEC provision, and the early*

childhood workforce" (OECD, 2001: 126).

8. Is there a stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation?

The OECD observes that *"sustained investment to support research on key policy goals is required as part of a process of continuous improvement"* (2001: 134). As we pointed out earlier, Canada does not have clear policy goals for ECEC. Over the years, there has been research and evaluation of ECEC programs, human resources, best practices and policy, mostly through a series of federal research programs. While these have yielded valuable information, there has not been the *"stable framework and long-term agenda"* that this policy lesson suggests is a crucial component of a process of ongoing improvement. The systematic monitoring and data collection discussed in the previous section is linked to this research agenda; basic data to provide public accountability should be a complement to a research and evaluation agenda that can help provide answers to more complex questions. A Canadian long-term and stable research agenda utilizing a variety of disciplines, methodologies and paradigms is essential as a tool to *"inform effective policy-making and raise the overall quality of ECEC"* (OECD, 2001: 134, 135).

Acting on What We've Learned: From Aspirations to Reality

This paper's purpose has been to examine the connections between social inclusion and early childhood education and care. We have argued that ECEC can make a significant contribution to social inclusion by supporting children's development, family well-being, community cohesion and equity. The paper describes how the goals and objectives of ECEC relate to development and human freedom; it explores how, and under what circumstances, ECEC services contribute to social inclusion – and when they don't. It concludes that in eight key policy areas, Canada does not provide the mechanisms that would enable ECEC to contribute fully to social inclusion. A key question that remains to be asked is whether ECEC services could contribute more to social inclusion than they now do. That is – notwithstanding the present ECEC policy and funding – are there implications for practice in areas that could be improved to strengthen social inclusion? At least four areas for further discussion stand out.

Quality

We have pointed out that the quality of ECEC programs is key to whether they are effective in *"developing talents, skills and capabilities"* and discussed the known elements that contribute to quality. These include staff training, good wages and working conditions and an infrastructure that assures ongoing quality. We have also noted research that shows that Canadian childcare is more likely to be mediocre than high quality. As the OECD study points out, high quality ECEC requires substantial financing, good regulation and well-trained and paid staff. These structural elements clearly require commitment at the policy level. However, even

in the absence of commitment to structural changes, there is considerable knowledge with implications for practice at both policy and service levels applicable to improved quality and, therefore, strengthening human development and social inclusion.

A key element that has been missing as an integral part of Canadian ECEC is systematic planning for quality improvement. When quality improvements have been undertaken, they have tended to be time-limited pilot or research projects funded by the federal government (for example, professional development opportunities) or isolated provincial initiatives (for example, wage enhancement or increased training requirements). The OECD study describes systematic approaches to ongoing quality improvement as including consideration of pedagogy, analysis of monitoring systems, qualitative and quantitative approaches to program evaluation, service support and infrastructure, and in-service training and professional development. While ultimately, assuring the high quality ECEC required to truly support social inclusion requires both structural changes at senior policy levels and a coherent systematic approach to quality enhancement, useful lessons about a systematic approach to improving quality can be drawn from this comparative work.

Disability

A second area to consider is inclusion of children with special needs. As we noted earlier, this is an important equity issue and therefore, fundamental to social inclusion. There are several facets to this issue, with implications for policy and practice. At the most fundamental level is the difficulty of physically including

and accommodating children with disabilities in an under-resourced and undeveloped system. While there is no legislative requirement or proactive mandate that would assure that ECEC programs include children with special needs, many centres do so. Barriers to inclusion identified by a national sample of centre directors include: insufficient funds to provide for the required additional staffing, the need to make structural modifications to the centre, the need for additional staff training, the centre already had the maximum number of children with disabilities that it could take or was licensed for, insufficient funds for necessary equipment and limited access to therapists and external resource consultants who could support centre efforts (Doherty et al, 2000a; see also Irwin, Lero & Brophy, 2000).

Research shows that generally, centres that include children with special needs effectively tend to have a proactive director who provides leadership, at least one designated staff person with special expertise in this area, assistance from professionals and positive experiences with parents. These enable positive experiences with inclusion, helped staff develop additional skills and reinforce their willingness to accept children with more challenging needs – an "encouraging" rather than discouraging cycle (Irwin & Lero, 2001).

Recent observations by Tougas (2002) suggest that expansion of ECEC systems with limited funding support for inclusion may not be sufficient to meet these goals. A more comprehensive approach, including training and ongoing consultations and support seems necessary. Moreover, within centres, training, attitudes and resources must be used to ensure that children with disabilities are not participating separately within the program, but in ways that enhance their development, their participation with others and their acceptance. Current research and best practice examples

could be used to enhance capacity regionally and nationally, but will require additional support to be sustainable.

Policy and service coherence: A systematic integrated approach

The Thematic Review provides evidence about the importance of coherence of policy and service delivery. Systematic integration requires proactive steps at the community and program level, in planning, and in funding and policy development. While truly integrated planning would include recognizing and strengthening the links between related services and ensuring that service gaps are filled, even without systemic structural change there is considerable room in ECEC practices and current policy to knit together a more integrated approach to ECEC.

A good example of these possibilities is in the area of ECEC for Aboriginal communities whose members have historically been particularly underserved by appropriate services. As new services for Aboriginal ECEC have been added in the 1990s, they have tended to remain separate entities at both policy and service delivery levels. Currently, there are four separate federal Aboriginal ECEC programs: First Nations and Inuit Childcare; childcare under the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND); on-reserve Aboriginal Head Start and off-reserve Aboriginal Head Start. (In addition, some provinces are involved in Aboriginal childcare on reserve; in some cases, this has been negotiated with the federal government and in others, with First Nations. As well, off-reserve First Nations people may participate in non-Aboriginal ECEC programs on the same terms as other Canadians). As Aboriginal communities are under federal jurisdiction, the three

federal ECEC programs that provide on-reserve services provide a good opportunity to integrate policy and services to allow First Nations' communities to smooth children's and families' participation in ECEC.

A lesson about the importance of an integrated approach that can be learned from the U.S. experience with Head Start should not be lost in the current context. Highly targeted half-day ECEC programs were originally developed in the 1960s for very low-income children whose mothers were not in the labour force. These, however, did not meet the labour force needs of those same families when the welfare reforms of the 1990s required parental employment when children were very young. As the U.S. experience shows, retrofitting programs designed for separate purposes rather than taking a more holistic approach initially can be challenging at best.

Diversity

Finally, as we described earlier, the fact that Canada is a very diverse country has special implications for the best practice of inclusive early childhood education and care. A study conducted in Canada's three largest cities examined how childcare centres and ECEC training institutions work with families and children from a wide range of backgrounds (Bernhard et al., 1995). Overall, preparation for work in these ECEC settings was less than optimal, and mutual understanding between parents and early childhood educators was not strong. The researchers reported that *"we are inclined to believe that there continue to be problems of systemic racism, irrespective of the good will of centre staff"* (1995: xi). This study and other information suggest that if ECEC programs are to make a strong contribution to social inclusion, there is considerable room for change in current training and centre practices.

In Conclusion: Towards Socially Inclusive Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education and care services as political, social and economic institutions have an important role to play as agents that support and enhance social inclusion, human development and, thus, freedom. They can enhance children's well-being, development and prospects for life-long learning; support parents in education, training, employment; foster social solidarity and social cohesion; and provide equity for diverse groups in society. Comparative research shows how certain elements of public policy can enable ECEC services to play these roles. It also shows that these elements can be implemented to balance their essential characteristics with cultural and national variations in ideas

about children, families and society.

Societies that advance social inclusion are those in which members enjoy equality, participate in a meaningful way, have opportunities for joining in collective experiences, share social activities and attain fundamental well-being. Early childhood education and care contributes to the process of social inclusion by helping to make equality of life chances and a basic level of well-being possible for all children and families. Indeed, some commentators suggest that ECEC is so fundamental to these that it should be a citizenship right (Covell & Howe, 2001; Courchene, 2001; Ignatieff, 2000; United Nations Children's Fund, 2001). This right would be consistent with the

Convention on the Rights of the Child and is enshrined and practised in a number of European nations.

If ECEC is able to contribute to social inclusion, it is not randomly or by happenstance. The OECD's policy framework makes clear that while there are ways in which current practice can be improved, if ECEC is to make a significant contribution to social inclusion, governments must play a meaningful role. The United Nations Children's Fund has called on world government leaders to *"make children – the youngest most especially – the priority at all*

policy tables…and to ensure [that this has] the necessary financial and political support" (2001). Over the past two decades, nations with a variety of histories, cultures, fiscal capacities and political arrangements have set in motion the enabling public policy for socially inclusive ECEC programs. These examples show us that closing the inclusion gap requires vision, commitment and the political will to turn aspirations into reality through transformative processes of policy and program development.

Endnotes

[1]   Based in Paris, the OECD was founded in 1961 to contribute to economic expansion, growth and employment and a rising standard of living and to the expansion of world trade. Its member countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States.

[2]   Australia, Belgium (Flemish and French communities), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

[3]   A Background Report and a Country Note was prepared on each participating country. These are available from the OECD or online at www.oecd.org/els/education/eced.

References

Abella, R. S. (1994). *Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report.* Ottawa: Government of Canada. Royal Commission on Equality in Employment.

Beach, J. & J. Bertrand. (2000). *More than the sum of the parts: An early childhood development system for Canada.* Occasional paper no. 12. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto.

Beach, J., J. Bertrand, and G. Cleveland. (1998). *Our childcare workforce: From recognition to remuneration -- more than a labour of love.* Main report. Childcare Human Resources Steering Committee: Ottawa.

Bernhard, J. K., M. L. Levebvre, G. Chud, and R. Lange. (1995). *Paths to equity: Cultural, linguistic and racial diversity in Canadian early childhood education.* Toronto: York Lanes Press.

Brooks-Gunn, J., and G. J. Duncan. (1997). *The effects of poverty on children. The future of children.* Vol. 7, 2. Los Altos, CA: David and Lucille Packard Foundation.

Burchinal, M., E. Peisner-Feinberg, D. Bryant, and R. Clifford. (2000). Children's social and cognitive development and childcare quality: Testing for differential associations related to poverty, gender or ethnicity. *Applied developmental science* 4 (3): 149-65.

Campaign 2000. (2000). *Child poverty in Canada: Report card 2000.* Toronto.

Childcare Resource and Research Unit. (2000). *Early childhood care and education in Canada: Provinces and territories 1998.* Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

Cleveland, G., and M. Krashinsky. (1998). *The benefits and cost of good childcare: The economic rationale for public investment in young children.* Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

Courchene, T. (2001). *A state of minds: Toward a human capital future for Canadians.* Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Covell, K., and R. Brian Howe. (2001). *The challenge of children's rights for Canadians.* Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

Dahlberg, G., P. Moss, and A. Pence. (1999). B*eyond quality in early childhood education and care: Postmodern perspectives.* London: Falmer Press.

Doherty, G. (1993). *Quality childcare: Contextual factors.* Ottawa: Canadian Childcare Federation.

———. (2001). *Targeting early childhood education and care: Myths and realities.* Occasional paper #15. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

Doherty, G. and M. Friendly. (2002). *Making the best use of the You bet I Care! data sets: Final report on a research forum.* Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto.

Doherty, G., D. Lero, H. Goelman, A. LaGrange, and J. Tougas. (2000a). *You bet I care! A Canada-wide study on wages, working conditions and practices in childcare centers.* Guelph: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph.

Doherty, G., Lero, D., Goelman, H., Tougas, J. & LaGrange, A. (2000b). *You bet I care! Quality in regulated family child care across Canada.* Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph.

Doherty, G., and B. Stuart. (1997). The association between childcare quality, ratio and staff training: a Canada-wide study. *Canadian journal of research in early childhood education* 6 (2): 127-38. Montreal: Concordia University.

Environics Research Group. (1998). *Childcare issues and the childcare workforce: A survey of Canadian public opinion.* Toronto.

European Commission Network on Childcare. (1996). *Quality targets in services for young children. Proposals for a ten year action plan.* London: Thomas Coram Research Unit, University of London.

Freiler, C. (2000). Social inclusion as a focus of wellbeing for children and families. Draft paper prepared for the Laidlaw Foundation. Toronto: Laidlaw Foundation.

Friendly, M. (1995). *Putting the pieces together: Childcare policy in Canada.* Don Mills, ON: Addison Wesley Ltd.

Friendly, M. (2001). Canary in a coal mine: Childcare and Canadian federalism in the 1990s. In *Childcare in Canada in the 21st century: Preparing the policy map*, edited by Gordon Cleveland, and Michael Krashinsky. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Friendly, M., G. Cleveland, S. Colley, D. Lero, and R. Shillington. (In preparation). *Early childhood education and care. An agenda for national data. (Final report).* Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

Friendly, M., and L. Rothman. (2000). *Early childhood development services: How much will they cost?* BRIEFing NOTE. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

Gallagher, J. , R. Rooney, and S. Campbell. (1999). Child care licensing regulations and child care quality in four states. *Early childhood research quarterly*, 14(3):313-333.

Goelman, H., G. Doherty, D.S. Lero, A. LaGrange and J. Tougas, J. (2000). *You Bet I Care! Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Child Care Centres Across Canada.* University of Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being.

Ignatieff, M. (2000). *The rights revolution.* New York: Anansi Press.

Irwin, S. H., (1992). *Integration of children with disabilities into daycare and after school programs.* Ottawa: Disabled Persons Unit, Health Canada.

Irwin, S., and D. Lero. (1997). *In our way: Childcare barriers to full workforce participation experienced by parents of children with special needs – and potential remedies.* Sydney, NS: Breton Books.

————. (2001). In the absence of policy: Moving towards inclusion of children with special needs in Canada's childcare centres. In *Changing childcare: Five decades of childcare advocacy & policy in Canada*, edited by S. Prentice, 153-69. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.

Irwin, S., D. Lero, and K. Brophy. (2000). *A matter of urgency: Including children with special needs in childcare in Canada*. Sydney, NS: Breton Books.

Jenkins, J. R., S. L. Odom, and M. L. Speltz. (1989). Effects of social integration on preschool children with handicaps. *Exceptional Children* 55:420-28.

Johnson, K., D. S. Lero, and J. Rooney. (2001). *Work-Life Compendium 2001: 150 Canadian Statistics on Work, Family and Well-Being*. University of Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being and HRDC, Women's Bureau.

Keating, D. (2001). Health and human capital. Paper presented at Canada in international perspective: The human capital paradigm, 27-29 August, at Queen's University International Institute on Social Policy, Kingston, ON.

Keating, D., and C. Hertzman. (1999). *Developmental health and the wealth of nations*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Klasen, Stephan (1998). *Social Exclusion and Children in OECD Countries: Some Conceptual Issues.* Paper presented at OECD Experts Seminar, January 22-23, 1998, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation http://www.oecd.org/els/edu.ceri.conf220299.htm

Lamb, M. (1998). Non-parental childcare: Context, quality, correlates and consequences. *Handbook of Child Psychology* 4: 73-133.

Lowe, G. S. (2001). Final Report on the National Learning Roundtable on Learning. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Lyon, M., and P. M. Canning. (1997). Auspice, location, provincial legislation and funding of day care in Atlantic Canada: relationships with centre quality and implications for policy. *Canadian journal of research in early childhood education* 6 (2): 139-55.

Mahon, R. and S. Phillips. (2002). Dual-earner families caught in a liberal welfare regime: The politics of child care policy in Canada. In S. Michel & R. Mahon (Eds.), *Child care policy at the crossroads: Gender and welfare state restructuring* (pp.191-218). New York, NY: Routledge.

Marcil-Gratton, N., and C. Le Bourdais (1999). *Custody, access and child support: Findings from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*. Ottawa: Department of Justice.

Morissette, R. and X. Zhang (2001). Experiencing low income for several years. *Perspectives on labour and income.* Statistics Canada, Cat. No. 75-001XIE, Vol 2, No. 3 , 25-35

National Council of Welfare. (2001). *Child poverty profile 1998*. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs. (1998). *Thematic review of early childhood education and care policy: Background report from Norway.* Paris: Organization for Economic Co-opera-

tion and Development.

Odom, S.L., C. A. Peck, M. Hanson, P. J. Beckman, A. P. Kaiser, J. Lieber, W. H. Brown, E. M. Horn, and I. S. Schwartz. (1996). Inclusion at the preschool level: An ecological systems analysis. *SRCD Social Policy Report* 1, (2-3): 18-30.

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2001). *Starting strong: Early childhood education and care.* Summary report, Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care. Paris.

Penn, H. (1999). How should we care for babies and toddlers? An analysis of practice in out-of-home care for children under three. Occasional paper #10. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

Polakow, V., T. Halskov and J. Per Schultz, (2001). *Diminished rights: Danish lone mother families in international context.* Bristol, U.K.: Policy Press.

Roeher Institute. (2001). *Developing an inclusive approach to monitoring child development and learning outcomes.* Toronto.

Sen, A. (1999). Investing in early childhood: Its role in development. Speech to the Inter-American Development Bank, Washington.

Sen, A. (2000). *Development as freedom.* New York: Anchor Books.

Shonkoff, J., and D. Phillips. (2001). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development.* Washington: National Academy Press.

Statistics Canada. (1997). 1996 census: Mother tongue, home language and knowledge of languages. *The Daily,* Dec. 2, 1997. Catalogue 11-001E

Statistics Canada. (2002). *Women in Canada: Work chapter updates.* Catalogue No. 89F0133XIE. Ottawa. Available at www.statcan.ca

Tougas, J. (2002). *Quebec's early childhood care and education: The first five years.* Occasional Paper #17. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto.

United Nations Children's Fund. (1999). *The State of the World's Children* 1999. New York.

United Nations Children's Fund. (2001). *The State of the World's Children* 2001. New York.

Whitebook, M., C. Howes, and D. Phillips. (1990). *Who cares? Childcare teachers and the quality of care in America.* Final Report of the National Staffing Study. Oakland, CA: Childcare Employee Project.

PERSPECTIVES ON
SOCIAL INCLUSION
WORKING
PAPER
SERIES

PUBLISHED IN 2002

Laidlaw Foundation