Introduction and Overview

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Introduction

How is the concept of social inclusion evolving in policy terms? Are we moving towards a common understanding or "definition" of the notion? What does social inclusion mean for issues like poverty and the growing racialization of poverty? What can we learn about social inclusion in theory and practice from the perspectives of the needs of children and their parents? What are the contributions of feminism and of the disability rights movement? What does social inclusion mean for Canada's newcomers, for anti-racism and for the social citizenship of visible minority communities? What does it mean for Canada's First Nations peoples? Are we moving in some way towards a coherent and policy relevant version of social inclusion that is "made in Canada"? These are the issues explored in this volume of selected essays on social inclusion, produced by the Laidlaw Foundation with the assistance of Fernwood Publishing.

It is only a few years since the Laidlaw Board took the courageous step of endorsing funding for what was basically an idea — the idea of social inclusion. Since that time our social inclusion work has not only developed and expanded, it has also won a significant amount of attention and support. Laidlaw-sponsored activities have included a variety of seminars and conferences as well as the production of a series of working papers exploring different areas and aspects of social inclusion as both theory and applied policy. Funding was also provided for partner organizations involved in projects such as the development of inclusive indicators, as well as research and public education on the welfare of Canada's children and pilot projects demonstrating new approaches to inclusion at the grassroots level of community organizing.

This volume contains a representative selection of the working papers previously commissioned and published by Laidlaw, as well as contributions solicited for the book. An overview of the contents and key issues is provided in this introductory chapter, and an index at the end of the book provides reference to key issues and authors for all the contributions. A single book like this of course cannot be fully representative of the complexity and diversity of views in the growing range of writings on social inclusion in Canada.

Other significant contributions worthy of attention include the complete set of Working Papers on Social Inclusion produced by the Laidlaw Foundation, the publications from Health Canada Atlantic

Region and the work of the Roeher Institute on the principles and philosophy of social inclusion and on inclusive indicators. The Policy Research Initiative in Ottawa continues to work in areas like social exclusion and poverty, and the use and measurement of social capital to build inclusion. The Inclusive Cities Project is working with social planning councils and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities across Canada to develop social inclusion as urban policy. Community-based organizations like the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, the Alternative Planning Group and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto have focused on developing grassroots participation in establishing inclusive indicators.[1]

The support of the active and committed volunteers past and present at the Laidlaw Foundation and the leadership of our Executive Director Nathan Gilbert have also played a vital role in launching and promoting this Canadian dialogue on social inclusion.

Overview of the Contributions

Poverty, Inequality and Social Inclusion by Andrew Mitchell and Richard Shillington

The chapter by Mitchell and Shillington emphasizes that both social inclusion and poverty are contested concepts. Depending on the intentions of policymakers, inclusion can be reduced to employability and be used to justify coercive welfare-to-work policies to undo dependence on social assistance. The outcomes of such policies are often lower levels of well-being for individuals and families living in earned poverty on the margins of the market economy. For these authors, however, the concept of inclusion can also be used to expand understanding of the conditions for well-being, which go beyond income, poverty and employment. This chapter presents a framework for operationalizing our understanding of exclusion for children, one which begins to explore and track the processes and societal institutions that create unequal outcomes — needy children in the midst of a wealthy society.

Rethinking the Poverty Debate

Mitchell and Shillington note that society has an interest in monitoring the well-being of its citizens and that high on the list of indicators of disadvantage and well-being is how many people are “poor.” But in Canada, poverty, they point out, is an intensely contested term. For some, poverty has meaning only in absolute terms — the minimum necessary for physical survival. For others, it can only be understood in relative terms, compared to the living standards of the society in which the person lives.

In Canada, the authors explain, we have tended to operationalize the idea of relative poverty by drawing an income line that is some fraction of

the average income. But whether the poverty line is drawn higher or lower, there is mounting evidence that inequality itself has effects on outcomes of well-being. The relative gap accepted by a society (apart from those officially defined as poor) can in itself generate negative consequences.

Mitchell and Shillington contend that all concepts of poverty are inescapably relative and that the choice of measure is really a choice among policy objectives. To begin with what we should measure before knowing what outcomes we are seeking, they argue, is to put the cart before the horse. What is the public policy objective to which poverty statistics are addressed — enough resources to meet physical needs for health? Or equality of opportunity? Or equality of outcomes?

While Canadian society increases in wealth, the living standards of the poorest among us fall farther away from the norm. Should we not be concerned about the widening social distance between those who are worst-off and the rest of society and the inequality of opportunity and civic participation that characterizes life at the bottom? Does this not require a policy response? Canada might set a goal of eliminating poverty that implied providing only enough funds to meet basic needs. A broader social goal would be equality of opportunity, which would be tracked on the basis of income inequality or relative poverty. Even more ambitious would be a policy goal that included social inclusion, which has implications for citizen participation, capacity and agency.

Poverty, inequality and social inclusion are not interchangeable concepts for Mitchell and Shillington; rather they are interdependent. To be included across the different dimensions of well-being (physical, economic, human, social, political) requires sufficient resources and rights and capacity to participate within the environments and structures of the society in which one lives. Their contribution continues with explorations of the concepts of relative deprivation and capabilities in relation to our understanding of poverty and social inclusion.

Perspectives on Inclusion, Exclusion and Poverty

Should policies change the structures and conditions that create exclusion or should the marginalized be integrated into the existing mainstream? Perspectives on social inclusion reflect differing assumptions about its root causes and solutions, argue Mitchell and Shillington, and are based on differing ideological views.

One common view sees unemployment as the main cause of social exclusion. The main concern is typically social cohesion, built on the norm of employment. The goal of policy tends to be reduced to employability. The excluded or marginalized are to be lifted over the minimal threshold of exclusion through paid work and incorporated into existing norms. For these authors the focus on the paid labour market ignores the role and value of unpaid work and caring responsi-

bilities; it also obscures gender, race and other inequalities in the labour market.

Another variant on social exclusion identified by Mitchell and Shillington focuses on the perceived moral and behavioural deficiencies of the excluded themselves. The central concern of this approach is the avoidance of dependence, seen as a side effect of income support, which is thought to destroy initiative and self-respect. Work is viewed as a moral necessity. The policy response is typically to increase restrictions on eligibility for and the benefits paid by income support programs.

For Mitchell and Shillington such "anti-exclusion" policies actually reinforce exclusion by recasting their subjects as somehow separate and different from the rest of the hard-working population, defective in skills or other personal attributes. Moreover, the limitations of inclusion through work are evident. In Canada as unemployment has declined significantly, poverty has remained high, many working families have remained poor, and low-wage and precarious employment is fast becoming an entrenched feature of the economy.

Policy solutions that focus on inclusion through the labour market risk simply exchanging one form of exclusion for another: exclusion from employment versus exclusion through marginal forms of employment. A better approach to social inclusion, argue Mitchell and Shillington, is to focus on poverty and inequality and the impacts of exclusion on people's lives. This view of the concept of inclusion puts greater emphasis on the responsibility of the larger society to create inclusive conditions.

Operationalizing Inclusion/Exclusion for Children

While Mitchell and Shillington are critical of narrow definitions of social exclusion and inclusion used to serve ideological ends, they also see potential in exploring these concepts from a comprehensive perspective. For these authors the concept of social exclusion directs attention not just to the fact of exclusion or to its consequences, but also to the institutions and processes that create exclusion. It begins with what we really care about — individual well-being — and asks who is affected and how. Losing one's job, for example, does not necessarily have to lead to poverty and marginalization. Policies affecting employment, income support, education and health can turn disadvantage into exclusion; they can sustain individual capabilities or undermine them. The chapter continues with an exploration of an appropriate framework of dimensions of inclusion and exclusion for children in Canada.

Mitchell and Shillington in this chapter remind us that institutions, agents and processes can be used for inclusion or exclusion, depending on policy intent. For example, housing policies can create marginalized ghettos or economically and socially diverse neighbourhoods. Employment and income support policies can be used to create a low-wage labour pool

or foster a high-wage, high-skill economy that values equality and recognizes the need for work-family balance. The process of policy-making itself can promote exclusion if citizens experience a lack of voice in issues that directly affect them, or it can foster civic participation.

These authors call for policies that promote people's capacities to act as citizens with equal freedom to conduct a life they have reason to value. An agenda of inclusion, they argue, will require supports that not only provide the income necessary to purchase necessities, but also facilitate the conditions to create equality of outcomes in employment, education and health and span the full dimensions of well-being.

Social Inclusion Through Early Childhood Education and Care by Martha Friendly and Donna Lero

This chapter makes the case that, under the right conditions, early childhood education and care (ECEC) can make a significant contribution to social inclusion by supporting children's development, family well-being, community cohesion and equity. However, Canada has made little progress in creating the right conditions that would enable ECEC to strengthen social inclusion. Key structural changes needed to create an integrated, high-quality, accessible system for all preschool children, including those with special needs, are outlined.

Can ECEC contribute to social inclusion?The authors' understanding of social inclusion draws on Amartya Sen's conception that an inclusive society is one in which members participate meaningfully and actively, enjoy equality, share social experiences and attain fundamental well-being. They see inclusion as an active, transformative process that goes beyond remediation of deficits and reduction of risk. Social inclusion promotes human development and ensures that opportunities are not missed — not just for some, but for all children.

The authors note that there is a growing consensus internationally that care and education for young children are inseparable concepts. ECEC services can fulfill a wide range of objectives, including care, learning and social support. At a practical level, ECEC services include childcare centres, other care services like family day care, kindergarten, nursery/preschools and some elements of family resource programs. These activities are intended to enhance child development and well-being, and to support parents, both in and out of the paid workforce. The authors identify four overall goals for ECEC that are associated with social inclusion.

Enhancing Children's Well-being, Development and Prospects for Lifelong Learning

If social inclusion over the life span is enhanced by full development in early childhood of one's talents, skills and capabilities, ECEC programs that support development can play a significant role. There are many inter-related factors that combine in complicated ways to produce children in good health who are confident, content, competent, resilient and socially responsible — or not. ECEC outside the home can have a profound effect. Indeed, it can be a determining factor.

A high-quality program provides intellectual and social stimulation that promotes cognitive development and social competence and forms a foundation for the child's future success. A high-quality program also improves life quality for the child in the here-and-now. High quality is short-hand for characteristics of ECEC that go beyond basic health and safety requirements to support children's development and learning.

Supporting Parents in Education, Training, Employment and Social Life

ECEC services can support parents by helping reduce social exclusion linked to poverty, unemployment, marginal employment, disempowerment and social isolation. Dependable care for children is essential if mothers are to participate in the labour force. Poor accessibility to adequate childcare contributes to gender exclusion from the workforce and to marginalization of women across social classes. Without ECEC services, parents living in poverty do not have access to opportunities for education, training or paid work.

Fostering Social Solidarity and Social Cohesion

Early childhood institutions are forums located in civil society. They can build social cohesion by becoming community focal points for parents, childcare providers, health and social services, and community volunteers. They can bring people together across class, ethnic and racial boundaries. As well they can help children learn tolerance and acceptance of difference in an environment that values diversity.

Providing Equity for Diverse Groups in Society

An inclusive society is one that provides equality of life chances. ECEC has a role in promoting equity through development of capabilities and access to society's resources for all children. Children with disabilities, special learning needs and chronic health problems require programs that welcome them and supports that enable them to participate with other children. For women, childcare is the ramp that provides equal access to the workforce. Without fully accessible services, equality for women cannot be a reality.

What are the conditions that enable ECEC to contribute to social inclusion? Does Canada have them? The authors maintain that ECEC can only play a fully effective role in enhancing social inclusion if certain characteristics of public policy and service delivery are in place. A major contribution in this chapter is a summary of eight policy lessons based on the results of a twelve-nation Thematic Review of ECEC in 1998–2001 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

How do we move from aspirations to reality? The authors argue 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. Written prior to the current (2005) negotiations over a new and major federal childcare initiative in Canada, the chapter identifies key steps that can be taken immediately to strengthen ECEC policy as a form of inclusion. They suggest that considerable knowledge exists to move forward in four good areas of departure:

- systematic planning for quality improvement in both policy and practice;
- including children with special needs effectively;
- policy and service coherence (a good example is ECEC for Aboriginal communities, where recent initiatives have not been integrated); and
- serving the needs of a diverse population more effectively through improved training and centre practices.

Feminist Perspectives on Social Inclusion and Children's Well-Being by Meg Luxton

Meg Luxton starts this chapter with the observation that the current debates on social inclusion and exclusion have had little to say about children. This limitation, she believes, is explained in part by the underlying concepts about families and markets that are central to prevailing liberal political and economic theory. Children are assumed to be the private responsibility of parents, and the only work that counts is market-based.

Luxton argues that the feminist concept of social reproduction offers a corrective. Social reproduction recognizes the bearing and rearing of children as a social responsibility. It views children as citizens and as part of networks of family, community, cultural groups and societal institutions that affect their well-being. It provides a different framework for social inclusion that invites debate about how we maintain and reproduce our society and make children a priority.

Dominant Assumptions

The difficulties involved in generating a child-centred concept of social inclusion, according to Luxton, arise not simply because analysts have not paid attention to children. Rather, they are rooted in the assumptions of classical liberal theory, which understands society as constituted by individuals who interact competitively in markets. These assumptions dominate current thinking. The focus is on the individual relating to the market. Children are understood as the private responsibility of their families and families are assumed to be responsible for making private decisions about whether, when and how many children to have and for generating a livelihood sufficient to support them. Outside intervention is considered acceptable only when parents have put their children at risk.

Luxton explores the fundamental assumptions behind this narrow thinking about children and their rights. As the private responsibility of their parents, for example, children are vulnerable to the circumstances of their caregivers. They are unable to act as independent decision-making agents and are ineligible to make citizenship claims in their own right. Furthermore, the assumption of classical liberal theory that activities are only economically productive if they are market-based limits our notion of "work" to either paid employment or production for exchange in the market. Therefore most childcare and all the unpaid, non-market activities that are involved in raising children are not recognized as work. Caring for children is not seen as making a contribution to the economy and is not considered socially necessary or valuable.

This narrow framework has enormous practical and ideological power. It renders invisible all the activities involved in bearing and rearing children and obscures the political debate about the extent to which children's well-being and care is a private family matter or a social responsibility. It produces policies that take for granted that the nuclear family is responsible for caring for children and that, within the family, women should carry the major load. When policies do not solve the problems, nothing in their articulation invites an assessment of why the policies fail.

An example explored in this chapter is the tendency to blame the breakdown of the nuclear family and the rise in single-parent, mother-led families for an increase in child poverty. As Luxton stresses, however, family separations and lone parenthood do not cause child poverty, and policies developed on that assumption will fail. In reality, child poverty is caused by division of labour by gender, labour market segregation and segmentation, pay inequalities, lack of public support for caregiving and men's widespread reluctance to pay child support. It is these social practices that result in women's poverty and, by extension, impoverish their children. What is required therefore is a rethinking of current assumptions about paid and unpaid work, societal and family responsibilities and our willingness to invest in Canada's children and their well-being.

A Social Reproduction Analysis

The feminist concept of social reproduction challenges the common assumptions about families and markets in liberal theory. Luxton suggests that it offers a compelling argument for the development of socially inclusive policies that will benefit all children in Canada.

Social reproduction puts children, as both dependents and as active members of their society, at the heart of social relations. It recognizes that the conditions under which children are conceived, born and raised produce not just individual adults, but the next generation. Children are not a private hobby of their parents, but a social responsibility of all. They are social actors in their own right, involved in making decisions that affect their lives. Luxton in this chapter explores the implications of the notion of social reproduction with respect to the role of "domestic labour," or unpaid labour in the home, and the responsibilities associated with child bearing and rearing. This perspective understands children as individuals who have rights to make citizenship claims on the world community and on the states, local communities and families in which they live. It recognizes gender, race, ethnicity and class relations as central to the organization of daily life. It rejects the assumption that the culturally normative family is white, western European, heterosexual and two-parent.

Social Inclusion and Children

The concept of social inclusion has been limited, for Luxton, by its use mainly in connection with rights to employment and welfare. These rights do not apply directly to children. But social inclusion has potential strength as a policy approach for children's well-being, especially if it brings to the surface fundamental issues identified through social reproduction analysis.

The issue of work and family is one that can be explored profitably with a social inclusion perspective. Children's well-being depends on the resources of time, energy and money that their parents have to give them. Many families are struggling to balance the competing demands of paid work/household income and unpaid domestic labour/childcare. Regarding this as a conflict for individual families to resolve misses the depth of the issue. At a deeper level, this conflict involves the allocation of costs between producing and sustaining people and the process of private profit maximization. Pivotal is how societies divide costs across gender and age and the degree to which working people bear the costs themselves or have access to services and policies that share the burden. What is at stake is the standard of living available to people in different social locations.

For Luxton, families and states are both key sites of the struggle over the extent to which women must absorb the costs of social reproduction or can demand they be redistributed to men, employers and society as a

whole. In Canada, governments have been unable to decide whether to support women as mothers, workers or both, resulting in policy paralysis and an undeveloped system of support to families and children. The chapter continues with a further exploration of several vital and complex policy issues within this perspective of social inclusion and a social reproduction framework.

A social inclusion focus reveals a contradiction between current neoliberal economic policies, which inevitably exacerbate inequalities, and expressions of political intent to reduce social exclusion, especially that of children. A commitment to social inclusion confronts the way social power is situated. It shows that unequal access to economic resources, political power and social status all affect personal behaviour, regardless of individual intentions. The more individuals and families have to bear the costs of social reproduction, and the more children are the individual responsibility of their mothers in a context that assumes women's primary role is as mothers, the more likely children are to risk poverty and other forms of social exclusion.

Social inclusion as outlined in this chapter assumes that existing social relations, institutions and cultural practices must be transformed in order to accommodate everyone. It implies that the centre must be reconfigured to encompass the practices of those from the margins. This aspect of social inclusion is particularly important when it comes to eliminating inequality while ensuring and supporting diversity. Great care must be taken to ensure that policies aimed at integration do not result in assimilation.

For Luxton therefore a social inclusion approach would represent a major departure from the policies that governments in Canada have pursued since the 1980s, which have reduced public services and left families to cope. Social inclusion policies would be based on a different assumption — that while children have the right to expect support, care and love from their parents, they also have the right to expect other sources of support and care from their society.

Thumbs Up! Inclusion, Rights and Equality As Experienced by Youth with Disabilities by Catherine Frazee

In this chapter Catherine Frazee shows that, perceived through the lens of disability and examined through the eyes of young people, social inclusion is about more than access to participation. It is also about access to respect, selfhood and human community. Inclusion and equality are considered complementary principles, both serving just social outcomes. The chapter highlights how rights-based mechanisms may remedy restrictions on activity, but miss the being and belonging, the sense of self in relationship with others, at the heart of social inclusion.