Social inclusion for Canadian children through early childhood education and care [1]

Perspectives on social inclusion working paper series
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Excerpts from 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". 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. 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 paper first 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.
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