

## A CLOSING NOTE

How can or should we pick up the conference challenge to think more broadly and systematically about a concept of disadvantage among children beyond about how to improve an absolute poverty line? What would be a richer concept? How can it be described if it cannot (initially?) be measured?

The focus—as Jane Waldfogel has noted—should be on a relative measure: Lacking what it takes to participate in one’s society (Townsend) or not having what the “custom of the country requires one to have” (Adam Smith). The interest is in social as well as economic disadvantage.

One possible strategy, we have noted, is to attempt to construct an answer, or at least an approach, by focusing sequentially on various domains and groups that involve a “closing out.” Choices could be made from among the following:

- Unemployment or jobless household
- Poor skills
- Low income
- Bad health
- Involvement in crime
- Family breakdown
- Consumption patterns or living standards below (?) local/regional/national norms
- Disabilities
- Immigrant status
- Non-English speaking household
- Early school leavers
- Neither at school nor in work
- Lack of standard housing arrangements
- Lacking access to standard services (utilities? Social services? Other?).

A list such as this enables one to ask (with Lawrence Aber), who is excluded excluded from what, by what, with what results? It would appear that one needs to look, as appropriate, at institutions, at participants, and at processes; but perhaps (as suggested subsequent to the Conference by Richard Nelson), the analytic process also must include attention to the pathways for normal inclusion. We might expand on this by posing the question—specifically regarding children—what does it mean for children in certain groups to be included as well as excluded?

A faculty group at Columbia has begun to convene around such notions. Individual scholars also could identify research possibilities or room for conceptual papers. We do not believe that these beginnings should be lost.