Human Capital: A New Paradigm?

September 28, 2001 – "The Human Capital Paradigm" was the subject of a conference last month at the Queen's International Institute on Social Policy.

A paradigm constitutes a "world view" that underlies a set of theories and the methodology regarding a particular subject.

For her part, the Director of the Family Network, Jane Jenson was asked whether "human capital" constitutes a "new paradigm". In her presentation in response, she asks questions like, "Why do we think this is a new paradigm?" and "What is the vision of the just society in the human capital approach?" As a new paradigm she finds it too limited.

Human capital is, however, part of a larger paradigm in the making – the "social investment" paradigm. It can be contrasted with what Jenson terms the "social rights" paradigm, in place for several decades after 1945. She compares the definition of social citizenship and role of the state implicit in each.

Speaking of paradigms in this way is always interesting, and perhaps useful, but Jenson counsels against taking the rhetoric for reality. Just as the "social rights" paradigm left out some, and never achieved all its promises, the "social investment" replacement still has large gaps between the "talk" and the "walk".

To access a Powerpoint version of her presentation click here.

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