WORKING PAPER SERIES

PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

# *Feminist Perspectives on Social Inclusion and Children's Well-Being*

Meg Luxton

JUNE 2002

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Laidlaw Foundation.

National Library of Canada Cataloguing in Publication

**Luxton, Meg, 1948 -**
**Feminist perspectives on social inclusion and children's well-being / Meg Luxton.**

(Perspectives on social inclusion working paper series)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-9730740-5-1

1. Children with social disabilities. 2. Children--Social conditions.
3. Children--Economic conditions. 4. Social integration. 5. Feminist theory.
I. Laidlaw Foundation II. Title.

HV745.A6L89 2002 362.7'086'94 C2002-902978-3

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This paper is part of the Laidlaw Foundation's Working Paper Series, Perspectives on Social Inclusion. The full papers in English and summaries in English and French can be downloaded from the Foundation's web site at www.laidlawfdn.org (under Children's Agenda programme). Limited paper copies are available from workingpapers@laidlawfdn.org.

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# 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.

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Executive Director

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# 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.

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## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following for their contribution and commitment to the working papers series on social inclusion: the authors, without whom there would be no working papers; Karen Swift, Frank Stark, Nancy Matthews, Jennifer Keck, Daniel Drache and the forty external reviewers of papers, all of whom provided critical feedback and expert advice at various stages during the editorial process; the members of the Advisory Committee, Children's Agenda Program, Nathan Gilbert, Executive Director, and the Board of Directors, Laidlaw Foundation for their support, interest and critical comments; and Larisa Farafontova, Eva-Marie Dolhai, and Richard Wazana, for their perseverance and skillful assistance at critical stages in the process.

*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.*

# *Feminist Perspectives on Social Inclusion and Children's Well-Being*

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## Putting Children and their Well-Being on the Agenda[1]

Since 1990 when the United Nations first began issuing its Human Development Index, Canada has ranked among the top countries in the world, a ranking that political leaders have proclaimed proudly. [2] However, on the Human Poverty Index, Canada consistently ranks lower, typically around tenth. And when looking specifically at poverty among children, Canada's rank drops even further. A 2000 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report on child poverty in 23 industrialized countries ranked Canada in seventeenth place, below nations like Spain, Greece, Hungary and the Czech Republic and a mere five places above the US, which had a child poverty rate of 22.4 per cent. The report noted that 15.5 per cent of children in Canada live in poverty (UNICEF 2000a). Statistics Canada low-income cutoff figures indicate that child poverty is even higher—19.8 per cent (The Vanier Institute 2000, 116-23; CCPA *Monitor*, September 2000, 23). These figures pose a challenge: why can't Canada, a country in which so many people have one of the highest standards of living in the world, ensure that all children meet, at a minimum, the criteria measured by the Human Development and Human Poverty Indices?

## Defining Social Inclusion from the Perspective of Children

A very limited perspective on children was explicit in the initial formulations on social exclusion, the concept that preceded, and continues to inform, social inclusion. The term social exclusion was coined in 1974 by Rene Lenoir, the French Social Action Secretary of State in the Chirac government, to refer to those "unprotected by social insurance programs, particularly those not covered by employment-based benefits. Originally, the excluded were defined as people with mental and physical disabilities, the suicidal, aged, abused children and youth drop-outs, adult offenders, as well as substance abusers" (Barata 2000, 1). Housewives and other unpaid care providers are strikingly absent, although they fit the criteria. Implicit in this formulation is an assumption that young children, youths in school or making the transition to the labour force, as well as those who care for them, are the private responsibility of their individual families and therefore ineligible for state support.

The term social exclusion was quickly taken up in policy debates as an alternative, or successor, to the term poverty, but although its focus is more general, proponents of social exclusion paid little attention to children. Social exclusion was considered a more useful concept than poverty because it is multi-dimensional, going beyond financial or materi-

al hardship to include a range of social and political relations of inequality that contribute to both material and social deprivation or oppression. The term encompasses a range of issues such as limited access to an income, housing, education, community services and health care.

In Europe, social exclusion has been understood more broadly as related to limits on the extent to which people are able to participate as citizens in their day-to-day lives and in the workings of their society. Berghman (1995), for example, attributes social exclusion to

> *the failure of one or more of the following systems: the democratic and legal system, which promotes civic integration; the labour market, which promotes economic integration; the welfare state system, promoting what might be called social integration; the family and community system, which promotes interpersonal integration.*

Most concepts of social exclusion typically assume its redress is "social inclusion through the exercise of common citizenship rights to employment and to welfare" (Roche and Van Berkle 1997, xix). This formulation serves to exclude children as most citizenship rights are age-specific entitlements such as participating in the political process (suffrage) or the labour force (compulsory schooling and anti-child-labour laws). [3] Similarly, most social welfare provisions relating to children are family-based; children per se have few welfare entitlements. For the most part, debates about social exclusion only relate, indirectly, to children when they discuss the ways in which the social exclusion of particular groups is typically reproduced generationally.

However, social exclusion recognized that some people have only a limited ability to participate in the political process, and many face systemic discrimination based on factors such as ethnicity, national origin, language, racism, sexism, age, class, ability and/or sexual orientation. As a result, the concept of social exclusion was mobilized by various equality-seeking groups to put their issues on the agenda. Anti-racist feminists came up with the terms "margin" and "centre" and effectively employed a strategy of "decentering" to make claims about the importance of their knowledge that challenged prevailing wisdoms and to insist on the power of marginality (hooks 1984). Patricia Hill Collins (1998, 127) describes decentering as the process of "unseating those who occupy centres of power as well as the knowledge that defends their power." She continues (1998, 127)

> *...when in the 1970s and 1980s Black women and other similarly situated groups broke long-standing silences about their oppression, they spoke from the margins of power. Moreover, by claiming historically marginalized experiences, they effectively challenged false universal knowledges that historically defended hierarchical power relations. Marginality operated as an important site of resistance for decentering unjust power relations.*

In response to such arguments by equality-seeking groups, the term social inclusion came to imply more than the opposite of social exclusion, emerging as a more complicated concept that offers greater analytical scope (Freiler May 2001). Social inclusion offers a complex, interactive model that treats all individuals as social actors and assumes that they play a role in shaping their lives while recognizing that their circumstances impose constraints on what is possible for them. Social inclusion highlights the fact that some people have limited or no access to the social resources available to others, and attempts to reduce the barriers to their access to such resources.

However, it recognizes that the solution to inequality is not simply to give those who have been excluded the same formal rights as those who were not excluded. It invites a more intricate analysis by assuming that existing social relations, institutions and cultural practices must also be transformed in order to accommodate everyone. Rather than expecting those "on the margins" to conform more closely to the prevailing norms and practices of those "at the centre," social inclusion implies that the centre must be reconfigured to encompass the practices of those from the margins. One of the values of a social inclusion perspective is that it can allow for the diverse cultural practices and values of various social groups.

Such a perspective is particularly open to children as it asks what is required to ensure that all children, regardless of their circumstances, are accommodated. Activists concerned about disability issues, for example, mobilized such arguments in discussions about whether children with disabilities and special needs are best served by integration into regular schools or by the provision of special schooling. By focusing on inclusion, they were able to ask what needed to change to ensure that children with disabilities or special needs could participate in, and benefit from, the education system as fully as possible.

## A Children's Agenda

Although they do not address efforts to extend social inclusion perspectives to children, international strategies to put children's rights on the agenda offer some important directives. These initiatives crystallized internationally with the UN's 1989 adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC, ratified by 191 nations including Canada, provides a framework for governments to improve the well-being of children. It calls for continuous action and progress in the realization of children's rights based on four general principles:

1. the principle of non-discrimination (article 2)—by which states commit to respect and ensure the rights of all children under their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind;

2. the principle of the best interests of the child (article 3)—in which the interests of the child are recognised as paramount and budgetary allocations should give priority to children and to the safekeeping of their rights;

3. the principle of respect for the child's views and right to participate in all aspects of democratic society (articles 12-15)—which asserts that children are not passive recipients, but actors contributing actively to the decisions that affect their lives;

4. the principle of the child's right to survival and development (article 6)—which claims the right for children to realize their fullest potential, through a range of strategies from meeting their health, nutrition and education needs to supporting their personal and social development (UNICEF November 1998v; UNICEF 2000b, 46-51).

These principles recognize that poverty is only one measure of the position of children and that policies and practices designed to ensure children's well-being must address all

aspects of children's lives. Central to such recognition is an appreciation of "the social"—of the ways in which social structures and practices can shape, and sometimes even determine, the lives of individuals regardless of their own actions. This takes a particularly complicated form with regards to children as they are inevitably subject to their immediate care providers and the larger culture within which they live, and their subjectivity changes with their own development and growing capacity to act on their own behalf. The CRC recognizes what a delicate balance is involved in assuring the rights of children while respecting various family, community and cultural practices.

The CRC assumes that children's well-being depends on children being fully integrated into their society as social actors, with the right to participate in decision-making proceedings affecting their lives (UNICEF 2000b, 50). More importantly, it assumes that the whole society will accept collective responsibility for the well-being of its children.

Recognizing that adolescents are often ignored by policies focused on children, the United Nations makes a point of extending all their principles to include that sector of the population. Central to this is a commitment to "ensure that adolescents participate in decisions that affect their lives, their families and communities, that they support each other as they face the challenges and opportunities of the transition into adulthood, and are actively involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of all of the above activities" (Dick 1999, 4).

The CRC identifies a number of principles for children's rights, deemed essential for ensuring the advancement of children and their well-being. Social inclusion offers a policy orientation that helps implement those principles, by translating abstract assertions of children's rights into more concrete policies and practices. However, efforts to mobilize the concept of social inclusion to advance children's well-being are complicated by the fact that, to date, most of the literature on social exclusion and inclusion is striking for its lack of attention to gender, women, sexism or the feminist analyses intended to correct such inattentions. Most of the social exclusion or inclusion literature takes for granted heterosexual nuclear family forms and gendered divisions of labour, failing to recognize the way such approaches naturalize women's responsibilities for children and obscure what is actually a political debate about the extent to which children's well-being and care is a private family matter or a social responsibility. Such perspectives make it very difficult to formulate policies that both assume and foster children's abilities to become social agents in their own right.

## Feminist Contributions to a Child-Centred Concept of Social Inclusion

The difficulties involved in generating a child-centred concept of social inclusion arise not simply because policy analysts have failed to pay attention to children. Rather they are rooted in the theoretical and political assumptions that underlie current dominant perspectives on social, political and economic organization which understand children as dependents of their parents, unable to act as independent decision-making agents and not eligible to make citizenship claims in their own right.

Contemporary social and economic policies in Canada still reflect the basic assump-

tions of classical liberal theory, which understands society as constituted by individuals who interact competitively in markets. In this framework, the individual is always assumed to be a property-owning man with a dependent wife and children; white, western European, heterosexual nuclear families are culturally normative and render other family forms suspect (Lloyd 1984). Heterosexual nuclear families are assumed to be responsible for generating a livelihood sufficient to support their members and are privately responsible for deciding whether, when and how many children to have, and for raising these children themselves. Outside intervention is typically considered acceptable only if parents are deemed to put their children at risk. From this perspective, children are understood as dependents, the private responsibility of their parents. Even when the individual is considered independently of a family, and even if individuals are understood as including women, the two main principles of liberalism, that the free and self-determining individual enjoys equality of opportunity and individual choice, are not easily applied to children (Weedon 1987, 5). Infants and young children are inevitably dependent and unable to make decisions for themselves, and most children remain significantly dependent at least into their mid- to late teens. They do not conform readily to the individual as understood by classical liberal theory.

Classical liberal theory is also predicated on assumptions that only consider activities economically productive if they are market-based, thereby limiting "work" to either paid employment or production for exchange in the market. This framework has enormous practical and ideological power. It has formed the basis of international economic policies such as the United Nations' National System of Accounts and current World Bank, International Monetary Fund and OECD policies (Waring 1988; Bakker 1994) and in Canada has shaped most federal, provincial and territorial policies (Bakker 1996). This framework means that most childcare—all the unpaid, non-market activities that are involved in caring for children—is not recognized as work. Caring for children is not understood as making a contribution to the economy and therefore, all the rhetoric about motherhood notwithstanding, is not considered socially necessary or valuable (Waring 1988; Folbre 1994, Luxton and Corman 2001).

Children, their generation, care and socialization, pose an unresolved contradiction for classical liberalism (O'Neill 1994). Liberal theory fails to recognize children as people in their own right. It renders invisible all the activities involved in bearing and raising children and makes individual children vulnerable to the particular circumstances and personal idiosyncrasies of their caregivers (Waring 1988; Luxton 1997). It tends to produce a policy framework that both takes for granted the existence and privileges of heterosexual nuclear families where women are primarily responsible for caring for children. All too often, the results reflect the flawed premises. The policy initiatives do not solve the problems and nothing in their articulation invites an assessment of why the policies fail.

For example, implicit in much of the literature on social exclusion and inclusion is a confusion of family form with social relations and economic status where single-parent or mother-headed families per se are identified as problematic for the successful rearing of children. Barata (2000, 2) notes that, at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s, many western European countries identified growing levels of child poverty. Policy analysts attributed this to unemployment, cuts to social programs, the breakdown of the nuclear family and children living in families of lone-support parents. While economic insecurity obviously

increases the likelihood of poverty, the argument that family form or separation lead to child poverty is based on faulty premises. Nuclear family separations and lone-parent families do not cause child poverty and policies developed on that assumption will fail (Reitsma-Street 1989-90, 527; MacDonald 1997, 10-17). In reality, what causes child poverty are gendered divisions of labour, labour market segregation and segmentation, pay inequalities, the lack of public support for caregiving and men's widespread reluctance to pay child support. It is these social practices which result in women's poverty and, by extension, impoverish their children. The more that individual families, and particularly women, are made responsible for providing for children, the more vulnerable children are to the particular circumstances of their families, and the greater the chances that children's well-being is achieved at the expense of women (Luxton and Corman 2001). The policies of the current period, which downplay or deny the extent to which children's situations are determined by those of their parents, are informed by an approach which, at base, neither supports the rights of children nor focuses on their well-being.

To counter the basic assumptions of liberalism, feminists have developed a concept of social reproduction which puts children, as both dependents and active members of their society, at the heart of social relations. This concept assumes that children are not a private hobby of their parents, but social actors in their own right. One main goal of social reproduction is bringing up the next generation, that is, to ensure that children grow up to become contributing adult members of their society. The conditions under which they are conceived, born and raised produce not just individual adults, but the population of the next generation. A social reproduction perspective understands children as individuals who have rights to make citizenship claims on the world community and on the particular states, local communities and families in which they live (Luxton and Maroney 1992).

The work of social reproduction—the efforts required to ensure the day-to-day and generational survival of the population—involves two major activities: income-generating work based on market activities such as paid employment or the production of goods and services to sell, and unpaid domestic labour in the home (Seccombe 1992, 1993; Luxton and Corman 2001). From this perspective, women's (and men's) unpaid labour in the home is regarded not as a private service for their families, but an important and socially indispensable labour that contributes to the production of the population in culturally specific ways. It also contributes to the generation of the labour force, that is, produces workers who are ready and willing to sell their capacities to work in the labour market on a daily and a generational basis (Seccombe 1974, 1992; Luxton 1980; Hamilton and Barrett 1986). It is from this perspective that childbearing and rearing are recognized as central to the process of the generational reproduction of a society, its peoples, its economy and its cultures and values.

However, a social reproduction perspective does more than recognize both the importance of children and the contribution of unpaid caregiving to the well-being of society. What is unstated in the CRC's assumption that children's well-being should be recognized as a collective responsibility of the whole world community is made explicit through feminist perspectives on social reproduction. Any efforts to ensure the social inclusion of children must include an analysis of the ways in which the dynamics of social reproduction play out in particular contexts. Social reproduction is a key process that constitutes and reproduces class,

gender, national origin, ethnicity, race and age relations in a context that is already constituted by state, law and ideology (Maroney and Luxton 1997). It is central in shaping the lives of children by producing them as members of various social groups with differential access to social resources, and thus highlights the shortcomings of assertions such as those on which the CRC depends. In other words, a commitment to social inclusion for children requires its advocates to rethink the premises currently underlying debates about how children are best cared for, by whom, and how to inform policy demands intended to foster children's well-being. [4]

## Children as the Private Responsibility of Their Parents

Throughout most of the twentieth century, Canadian government policies were based on the premise that children were mainly the private responsibility of their parents and that women were wives and mothers with husbands to support them. Social policies assumed mothers would voluntarily provide care for their children and that if mothers were unable to provide such care, it was a family responsibility to make other arrangements (Eichler 1988). A range of social policies provided modest support, such as the family allowance, initiated in Canada in 1945 as a universal benefit to assist families with the costs of child rearing (Baker 1995, 128). Policies were developed for women, especially mothers, who did not have income-earning husbands to support them. These were premised on the principle that mothers would stay at home to look after their children, and provided a (limited) means for them to do so (Ursel 1992; Little 1998; Christie 2000).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, more and more women combined participation in the paid labour force with having small children, and the revitalized women's movement developed the language of social reproduction to explain the constraints such women were under, and a series of demands intended to relieve those pressures (e.g. demands for childcare, pay and employment equity, maternity and parental leaves, benefits for part-time employees and flexible time) (Luxton 2001, 70). Employers and governments came under widespread pressure to increase the support they offered employed parents through a range of measures designed to relieve the pressures involved in managing paid employment and childcare responsibilities (White 1993; Vickers et al. 1993). Canadian governments were under pressure to extend their welfare state provisions but typically responded in a limited manner by using income transfers and tax policies to facilitate parents' choices about whether to keep both parents in the labour force or have one stay home to be with the children.

However, from the 1980s on, governments turned to neo-liberal economic policies aimed at reducing government provisions of social services while fostering private for-profit business (Cohen 1997). They increasingly cut social services and income transfers, assuming that individuals and families would absorb the cuts (*The Toronto Star*, 18 September 1995, A1).

In all areas of policy, from taxes, social assistance, legislated maternity and parental leaves, and in the face of the absence of a national system of early childcare, governments reluctantly recognized that caregivers could not participate in the labour force without some government support. They also recognized that

neo-liberal policies were unsuccessful in reducing either children's poverty or the systemic exclusions suffered by so many. Responding to such challenges, in the 1980s neo-liberal policies were challenged by a paradigm shift that focused on investments in children (Beauvais and Jenson 2001). Nonetheless, the policies they developed continued to put pressure on individuals to provide as much care for themselves and others as possible (Bakker 1996; Brodie 1996). Chow, Freiler, and McCuaig (1999, 1) note the resulting difficulties:

> *Not knowing whether to support women as mothers, workers or both has led to a form of policy paralysis and an un-developed system of support to families with children.*

Such ambiguity, which remains central to the policies that have dominated government practices over the last two decades as neo-liberalism has gained in strength (Luxton 1997), is unsurprising as children continue to be regarded as the private responsibility of their parents. Neo-liberalism assumes that what happens to children in families results from the choices made by the individual adults in those families. The (il)logic of this position was graphically illustrated when, in the face of evidence that children in Ontario were going to school hungry, Premier Mike Harris defended his government's 21.6 per cent cuts to welfare benefits. He denied that poverty was the cause of children's hunger and blamed, instead, women's "lifestyles", arguing that many mothers are too busy with their jobs to make breakfast. He contrasted this situation with one he remembered from 30 years before when "mom was in the kitchen with the hot breakfast cooking as everybody woke up in the morning" (Mittlestaedt 1996). [5]

While issuing an overt call for women to leave paid employment and work unpaid at home is unrealistic, neo-liberal political economy continues to depend on much of the work of caring for children being done as unpaid labour in the household economy. [6] The success of their program depends on widespread acceptance of that idea. By creating nostalgia for the days when unpaid domestic labour was largely done by women as housewives, they lay the basis for the notion that it is only a change in "lifestyles" that is creating the problem.

## Using Social Inclusion to Rethink the Position of Children

One strength of a focus on social inclusion is that it reveals a contradiction between current neo-liberal economic policies, which inevitably exacerbate inequalities, and expressions of political intent that aim 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, limiting interpersonal and group relationships 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 milieu that assumes women's primary role is as mothers, the more likely children are to risk poverty and other forms of social exclusion.

As a result of neo-liberal policies implemented over the past 20 years, the social and economic resources available to all children—except those with well-to-do parents—have markedly declined (Bezanson 2002). Neo-liberal policies put the majority of families with children at a disadvantage. While enacting legislation that makes their costs higher, they

ensure that parents have less time to generate income and are under greater pressures to redistribute what income they do have. Neoliberal policies also reduce or eliminate forms of community support which exacerbates children's vulnerability to their parents' social position, thereby rendering children more vulnerable to the particular situations of their parents. Without explicit policies of wealth redistribution, children are more likely to be deeply affected by their parents' unemployment. The effects are not just financial: the more stress parents are under, the harder it is for them to give their children the quality of care they may aspire to. Where parents are rendered incapable of caring for themselves, their children are at greater risk of suffering terrible deprivations. [7]

In contrast, policies based on a commitment to social inclusion for children would strive to understand the different rewards and penalties that attach to people in dissimilar social locations. They would also promote the recognition that different groups need to exert different levels of effort to achieve similar goals. The more children are embedded in networks of family, community and other social ties and institutions, and the more childcare is understood to be a social or collective responsibility, the greater are their chances of avoiding poverty and experiencing the benefits of social inclusion. State policies concerning funding for students in post-secondary education illustrate these dynamics. While most post-secondary students are legally adults, their access to student loans is mediated by their parents' presumed ability to pay. In the 1960s and 1970s, the combination of relatively low-cost post-secondary education, scholarship (rather than loan) programs, and the availability of summer employment meant that more children than ever before, especially from working-class households, were able to attend post-secondary institutions. In the 1990s and 2000s, as individual students are required to bear a greater proportion of the costs, as loans have replaced grants and the income from student employment covers less of the cost of living, there is growing concern that working-class students, single parents and other people with low incomes will abandon efforts to get post-secondary education. The more society as a whole accepts some responsibility for caring for children, the more all children will have access to the standards of living and well-being typical for those living in Canada.

## Social Inclusion and the Politics of Diversity

One of the most trenchant criticisms levelled against social policies based on classical liberal theories is that they present culturally specific social relations as universal norms, privileging them at the expense of other cultural forms (Sen 2000). In trying to reduce or eliminate social exclusion, policy makers must exercise great care not to fall into the trap of developing policies aimed at integration, which result, instead, in assimilation. Government and church efforts, in the early to mid-twentieth century, to assimilate Aboriginal children offer a tragic example of the ways in which efforts to eliminate diversity in fact produced greater inequality, the social costs of which are still being measured (*The Globe and Mail*, 11 December 2000, A3). At the same time, inequalities are produced, reproduced and changed through social differentiation. Policies that accept existing differences uncritically and reify them may easily produce or intensify inequalities. For example, protective labour legislation intended to recognize differences between women and men

(such as forbidding women's employment in mining or preventing women from working at night in heavy industry) resulted in discrimination against women, making it hard for them to get well-paid jobs or earn as much as their male co-workers (Luxton and Corman 1991, 84-5; Keck 1998).

Equality-seeking, anti-poverty and anti-oppression activists argue that in recognizing social difference, there is a delicate balance between reinforcing and reducing inequality; the challenge is how to ensure and support diversity while eliminating inequality. As Floya Anthias (1997, 256) notes:

> *The issue of inclusion is not an issue of integration, but involves difficult questions about how diverse cultures and groupings can achieve representation on an equal level and as constituencies of advocacy, as well as issues relating to individual social and political rights.*

Key feminist demands suggest the kinds of complex policy initiatives that would facilitate such goals. Calling for a multi-pronged approach, feminism advocates "affirmative action" measures that recognize the consequences of systemic discrimination, such as affirmative action hirings (Abella 1984), while simultaneously pursuing measures that both increase social appreciation of women's traditional attributes and activities (Luxton and Vosko 1998) and foster similar treatment for women and men (Kome 1983). Although it is not couched in the language of social inclusion, the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified guidelines for strategies both to set in motion reparations for past injustices and to foster future dynamics that reduce inequality without eliminating diversity. It calls for four principles of recognition, respect, sharing and responsibility (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996, 675-97). Such principles would be appropriate criteria for social inclusion policy making.

The value of a social inclusion perspective lies, therefore, in its potential to challenge existing inequalities, especially socio-economic disparities, while respecting and promoting diversity. Translated into policy this typically means combining various affirmative action strategies, designed to overcome the effects of systemic discrimination, with policies developed to transform the mainstream to make it more accommodating of minorities. In Canada, a world dominated by English-language speakers, providing Francophone children with French-only schooling may honour their language rights but result in their subordination in the labour market. Instead, a genuinely bilingual school system may offer greater protection for French-language rights by permitting French speakers schooling in their own language, ensuring their capacities in English and increasing the number of English speakers who understand French. Full inclusion would require policies that reach beyond the school system to create a climate where French speakers are not ghetto-ized in particular regions or jobs, but rather valued for their language skills. Similarly, in a system permeated by homophobia, providing a gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and transgender-positive school may keep some young people in school and protect them from abuse, but only if it is accompanied by an anti-homophobia program throughout the entire school system will there be any possibility of systemic change.

Feminist pedagogies, for example, have noted the important difference between classroom practices that are non-sexist and non-racist and those that are anti-sexist and anti-racist. Where the former aim for a social inclusion based on the premise that everyone gets treated in the same way, the latter recognizes that sexism and racism exist and produce dis-

criminatory and oppressive practices that permeate daily life and that pedagogical practices must therefore consciously aim to counter discrimination. Social inclusion, from this perspective, will only result when systemic oppression is acknowledged, the different social locations of children in the classroom are identified as a source of strength and their diverse experiences are recognized and validated.

The most challenging impact of policies of social inclusion is the fact that efforts to increase social responsibility for children disrupt existing power relations. Social inclusion, if fully realized, means that those who are the main beneficiaries of inclusion are those with the least power—children and women, people with disabilities or who are Aboriginals or First Nations, immigrants, racialized, working-class and poor people. Those who currently hold power and are members of groups that have had the benefits of social inclusion for generations stand to lose their relative privileges and may be challenged to share their power in ways that cannot be anticipated by policy makers when they commit themselves to developing and implementing radically new practices.

## Social Reproduction and Social Inclusion: Implications for Children's Policy

The term social reproduction enables us to name processes which are key to what happens to children as they are born, grow up and become full adult members of their society. Any efforts to ensure social inclusion for children have to take account of these processes. There is a long tradition of discriminating against children on the basis of the form of their birth family. Until the 1970s in Canada, children born to a woman and man who were legally married to each other were considered the legal children of those two adults, regardless of the child's actual biological parentage or the adults' actual relationship at the time of the birth. Children born to legally married adults were recognized in law and socially; children born to adults not legally married were considered illegitimate in law and were often discriminated against socially. Over the past 30 years, changing patterns of cohabitation, marriage, divorce and sexual practices have loosened the link between heterosexual marriage and child-bearing and significantly altered the relationship between family form and child rearing. In the late 1970s, changes in the law ended the legitimate/illegitimate distinction and widened the range of potential legally recognized parents.

However, a heterosexual and marriage-based morality still plays an important role in the ways children are assessed. It is reflected in the media's use of the coy phrase "love children" to describe children born to parents who were not legally married to each other at the time the children were conceived and born.[8] Likewise, children of lesbian and gay parents are subject to homophobic prejudices (Arnup 1997; Gavigan 1997); children whose mothers apply for social assistance are assumed to live in poverty because they live in single-parent families (Little 1997), and many Aboriginal children whose birth parents are deemed by social service personnel to be unable to provide adequate care are assumed to be without family, even when others in their community are willing or even eager to care for them (Monture-Angus 1995). Current policies presume that biological fathers, regardless of their actual involvement in the day-to-day care of children have a financial responsibility to support their offspring. Following this logic, social agencies put pressure on mothers on welfare to identify the "sperm donor" so he can be forced to contribute to the child's care.

Policies of social inclusion would, in contrast, guarantee that all children have the right to a decent standard of living regardless of their biological parents' willingness or ability to be involved in their support and care. They would ensure that children's well-being does not depend on the marital status of their biological or social parents, emphasizing instead the child's well-being as a member of the community in which she or he is raised, thus bringing to life the vision enshrined in the CRC, that childcare is the concern of the "whole world community." In short, to succeed in full, policies aiming to ensure children's social inclusion must continue the trends of the last several decades by working to reduce or eliminate the central role that family form currently plays in determining children's legal and social status.

What such a formulation of social policy also reveals is that, while a specific focus on children in their own right is essential, children's well-being is directly linked to that of the people responsible for raising them. In the contemporary political environment, discussions of child poverty have obscured the fact that children are poor because their parents, usually their mothers, are poor, and just as problematically, have failed to acknowledge that children are well-off because their parents are. Policies aimed at social inclusion for children that do not address the circumstances of their caregivers are likely to fail. Yet current social structures and political policies render it inevitable that child rearing is a private responsibility. They are premised on the assumption that individual parents, extended families and the immediate circle of caregivers have the major responsibility for the well-being of individual children, an assumption which puts children at risk. As a result, we are caught in a peculiar double-bind in which, as Marge Reitsma-Street (1989-90, 521) notes, young people only have the legal right to adequate care, educational and recreational opportunities if they are actually in the care of the state:

> *These rights to food, shelter, and so on cannot be claimed by young people in their own family groups since there are no mandatory provisions ensuring that family groups receive the help they might need to feed, clothe, educate, and develop their offspring.*

While state regulations do provide the means to remove children from dangerous familial situations, making a child a ward of the state is neither a measure of social responsibility, nor a means to foster social inclusion for the child. Indeed, current evidence overwhelmingly proves that the actual resources provided after a child is removed from a family are rarely sufficient. As Karen Swift (1995, 171) argues, "their futures are far from ensured through these repeated rescue operations." Swift goes on to draw particular attention to the way state intervention hides the actual problems facing families whose children are deemed at risk:

> *...help offered through child welfare agencies departs in almost every way from our usual professional ideas about what constitutes real help. Procedures through which this help is offered often conceal or distort the very serious problems many of these parents face, and they conceal as well the class-based nature of the concept of neglect itself (1995, 170).*

In contrast, policies premised on the belief that the social inclusion of children requires their society as a whole to share responsibility for their care would invert the current practices.

They understand the welfare of children as an effect of the fact that primary caregivers have the resources and support needed to provide adequately for each child. Furthermore,

social inclusion recognizes that primary caregivers are located in communities, and that support and services should be available to them and their children alike. A British study of children's literacy offers an excellent example of the benefits that can derive from policies which are developed out of sensitivity to this fact. It not only found a close association between the literacy rates of parents and children, but recorded that efforts to encourage literacy in the children seemed to work best when parents were included as well:

> *Parents' educational levels are important determinants of their children's. Sixty per cent of children in the lowest reading attainment group had parents with low literacy levels; only 2 per cent had parents with high literacy. Attempts to improve family literacy, parents and children together, look promising (Sparkes 1999, 3).*

It should be clear from my sustained references to the potential enshrined in the CRC's formulation of a community-based system of childcare that I do not support any position which tries to privilege mothers as the primary caregivers of children, because women are primarily responsible for the caregiving aspects of child rearing. However, it is impossible not to recognize that children's well-being is closely linked to the specific status of their mothers, and thus, to the more general status of women in the society as a whole. The United Nations has itself made this point:

> *It has become increasingly recognized that women's rights and well-being are central to both human development and the realization of children's rights. It is clearer than ever that unequal gender relations and wide gender gaps in social, economic, political and civic spheres do not just deny the individual rights of girls and women—they reduce human capabilities as a whole (May 2000, 6).*

There is considerable evidence, in Canada and internationally, which proves that women's education and literacy levels directly correlate to the well-being of their children. Extensive statistical evidence based on historical and comparative studies of countries and regions show clear links between women's education and literacy rates, their ability to earn an independent income, their access to property rights, their general standing in society, and the achievement of lower fertility rates, lower mortality rates of children, increased educational opportunities for children, especially girls, and increased spending on children especially for food, clothing and school supplies (Sen, Germain, and Chen 1994; Prentice et al. 1996, 469-73). The social value or status of the primary caregiver appears to have an impact on the status of children as well. Nonetheless, the practice persists whereby, when women work long hours in their homes, their activities are not recognized as work and are not included in the accounting of the respective contributions of women and men to household economy. When women work for pay, their contribution to the family economy is valued differently and becomes more visible. The combination of visibility and economic power increases the status of women and has a direct impact on the status of their children—a status which, again, is explicitly gendered, in that their daughters seem especially to benefit (Stiglitz 1998). As the 2000 UNICEF report to the UN General Assembly Economic and Social Council notes:

> *...the greater a role the woman plays in decision-making, particularly with regard to household expenditure, the better off her children are likely to be. Therefore, future action for children must recognize the importance of increasing women's opportunity for education, employment and reproductive health in order to increase their bargaining power in the household (2000, 8).*

Internationally, women's and children's social exclusion is significantly determined by the fact that caregiving, especially of children, is not valued in current economic and social policy analysis. Despite their recent recognition of "human capital," economists have not paid attention to the relationship between social reproduction and the production of goods and services in the market (Picchio 1992). Their focus on GNP to the exclusion of social reproduction permits governments to reduce health, education, childcare, elder care and all other forms of care, to the status of "economic expenditures" and to exclude any consideration of the time devoted to the care and education of the next generation from the macroeconomic category of investment (Folbre 1994). In this formulation, children become "consumer goods" that adults may choose to have, rather than valuable members of society.

To counter this tendency, feminists contend that efforts to put children and their concerns at the top of the agenda require a revaluing of them as well as of those who provide their care. Arguing that social inclusion for women depends on recognizing and valuing the unpaid work of caregiving, they have called for changes to the National System of Accounts so that caring for children is recognized as a vital, socially necessary activity and that women's unpaid caregiving is included in the calculations used to determine economic policies.[9] They advocate a change in priorities, understanding that this requires a complicated and multi-faceted revisioning of current policies and practices. Their suggested changes derive, in particular, from the need to provide the means by which caregivers will acquire the time and resources for childcare, and they include in their ambit a consideration of everything from adequate housing and incomes to maternity and parental leaves, to shorter working days, weeks and years so that caregivers have more time with their children. Their thinking, and the policy proposals to which it gives rise, profoundly challenge existing assumptions that families, usually mothers, can and will act as a reserve army of unpaid labour, taking care of needs that are not met elsewhere (Luxton and Corman 2001).

A commitment to social inclusion requires us to rethink all our current assumptions about the organization of paid employment, unpaid childcare, and the extent to which we as a society are prepared to put resources into our children and their well-being. Policies to foster social inclusion would attempt, by socializing caregiving more, to reduce children's dependence on their primary caregivers, give parents more time to be with their children and strengthen community ties among parents, childcare workers and children (Luxton 2001). One such initiative is the provision of childcare from infancy for all children at costs that all parents can afford, while simultaneously publicly recognizing and valuing caregiving by, for example, extending maternal and parental leaves, linking childcare and school hours more closely to hours of employment for parents (or reducing shift work for parents), increasing the pay of childcare workers (Cleveland and Krashinsky 2001). Could it also mean that non-relatives gain the right to claim parental leave if they are actually involved in looking after an infant? Recognizing the research that shows that a troubled adolescent may need only one caring relationship with an adult to overcome her/his difficulties, could any adult demand paid leave if they were actively involved in helping a distressed teenager?

Just as social inclusion policies combine initiatives to reduce children's dependence on their immediate caregivers with efforts to both free and support caregivers so they have more time and resources for their children, such policies also combine initiatives that recognize

children as dependents with efforts to support children as social agents in their own right. This dual position poses significant challenges to social policy initiatives based on social inclusion. As the United Nations CRC recognizes, children embody both the rights of individuals and the rights of their families, communities and cultures. If social inclusion policies hope to centre on children, how might they balance the rights of parents to raise their children within traditions the parents value with the rights of children to be assured that their upbringing will provide them with the best chances possible to be fully integrated members of their society? And in a multicultural society and an increasingly global society, who decides what is appropriate and what should be publicly supported and funded?

The tensions and contradictions inherent in these circumstances are revealed in the controversies about the adoption of children from impoverished, or from ethnically- or racially-different communities by white, middle-class Canadians. While some argue that the well-being of individual children is improved by the material and emotional resources and cultural normativity of their adoptive families, others critique such adoptions as a form of either elitism or class, race or cultural genocide. As long as private parenting remains dominant, there will be a logic supporting the claims of those who are closer to the centre and well-to-do that they can provide a better environment for the child than parents on the margins or with fewer resources. [10]

Children raised as whites, who later discover they have Aboriginal roots, have raised troubling questions about the relative weight and value of secure, loving commitment from their adoptive parents and the value of a sense of cultural belonging. A generation of Chinese-born Canadian girls is ten years away from making their contribution to this debate. [11]

A focus on the rights of children, independently of their parents, raises important questions about, for example, what an education policy based on social inclusion would look like.

Some might claim that public education ensures that all children have the same educational opportunities and therefore reject both private and home schooling. Others argue that respect for diversity involves parents' rights to choose alternatives to public education. Canada has legally recognized the right of parents to raise their children in the parents' religious tradition and Ontario has funded Catholic schools. As other religious denominations demand similar funding privileges, some people have raised concerns about the effect of differentiated schooling on public life. Similarly, at present parents have the right to home schooling as long as they cover basic curriculum, but some critics worry about whether home schooled children learn to work in groups or to relate to other adults effectively. Many parents who take their children out of the public system object to their taxes paying exclusively for public education. Others object to public revenues supporting private schooling.

Similarly, troubling questions arise when parents insist on their right to use physical punishment to discipline their children in a society that is struggling to eliminate interpersonal violence, and in an international context where peacemaking efforts have increasing importance. What criteria distinguish children's rights to freedom from violence from parents' rights to discipline their children? Do community groups that assume that child rearing practices affect the quality of their society have any right to intervene? Who decides and on what basis? What criteria can be applied to children who demand their right to determine their own lives when the adults in their imme-

diate circle consider their decisions inappropriate? And what kinds of social support might such children be entitled to if their parents make obedience a criterion for support? Should the policy direction encourage children to stay under parental authority, or provide the opportunity for children to live independently of parents in supervised group settings or on their own? If a young person rejects her parents' demand that she get married, insisting instead on staying in school, thus forfeiting their support, what assistance, if any, should she expect—social assistance, tuition, housing? If she decides to leave school, live on the street and work as a squeegee person, should she be entitled to similar support or is public assistance only available to those whose activities are directly linked to future labour force participation?

I suggest that a multi-pronged approach, similar to that advocated for supporting diversity while advocating equality, guide policy making in this area. Such an approach would recognize the consequences of children's dependency, while simultaneously pursuing measures that both increase social responsibility for children and encourage children's participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. It would also understand that a measure of the well-being of children reflects, better than any other measure, the well-being of their society.

Efforts to respect children's agency would encourage policies and regulations that incorporate children wherever possible. These might include simple practices such as including children in parent-teacher interviews, thus potentially creating a place for children to raise their concerns. Student councils in schools and community organizations could strengthen children's ability to learn about issues and speak out effectively about their concerns. Various international conferences such as the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women have made a point of including child delegates. Another way of developing policies that respect children involves moving away from age-based categories to those based on evolving capacities and abilities. For example, most provinces and territories impose age limits on those applying for drivers' licences but many children living in rural and northern communities begin driving sooner as they help with farm labour, hunting and bush activities or simply confront the lack of alternative transportation. Skill-based driving tests might provide a more useful screen. Similarly, voting rights are arbitrarily age-specific, a policy that has been criticized by those who point out that young people can join the army and fight in wars several years before they can vote for the government that declares war. Are curious, well-informed 10 year olds more or less capable of voting than legal adults who ignore what is happening around them?[12]

Attempts to put into practice principles that support children as social agents in their own right require a reallocation of resources, first to ensure that all children have access to top-quality childcare, schooling and recreation from infancy to adulthood. Second, fostering children's inclusion involves investing more in community-based services for children, teenagers and their parents or care providers such as parent-support groups, toy-lending libraries, health clinics, recreation centres and group homes as well as supporting a whole range of services through which children and caregivers can meet, keep an eye on each other, develop friendship and support networks and enjoy themselves. Such publicly funded programs would have as a central commitment the development of children's physical, intellectual and psychosocial capacities to their full potential. They would also depend on an active commitment by all levels of government, and state funded agencies such as schools, welfare agencies and employment centres to anti-oppression

initiatives at all levels from curriculum and programming to service provision, hiring and promotion. This would require greater investment in public education to improve the quality of schools generally, and in particular for students with special needs. It would make post-secondary education affordable or free for all qualified students to ensure that social benefits make an impact across generations as much as across existing social classes.[13]

While such proposals complement current policy orientations that advocate investments in children (Beauvais and Jenson 2001), they are contrary to prevailing government policy orientations toward reducing government spending, cutting taxes, and expecting individuals and families to rely more on each other and less on government services. As a result, they pose a challenge to children's advocates and policy makers: what levels of social exclusion are we willing to tolerate and for which children? What rates of child poverty are acceptable? Stated positively: what investments of money, time and other resources are we willing to make to ensure the social inclusion of all children in Canada? These are complex political questions that a social inclusion perspective addresses by assuming that at least three criteria that recognize the child as a social agent should be considered: that children participate in decisions that affect their lives and be involved in turning those decisions into action based on their evolving capacities; that while children have the right to expect support, care and love from their parents and other immediate caregivers, they also have the right to other sources of support and care if they need them; and that children have the right, as individuals, to make citizenship claims on their society. There are, of course, no simple answers to the questions I have raised in this paper, but a public recognition that such questions are not a reflection of the private troubles of individual families, but part of larger social issues about how we maintain and reproduce our society, would at least make the debate more public and invite social, rather than individual solutions.

# Endnotes

[1] The Laidlaw Foundation's initiative, and the discussions it prompted, have produced a significant contribution that focuses specifically on the usefulness of social inclusion as a policy approach for children. I want to thank the Laidlaw Foundation and especially Christa Freiler for making it possible for me to participate in this discussion. I also thank Christa Freiler, four anonymous reviewers, Kate Bezanson and the members of the Feminist Political Economy study group, Jane Springer and Vee Farr for their comments on previous drafts of this paper.

[2] The Human Development Index measures longevity, levels of education and standards of living. The Human Poverty Index measures the percentage of people expected to die before age 60, the percentage of adults whose ability to read and write is inadequate, and deprivation in overall economic provisioning reflected by access to health services, safe water and the percentage of children under five years who are underweight. See the United Nations *Human Development Report* for each year from 1990-2000. For definitions of the Human Development Index and the Human Poverty Index, see Human Development Report (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998): 14-15.

[3] Robert MacDonald argues that his 1997 book *Youth, the 'Underclass' and Social Exclusion* is the first British attempt to investigate "the processes of social exclusion that affect vulnerable young people" (1997, 1) but it too focuses primarily on unemployment, training, the labour market, homelessness and crime, as they relate to teens or young adults. It only addresses parenting in a peripheral way and the experiences of young children are not addressed.

[4] In the course of working on this paper, I was surprised by comments from several people who took for granted that feminism, both historically and in the current period, has paid little attention to children or that feminist demands for women's equality have been at the expense of children. For example, the initial proposal for this working paper began: "The well-being of children had tended not to figure prominently in the 'feminist project' of achieving equality for women." Later, one anonymous reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper claimed that "children have been largely absent in feminist theory" and suggested that I "discuss the tensions in feminist theory around children a bit more" (Reviewer #3). I completely disagree with such claims. I think children have figured prominently in feminist theorizing and political practice since the eighteenth century. My guess is that prevailing media discussions of feminism which tend to present a caricature of a narrow liberal feminism as if it were the only feminism may explain the prevalence of such ideas.

[5] His language clearly marginalized women who, as they were serving in the kitchen, were not included with "everybody."

[6] In the winter of 2002, treasurer Jim Flaherty pushed the logic of the Conservative Party's policy even further when he proposed to cut most or all government funding for childcare.

[7] In 2002, some of the elders in Davis Inlet appealed to the government for help with glue-sniffing addictions among young children. Media accounts of the situation showed that some adults in the community were themselves substance abusers. Their own experiences in residential schools, com-

bined with their inability to rely on the bush for economic subsistence and the lack of effective alternative sources of economic livelihood, resulted in their inability to care for their children (*The Globe and Mail*, 7 December, 2000, A19; *The Toronto Star*, 11 December, 2000, A6).

[8] An example of this hit the media in December 2000 when the newly re-elected mayor of Toronto, Mel Lastman, was sued by a woman who was his lover for 14 years and by her two adult sons, who claimed Lastman was their birth father although he had never publicly acknowledged them as such. An article in The Toronto Star referred to "the matter of the two love children he allegedly fathered during the affair" ( *The Toronto Star*, 2 December, 2000, A5).

[9] This demand was most clearly articulated in the 1995 *Platform for Action*, the official document of the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, Beijing, China. Initially objections to collecting such data were based on claims that it could not be collected. Subsequent initiatives have disproved those claims. For example, the United Nations (1991) estimates that women's unpaid work internationally is worth about $4 trillion annually. The General Social Survey indicates that in 1992 people in Canada performed at least 25 billion hours of unpaid work, 95 per cent of which was domestic labour—looking after children and caring for the home. Statistics Canada estimates that this labour is equivalent to about 13 million full-time jobs, is worth about $234 billion, and equals about 4 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product—and that women did two-thirds of it (Statistics Canada 1992; Chandler 1994).

[10] This has often proved an effective claim in legal custody disputes where the higher income parent, or the father who has remarried and has a stay-at-home wife, is awarded custody in "the best interests of the child" (Boyd 1989).

[11] The Chinese government's one child policy, combined with a preference for boys, has produced a large number of abandoned girls in China. The Chinese government has co-operated with Canadians who want to adopt, so there is now a significant population of Chinese-born girls adopted by Canadian parents. In 2001, the oldest of these was about 10. Many of their parents assume that as young adults, these children will have questions about why they were born, given up for adoption and adopted by overseas, i.e. Canadian, parents.

[12] Carl Keast, a grade five student, was studying the Charter of Rights and Freedom. The summary given him by his school said that the Charter entitled everyone to vote. He pointed out the error, noting that 10 year olds are not enfranchised.

[13] The only Canadians to have access to anything like the programs outlined here was the generation of World War Two veterans, their partners and children. Many of them benefited from state support such as day care centres during the war and educational grants and subsidized mortgages after the war. That generation was relatively the wealthiest in Canadian history, suggesting that public investment in social reproduction may be an important way to generate high levels of social productivity and standards of living (Pat Armstrong personal communication).

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