

Dr. Julia Preece

Centre for Research and Development in Adult and Lifelong Learning, University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK

## **Gender issues for active citizenship**

### **ABSTRACT:**

Recent feminist literature has deconstructed some normative assumptions about citizenship. The changing European context is also raising interest in new ideas about citizenship. This paper explores the concept of active citizenship from a gender perspective and discusses how men and women seem to be positioned in private (family) and public (political) domains. It draws on empirical research, primarily from the UK but as part of a European multi-country study involving Slovenia, the Netherlands, Spain and Finland. The theoretical focus is the relationship between power and discourse. This perspective provides an analytical tool for exploring how gender has been understood in the construction of citizenship values in Europe. The paper starts with the argument that the concept of citizenship is gendered. This means that the way men and women learn what is valued in terms of active citizenship determines their identity as citizens, their perceived entitlements as members of a given society and their perceived role within society.

The aim of the study was to investigate how people learn to be active citizens with particular reference to the changing contexts of globalisation and European integration. The study included a qualitative investigation into how people's personal life histories demonstrated their learning of citizenship values and practices. The overall research aimed to investigate how people acquire their understanding of, and ability to, contribute to active citizenship in the domains of work, state, family and civil society. The investigation looked for the ways people made meaningful connections between their experiences and how they then acted out citizenship roles and responsibilities. These meaningful connections would affect people's values, identities and decisions throughout their lifespan. A gender specific dimension was included to explore the following issues:

1. What values and attitudes have influenced decisions by men and women over their lifespans to undertake citizenship activity?

2. Are there particular features of the present environmental and social conditions which women and men face differently?
3. Are there particular ways in which women and men give meaning to their experiences and their identities?
4. What are the implications for a future agenda for citizenship education that incorporates a gender perspective?

Lifelong learning implications of the findings highlight that the learning of citizenship values needs to include a more pluralistic understanding of gender relationships, particularly in relation to family roles. The final section analyses different attempts to re-define a gender sensitive concept of citizenship, concluding with the argument for an ethical education that would empower women to play a more equally recognised citizen role in societies.