

Active and inclusive citizenship for women: Democratic considerations for fostering lifelong education

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Recent discourses in lifelong learning (Elliott, 2000, Martin, 2003, Welton, 2001) have focused on the importance of active and inclusive citizenship. This paper examines factors to create a more inclusive learning environment for women to engage as active citizens within both educational contexts and the broader society. I begin by examining how the concept of deliberative democracy has been taken up in discourses in lifelong learning, drawing upon critical feminist theory to consider criticisms regarding how democratic approaches to lifelong learning have been undermined by the effects of globalized capitalism. Challenging the focus on lifelong learning and the marketplace (Gouthro, 2002a), this paper explores three democratic considerations to foster lifelong learning for women; a) structural gendered inequalities that situate women at a disadvantage in accessing and participating fully in educational contexts, b) a narrow definition of lifelong learning that focuses on the marketplace which serves to exclude, overlook, and diminish women's learning potentiality, and c) the need to consider gender as a complex variable within the broader discourse of education for inclusion. My paper is informed by a current SSHRC (Social Science and Humanities Research Council) funded research study that examines lifelong learning trajectories for women in Canada and a current CCL (Canadian Council on Learning) funded grant on women and active citizenship in Nova Scotia. I conclude with recommendations regarding pedagogical practices for

democratic educators and suggestions to inform policy development in lifelong learning.

Deliberative Democracy, Active Citizenship, and Lifelong Learning

The importance of democracy is a consistent theme that emerges in discussions around adult education. Lifelong learning is linked with developing an active and engaged citizenship, through what many critical theorists (Habermas, 2001, Gutmann & Thompson, 2004, Welton, 1998) term ‘deliberative democracy’. The capacity to develop well reasoned arguments, to critically assess evidence, and to participate in dialogue with other citizens, are all fundamental prerequisites for an active and engaged citizenship. Habermas (2001: 278-279) clarifies how democratic will-formation informed by discourse theory derives its legitimacy from ‘on the one hand, the communicative presuppositions that allow the better arguments to come into play in various forms of deliberation and, on the other, procedures that secure fair bargaining conditions’. Therefore, decision making is a dialogical process, whereby all participants must be provided with opportunities to participate equitably, in order to make decisions in a fair and reasoned manner. Gutmann and Thompson (2004: 3) state that ‘most fundamentally, deliberative democracy affirms the need to justify decisions made by citizens and their representatives.’ Welton (1998: 370) argues that the notion of ‘deliberative democracy’ is consistent with ‘core values’ in ‘socially responsible adult education’, as ‘we have a commitment to the enlightened, relatively autonomous and enlightened learner; that social learning processes are central to the formation of the active citizen; and that we have an obligation to foster discussion, debate and dialogue among citizens.’ However, as Fraser (1995) and other feminists (Landes, 1995, Pitanguy, 2002, Preece, 2002) have pointed out, women have

frequently been marginalized or excluded from public deliberation, thus diminishing their ability to participate fully as active citizens.

Lifelong learning has often garnered support as a means of ensuring that citizens can participate actively in the broader society by fostering literacy and employment skills, as well as the capacity of individuals to make more informed decisions around issues such as health care, parenting, and governance. Stromquist (2003: 9) argues that literacy can be regarded as a political project to assist women to engage more actively as citizens. Attaining literacy skills places women in a better position to advocate for their rights regarding income and health care, while challenging the underlying gender ideologies that put women in a more vulnerable position in society, by addressing concerns such as sexual assault and domestic violence.

In the 1970's, the pivotal UNESCO report, *Learning to Be* (Faure, Herrera, Kaddoura, Lopes, Petrovsky, Rahnama, and Ward, 1972) argued that opportunities for lifelong education should be considered a basic human right. Lifelong learning was perceived to have many ameliorative effects that could serve to improve the conditions of humans across the globe.

Over recent decades, however, broader democratic goals have gradually been eroded by the rising influence of the marketplace on educational discourses. Increasingly, the support that governments, universities, and corporations lend to lifelong education ventures is based on the belief that citizens need to continually learn new skills and adapt to a rapidly evolving global marketplace (Methven and Hansen, 1997, Edwards, 1997). While broader notions of lifelong learning outside of the paid workplace may be acknowledged, the main focus, rationale, and willingness

to provide financial support for education is usually connected to a bottom-line mentality that focuses primarily on ‘learning for earning’.

Within this context, education is no longer perceived to be primarily a responsibility of the government for all of its citizens. In examining UK policies, Ian Martin argues that (2003: 568) ‘essentially, as the state has sought to reduce its role in the provision of services, so it has encouraged citizens to become more self-sufficient (and self-interested) consumers or customers —as distinct from supposedly dependent welfare clients’. When education is perceived as an individual responsibility, each person must situate him/herself in the most advantageous position within what Beck (1992) has named a ‘risk society’. Under these conditions, predictably, marginalized groups are increasingly disenfranchised. A competitive and individualistic approach towards lifelong education minimizes the importance of social justice considerations when fostering educational opportunities, further disadvantaging women and minority groups.

In their research on lifelong learning, Gorard, Reeves & Fevre (1999) discuss how individuals must map their own learning trajectories throughout their lifetime. Preliminary research from my SSHRC study on women’s lifelong learning trajectories in Canada reveals some of the factors that complicate ‘individual’ learning pathways, indicating that the model of the autonomous learner is more a reflection of masculine than feminine experience. Women’s life courses and decisions around education are intricately linked with gendered responsibilities as they respond to the needs of others – husband’s careers, children’s education, and care for elderly parents.

Recent discussions on educational policy take up Giddens (1998) concept of the ‘Third Way’. Perkins, Nelms and Smyth (2004: 1) explain that the Third Way has been presented as an alternative ‘between neo-liberalism and the post-war welfare

state'. It is based on notions of human capital theory, with the assumption that there will be economic payoffs if a society broadens access and opportunities for lifelong learning. However, as some critics (Lister, 2003: 433) point out, the focus of these policies, particularly with regards to providing additional support to children, emphasizes the value of 'the future worker-citizen more than democratic-citizen who is the prime asset of the social investment state'. While Lister (2003) believes that this is still an improvement on previous social policy in the UK as it provides additional resources that will benefit children, it is still problematic because the primary focus on learning is linked with the marketplace. While having an educated workforce is a good thing, as Perkins, Nelms, & Smyth (2004: 15) note,

Valuing families, communities, cultural practices, the environment and those population groups ill-suited to the labour market calls for broader social policy goals and a recognition of other forms of contributions as well as the simple one of economic participation.

As the divide between the rich and the poor is widens, and many citizens feel excluded from deliberations around democracy (Martin, 2003), adult educators need to carefully assess what they mean when they take up notions of citizenship and learning. When we invest in lifelong education, what kind of learning is being fostered?

Using a critical feminist perspective, I argue there is a need to for broader, democratic beliefs to inform educational practices and policies. Critical theorists in adult education have drawn upon the work of the German philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, to envision a communicative approach towards learning that supports democratic ideals. Michael Welton (2001: 32) argues that 'the central question for

civil societarian adult educators and citizens is simply this: who can place issues on the agenda and determine what direction the lines of communication take?’ Are practices and policies in lifelong learning to be determined through the mechanistic, utilitarian directives of the marketplace, or can critical educators shape a broader, more holistic view of what should encompass a learning society?

Similarly, critical feminists such as Nancy Fraser raise important questions about justice and inclusion issues, paramount to democratic educational practices. Fraser (2003: 9) believes that concerns around redistribution (sharing resources) and recognition (politics of identity) are often pitted against one another in what she perceives to be ‘false antitheses’, arguing that ‘justice today requires *both* redistribution and recognition’. Both of these factors must be taken up by feminists (and supporters) to address democratic concerns and to provide more inclusive learning opportunities for women to engage as active citizens.

Structural Inequalities for Women

There are still many structural inequalities that limit women’s ability to participate fully in lifelong learning, supporting Fraser’s argument that both ‘redistribution’ and ‘recognition’ are key factors to be negotiated for women to attain equitable participation in society. These inequities are rooted in patriarchal social structures and unfortunately seem to exist in virtually all societies, to a greater or lesser extent. Structural social inequalities include lesser access to citizenship rights, including financial and educational resources, as well as less support and fewer opportunities to attain positions of power and authority within government, industry, religious, and educational institutions. In addition, women continue to carry disproportionately greater burdens of unpaid labour in all societies. Violence that

targets women, ranging from sexual harassment to rape and murder, still casts a dark shadow of patriarchy over the lives of all women (and men who genuinely care about them).

Within the larger global context, there are still many women who are not allowed even basic citizenship rights. For instance, Mona Laczo (2003: 77) points out that in Nepal citizenship is passed down through blood relationships from fathers to their sons and daughters. At the age of sixteen, Nepalese can apply for a Certificate of Citizenship, but a women's application has to be supported by her father or husband, creating a situation of vulnerability and dependence for women. Laczo (2003: 77) also notes that 'thousands of Nepalese women are denied rights of citizenship because they have been trafficked against their will, or they belong to ethnic minorities, or they are refugees.' Refugees are stateless, and thus have no citizenship protection, while children of mixed marriages who do not have Nepalese fathers are not eligible for citizenship. Women survivors who have been trafficked are frequently ostracized by their families and communities, and put in the problematic position of having to go to the same male relatives who sold them for permission to attain citizenship! Without basic citizenship rights, many Nepalese women have limited access to employment, education, and health care, and the prospects for their children's future are limited.

Women who live in developed countries and who have obtained full citizenship rights have many privileges in comparison to women in situations such this, but they still face many structural social barriers that limit their ability to participate fully as active citizens. While women have made great progress in obtaining further education and working in the paid labour force, an emphasis on competition and individualism factors out structural inequalities that need to be addressed for more equitable and democratic learning opportunities.

As critical theorists (Gouthro, 2002a, Welton, 2001) have noted, discourses in lifelong learning are increasingly shaped by the language of the global marketplace, that denotes learners as clients and education as a commodity. Jackson (2003) argues that when the agenda for lifelong learning is shaped primarily by market forces, women are frequently disadvantaged. In listening to women's life histories in my SSHRC research, it is clear that women's commitments to other family members means that women will frequently either limit, delay, or struggle under adverse circumstances to continue their education. Women generally have responsibilities and connections to the homeplace that lead them to have different lifelong learning trajectories than men. Women consistently maintain a disproportionate responsibility for caring labour, such as motherwork (Hart, 1997). Selwyn and Gorard (2003: 176-177) point out that having children disadvantages women in the labour force and in their pursuit of educational goals far more than men, as can be seen in recent research on participation rates in adult education in the UK where 'a male with a child is 1.6 times as likely to participate as a woman with a child'. Crittenden (2001) and Budig and England (2001) note that the 'costs' of raising children are primarily borne by women, resulting in lower incomes and less opportunity for advancement. Women are more vulnerable to the caprices of an unforgiving marketplace if they take time out for caring labour (which they are socially assigned), and in the case of divorce, their income is likely to drop substantially (while a man's is likely to increase significantly). The same inequalities that hamper workplace advancement impact on detrimentally on educational opportunities for women.

Bird (1999) notes that lifelong education is often an important venue for the transition between unpaid and paid labour commitments, when women shift as employees back into the marketplace. Due to the devaluation of women's unpaid

labour, and the competitive individualized context predominant in current educational discourses, there is often a remedial approach towards women 'returners'. Hayes and Smith (1994) found that women are often treated as though they are deficient in adult education contexts. It is difficult to change prevailing and ubiquitous assumptions about gender roles that over time have become ingrained into our social fabric. As I have noted in earlier research (Gouthro, 2002b), challenging entrenched ideas of what constitutes a 'committed' or 'productive' learner in academe is problematic. These definitions are frequently linked with a marketplace orientation that is so pervasive and taken-for-granted, it is difficult for people to envision alternative perspectives that would validate women's unpaid labour contributions. Similarly, Hart (1997) argues that educators need to develop recognition for learning in more holistic contexts that validates women's subsistence labour, such as motherwork.

Broadening our understanding of lifelong learning

A broader emphasis on lifelong learning that occurs in a wide range of contexts may be beneficial for all learners, but it is particularly important for women. A critical feminist perspective points to the need to recognize learning that occurs in the realm of what Habermas (1987) has termed the lifeworld - the everyday world of taken-for-granted activities, where our connections to others and understanding of the world is first formed. While it is important not to idealize the lifeworld (since there are also gendered dimensions to the lifeworld realm), learning in the homeplace (Gouthro, 2005), in community and civil society organizations (Welton, 2001) all serve important purposes in promoting active citizenship.

Critical educators such as Welton (2001) and Johnston (1999) have pointed out the need to consider lifelong learning as a means to advance civil society and

citizenship. These are important realms for sustaining democracy. Welton (2001: 33) argues that ‘Habermas’s recent reflections on civil society and the public sphere are richly suggestive for adult learning theorists and practising adult educators who are designing intervention strategies for a just and honest learning society’. Concerns around challenging what Habermas would term ‘system imperatives’ (forces of the marketplace) that are encroaching into the realm of the lifeworld (our everyday world of home, local community, and civil society) must be taken up by educators committed to democratic practices.

Rennie Johnston (1999) explains that there are four overlapping approaches towards education and citizenship that can be examined from the social purpose tradition in adult education. First, adult learning for *inclusive citizenship* addresses economic and social exclusion. Secondly, adult learning for *pluralistic citizenship* recognizes concerns of identity and difference. Thirdly, Johnston (1999: 184) states that there is adult learning for *reflexive citizenship* whereby ‘adult learners [can] engage more actively and critically with the idea of both citizen’s rights and their responsibilities’. Finally, there is adult learning for *active citizenship* that has the opportunity to bring together divergent groups of citizens to actively work together towards initiating social change. Johnston (1999: 186) argues that ‘common to all these groups, is that they are involved in learning and in different ways they promote and develop their individual and collective voice’. Our understanding of the purposes of lifelong learning shifts if we investigate learning that occurs in lifeworld realms - from the homeplace to civil society organizations.

At the same time, it is essential to explore how within these different categories of citizenship, gender shapes social expectations around participation. Preece (2002: 21) argues that the concepts of citizenship and governance are gendered, which

means that the way men and women learn what is valued in terms of active citizenship and participation in decision making determines their identity as citizens, their perceived entitlements as members of a given society and their perceived role within society.

For instance, Fraser (1995) notes that citizenship for men has often been linked with military service, which is often perceived as an valuable contribution to the larger society. Yet as many feminists argue, one of the main roles for many women – that of being mother – also provides many benefits to the state, and is essential for raising the next generation of citizens, but it is generally overlooked in discussions around citizenship. In my CCL grant, one of the challenges in deciding upon who to approach to be participants has been to consider what constitutes active citizenship for women, as the contributions that women make to society are often not as publicly visible as the work that men do.

The historical exclusion of women from full citizenship cannot simply be addressed by broadening the definition of citizen to include women as well as men. Stromquist (2003: 8) points out that

feminist theories have demonstrated that not only is the state gendered (through the prevailing presence of men in multiple public institutions and the presence of male leaders), but that citizenship itself is also gendered.

One of the problems with understanding concerns around citizenship is the all too frequent public conflation of “citizen” with “taxpayer”, which is particularly problematic for women outside of the paid labour force. Elliott (2000) points out the needs to recognize gendered forms of discrimination that could serve to disadvantage

women if the model for citizenship participation does not acknowledge inequities in circumstances. Elliot (2000: 15) argues that 'entry into the public sphere alone does not ensure 'equality' for women'. It is important to recognize the value of unpaid labour, as well as provide support for women to access paid labour.

Nancy Fraser (2003) notes the dual concerns that frequently create tensions in resolving issues of inequality. Demands for parity (everyone has the same rights, privileges and access to resources) are often countered against the uniqueness of identity (the special considerations that particular groups wish to have recognized). From a critical feminist perspective, we can see the need for women to have equal access to learning opportunities, but at the same time there needs to be recognition for differences in experience ie. the focus in many women's lives on caring labour. These concerns are not mutually exclusive. Both approaches towards equity have to be addressed in order to create democratic opportunities for full participation in lifelong learning.

Identity and Democratic Inclusion

To understand the concept of active citizenship, we need to not only assess how women participate as citizens, but also the ways in which concerns that impact primarily upon women have been systematically ignored or trivialized within discourses around citizenship.

The historical precedents of democracy are exclusionary, as women, the poor, and minority groups were generally not allowed to participate in decision-making processes around governance. As Bertrand Russell (1996, c. 1946: 574) points out, Locke 's [1690] 'social contract' which discussed the concept of civil society as the

rule of the majority, unless it is agreed that a greater number shall be required...sounds democratic, but it must be remembered that Locke assumes the exclusion of women and the poor from rights of citizenship.

Even fairly recent critical discourses around the topic of citizenship often overlook or marginalize women's contributions and experiences. Landes (1995) points out that Habermas's (1987) discussion of the bourgeois public sphere where citizens (primarily men) participate was set up to exclude many issues that were relegated to the private (women's) sector, as these were considered to be particularistic rather than universal concerns. As Stromquist (2003: 8) notes, 'citizenship must consider not only public but private realms'. Landes (1995: 97) argues that while Habermas acknowledged there were some problems with the bourgeois public sphere 'attaining its stated goals of equality and equal participation', this was perceived to be 'a limitation of actual existing society, not of the model of a universal public according to which pre-existing social inequalities are bracketed'. Bringing a feminist perspective to critical theory challenges the assumption that the exclusion and/or marginalization of women as fully participating, active citizens is not just an oversight that needs to be addressed by widening the parameters of discussion, but rather it is an intrinsic component of a society that does not value women's contributions and concerns as much as it values men's contributions and concerns. In her feminist analysis of Habermas's (1987) work, Nancy Fraser (1995: 36) argues that citizenship 'has an implicit subtext' as long as the concepts of 'worker' and 'childrearer' are perceived as fundamentally different and incompatible.

A democratic approach towards learning needs to take into account the unique differences and situations of all learners, recognizing women are often expected to

fulfil different social obligations and responsibilities. Fostering policies in lifelong education that address these concerns is important to create inclusive learning contexts.

At the same time, gender is just one variable that needs to be addressed if we are to consider what inclusion means in all learning contexts, and to assess how privilege too frequently defines educational goals. Adult educators who are motivated to support democratic practices need to critically reflect upon the policies and pedagogical environments that they are involved with to consider how the particular needs and challenges of their learners are being addressed.

Women of colour, lesbians, poor women, and other women in minority positions, have multiple challenges in attaining equity and recognition. For example, in developing civil society, feminists have often had to struggle to have issues pertaining particularly to women included on the agenda for social change. In her examination of the development of civil society in Latin America's southern cone countries (Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay), Jaqueline Pitenguy (2002: 807) points out that feminists 'had to struggle simultaneously to reestablish democracy and to widen the democratic agenda beyond classical civil and political rights to include gender inequality as a central democratic theme'. Similarly, Bannerji, Mojab and Whitehead (2001: 21) note that

women in anti-colonial nationalist movements also occupied subject positions that were multiply determined by notions and practices of gender, class, racism, and ethnicization. As potential citizens of emerging nations, they possessed plausible claims to political, legal and social equality with men. As women

in patriarchal and class-based societies, however, they were often legally defined as the property of husbands and fathers.

Minority women face multiple barriers that hinder full democratic participation, barriers that are often played out in more subtle ways in different learning contexts. Educators need to acknowledge and address these concerns if they are to create what bell hooks (2003) calls a 'teaching community'. hooks recognizes that educators can never promise a completely safe learning environment, but she argues that creating a space where people can genuinely participate, listen, and learn from one another can provide a constructive place where important learning can occur.

Implications for Policy, Pedagogy, and Practice

Democracy can either be fostered or stifled in different educational contexts. Critical and feminist educators recognize the need to continually reflect upon their own teaching practices. Brookfield (1995: 25) states that 'in our classrooms, students learn democratic or manipulative behaviour. They learn whether independence of thought is really valued or whether everything depends on pleasing the teacher'. A democratic learning space is one that is characterized by open, dialogical relationships. Fraser (2003: 44) explains the complicated and intertwined demands of creating dialogical opportunities for learning:

Fair democratic deliberation concerning the merits of recognition claims requires parity of participation for all actual and possible deliberators. That in turn requires just distribution and reciprocal recognition. This circularity...faithfully expresses the reflexive character

of justice as understood from the democratic perspective.

To address concerns of both redistribution and recognition, educational policies, institutional structures, and underlying values that shape educational practices have to be carefully examined. For example, although women's participation in higher education has increased dramatically over the past few decades, women still only comprise a third of all doctoral students. They are less likely to be in higher ranking, tenured positions in universities (Stalker and Prentice, 1998, Hannah, 2002). Women are still more likely to be primary caregivers for children and other family members, which disadvantages them as they move up the increasingly competitive ranks in universities. Issues of redistribution need to be taken up to address this - such as the lesser financial support and time constraints that women experience because of domestic obligations. In addition, there are issues of recognition to consider. Women's lives do not mirror men's, and the differences in their experiences should be valued so that they are not perceived as being "deficient". There needs to be greater respect for the contributions that women make to society through unpaid labour, which is still devalued.

Some policies in higher education are beginning to address these concerns. For instance, SSHRC (Social Science and Humanities Research Council) scholarship applications allow applicants to explain extenuating circumstances if there has been a break in their career trajectory, such as taking time out for caregiving activities. In my current SSHRC research study, women point out changes in higher education that have made learning opportunities more accessible, such as having opportunities to take courses on-line. However, there is still a need for more comprehensive changes to be made to create more equitable opportunities for women in accessing higher

education. Many doctoral programs still require full-time residency for a period of a year or longer. There are few funding opportunities for women who opt to take their degree part-time. Childcare on campus is often set up for full-time care during the daytime, while many courses are offered in the evenings.

A critical feminist framework for understanding active citizenship and lifelong learning raises many questions about our taken for granted assumptions around fairness, equity, and justice. It challenges educators to be critical of the overarching influence of the marketplace on educational endeavours, and to think about the gendered nature of all aspects of life.

For instance, when Perkins, Nelms, and Smyth (2004: p. 8) discuss the concept of the 'Third Way', they explain that advocates of this approach state that there should be 'no rights without responsibilities'. From a critical feminist framework I have to ask, what does this mean? If there are to be no rights unless you fulfil your obligations and responsibilities, how are the unpaid labour contributions, done primarily by women, taken into account? As Hart (1997) notes in her research on poor black women in the US inner city, the time and energy that these women spend on raising their children is not valued or considered as work. With regards to the notion of responsibility, it does not seem to suggest that everyone will be engaged in labour that is conducted in an ecologically and environmentally sustainable fashion. Nor does it imply that men should be equally responsible for caregiving activities by taking time from their paid work careers to be involved in raising children and caring for the sick, disabled, or elderly members of our population. If the notion of responsibility is defined within a masculine, market-oriented framework, then women are going to be increasingly disenfranchised as citizens.

A critical feminist framework points out that in any critical analysis of citizenship or civil society movements, there has to be recognition that power is mediated through our societies in complex and interlocking ways. Our understanding of how societies are structured and therefore, how they can be changed, is limited if we leave out considerations around gender (as well as race, ability, age, and other social/structural factors).

By bringing a feminist lens to critical perspectives in lifelong education, we gain insights into the different values that motivate social action. In previous work (Gouthro, 2000) I examine how women's participation in civil society movements often emerges from their caregiving roles ie. mothers who take on multinational corporations because of concerns that toxic waste dumped in their community is impacting detrimentally on their (and their family's) health. One reason I was motivated to apply for my current CCL grant, is that I believe it is important to celebrate the unique ways that women have contributed to the evolution of active citizenship. For instance, in Canada there is a group of older women activists named the 'Raging Grannie'. Roy (2004) details how this social movement emerged as an eclectic group of women came together to challenge the government on allowing nuclear submarines to land within the port of Victoria (on the western coast of Canada). These women use humour and wit to critique what they perceive to be unjust government policies, and to advocate for social change. Roy (2004:11) cites one of their poems:

The Bad Old Days

Refrain: We're the women who did the work, So men could get the credit.

We said "Leave it to us," And wished we never said it.

*No, I don't mind staying late, I'll type another stencil
 Can I bring you coffee now? Let me sharpen your pencil
 I'm sorry the baby cried, I'm sorry that she wet you
 Politics was not for us, We left that to our spouses
 But now we know a women's place, In Parliamentary Houses ...
 We're prepared to work, But we want more than credit
 Equal pay for equal Work, We'll sing until we get it.*

When taking a global perspective on active citizenship, a critical feminist perspective encourages educators to conceptualize citizenship in a broader and more inclusive way. For instance, the notion of global citizenship could push people to think beyond the narrow parameters of their own nation-state, to realize that issues such as environmental sustainability and just labour practices are the responsibility of all people. In principle, everyone, including displaced refugees, should be able to access basic citizenship rights – so how can this difficult mandate be carried out?

Deliberative democracy suggests that there is a need to work towards developing a more active and engaged citizenship. Through dialogue, raising awareness of social issues, and encouraging participation by citizens in informing the development of social policies and practices, learners can be motivated to work towards social change. As educators, we must reflect upon the challenges of creating the capacity for our learners to engage proactively as citizens, taking into account the power differentials that still impact on women with regards to how we take up notions of citizenship.

Ultimately, Nancy Fraser (1995: 46) questions:

Should the roles of worker, childrearer, citizen and
 client be fully degendered? Can they be? Or do we,

rather, require arrangements that permit women to be workers and citizens as women, just as men have always been workers and citizens as men?

There are still many concerns that need to be addressed to create equitable and inclusive opportunities for women to participate as active citizens and in lifelong learning contexts. The current trend to support an individualistic and market oriented approach towards learning needs to be challenged by critical and feminist educators in order to create more democratic opportunities for women to engage fully in a learning society.

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This paper uses a critical feminist theoretical approach to argue that systemic concerns around equity, social justice, and access need to be taken up by educators, administrators, and policy makers in order to address democratic considerations for fostering lifelong learning for women.