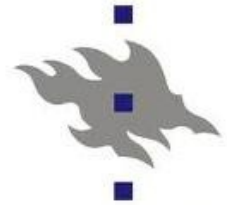


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UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

In Summer 2010, I received the high honour of being granted the title of Docent in Home Economics (Kotitaloustiede) at the University of Helsinki in the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences. My relationship with Helsinki University began in 1998. I attended the inaugural *International Household and Family Research Conference* organized by the venerable Dr. Kaija Turkki, a fellow home economist employed at the University of Helsinki. During 2005-2006, I was part of an international 6-member team that reviewed research programs at the University of Helsinki. I served on Panel 9, Education and Home Economics. Dr. Turkki and I have remained in touch, sharing our dreams and aspirations for the discipline of home economics, and the attendant profession, at the global level.

In my application for the Docentship, I was asked to write about my assessment of the discipline and profession of home economics and my contributions to it, past, present and future. I explained that, around the world, the discipline of home economics has existed for over 150 years, was formalized into a profession about a century ago, was institutionalized into college and university higher education programs as an academic discipline around the same time (ongoing) and is now entering another century of influence and growth.

The discipline has a long-standing history of working towards improving and enhancing the quality of life and well-being of individuals and families in their communities. A global Body of Knowledge (BOK) has been established, housed within 25 or more home economics-specific journals and other knowledge artifacts and scores of sub-specialization venues (i.e., consumer economics and resource management; family studies and human services; housing and facility management; clothing, textiles, craft, apparel and fashion; and, foods and nutrition). These subfields (specializations) are necessary because those practising in the field require specialized knowledge to serve the universally diverse needs of individuals and families. Every subfield and specialization makes advances and contributions to knowledge, as does scholarship about the field in general (housed in the home economics-specific journals).

As with most academic disciplines that were born at the turn of the 19th century, home economics originally embraced the scientific paradigm. Decisions taken at the end of the 1800s reflected the thinking of the time, that of scientific positivism and capitalistic economics in an era called the Industrial Revolution. Those living at the time tended to cut up what is human into separate pieces of a puzzle that could not form a whole image. With this fragmented approach, human complexity became invisible, and people vanished into knowledge of only the parts and not the integrated whole. Such was the thinking when home economics was founded. But, times have changed over the past 100 years, and I feel strongly that the thinking within our discipline, indeed within higher education in general, has to change as well.

In particular, home economics has always considered itself interdisciplinary in its

approach to practice and generating knowledge. It is deemed to be our strength, and it defines our disciplinary and professional approach to practice. To ensure this interdisciplinary perspective, home economics university, higher education degrees are structured so that students take courses from other disciplines (i.e., the arts (especially economics, psychology, sociology, law), the business and administrative sciences, the natural sciences, and the humanities). The intent is to create inter-woven knowledge that enables them to bring unique approaches to help families meet their basic universal needs. The latter are usually understood to include: foods and nutrition; housing and shelter; consumption; resource management; family relations and individual and child development; apparel, clothing and consumer textiles; and, health and transportation.

In addition to taking courses from aligned disciplines that are not focused on the family per se, home economics students take especially designed core courses focused on universal individual and family needs, processes and skill sets - a marriage of other disciplines and family-tailored courses. Concurrently, they are socialized to tease out content, theory and principles from aligned disciplines and then draw on the synergy created when connections are made between these insights and home economics' mission and philosophy and its core body of knowledge.

This approach to designing higher education programs to socialize people into the discipline and profession of home economics leads to an integrated system of (a) philosophy/mission/values; (b) theory/content/knowledge; and, (c) competencies/skills/practice) (see Figure 1).

The result is interdisciplinary-informed practice that is focused on preparing individuals and families to fulfill their basic functions as a social institution. Interdisciplinarity is all about connections, synergy, holism and integration, the hallmarks of home economics for over a century.

Despite our best intentions when designing home economics higher education programs, the discipline, along with *most* disciplines in higher education, fell prey to the global phenomenon of disciplinary hyperspecialization. Using an interdisciplinary orientation, the *academic discipline* of home economics created (and continues to create) its own disciplinary knowledge base to serve both a generalist and a specialist approach, with the latter gaining a privileged position. The former prepares mission-oriented professionals to assist individuals and

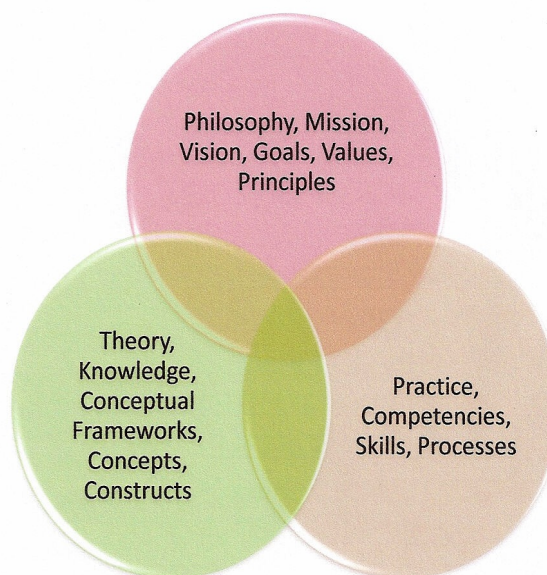


Figure 1 Home Economics as an Integrated, Holistic System

families in solving perennial problems faced by every generation. In addition to theory and practice, it often involves added attention to the stated mission, values and philosophical core of the home economics profession (my particular area of interest). The specialist approach, on the other hand, prepares professionals for specific career paths (heavy on content, theory and competencies), with the focus on the mission being less clear. As well, a generalist is prepared to integrate knowledge from a variety of disciplines while a specialist studies within existing subdivisions of an established discipline (in our case, food, clothing, shelter, family, consumption, et cetera).

The deification of subdisciplines in higher education has occurred at the expense of the diverse needs of contemporary society and the pressing challenges facing humanity and the resultant human condition and ecological integrity. To address this hyperspecialization issue, Dr. Turkki calls for a new kind of specialization for home economists. She rejects the term generalist, explaining that if we choose to see home economics as holistic and integrated (rather than a collection of experts in separate subjects and content areas), we would all become new kinds of specialists - *integrated specialists* - with expertise that enables us to integrate, link, make bridges, coordinate and communicate. Donna Pendergast coined the phrase *expert novice* to describe a new approach to home economics practice. Instead of assuming a technical, fragmented orientation to practice, being just a technical expert, home economists would strive to be an expert at being a novice. Because the world, people and communities are changing so fast, we also have to change. To do that, we have to become amenable to expecting change and being comfortable with continually having to learn new things while letting go of expertise if it is no longer meeting the needs of society.

Like Drs. Turkki and Pendergast (two world leaders), my contribution to the discipline is to push the intellectual and philosophical boundaries about home economics leadership, education (professional socialization) and philosophy in new directions, down paths upon which we have never strode, but must embark. My scholarship takes the discipline beyond its century-long dependence on the old sciences (Newtonian physics, positivism, modernism, patriarchy) to a new foundation based on the new sciences of chaos theory, quantum physics and living systems theory. This shift needs to be reflected in our integrated approach - our philosophy (mission, values, principles), our knowledge base (theoretical orientations, conceptual frameworks and research methodologies), and our practice (competencies and skill sets) (Figure 1).

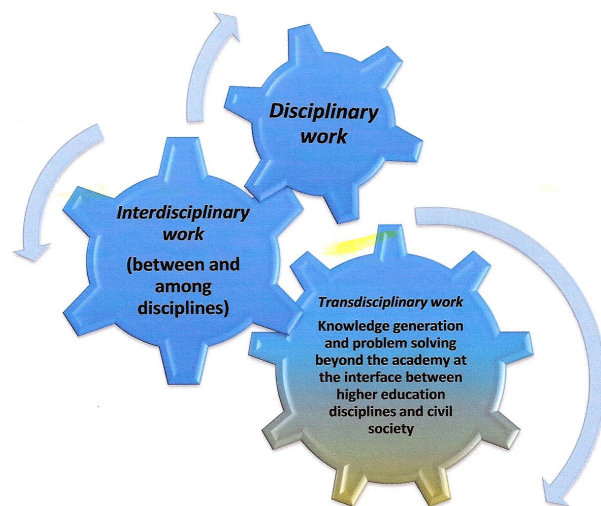
As Docent, my contribution to the discipline, to the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences and to the University of Helsinki will be discussions about moving beyond:

- integrated and holistic practice to *integral practice*,
- interdisciplinarity to *transdisciplinarity* (especially in higher education),
- transactional and transformational leadership to *integral leadership*,
- conventional metatheory to *integral metatheory*,
- a focus on well-being and quality of life to a focus on the *human condition* and the *human family*,
- family literacy to *'becoming family literate'* (how to 'be' in a family),

- ethical consumerism and sustainable resource *management* to consumer-citizen *moral leadership*,
- consumer empowerment and efficacy to *transdisciplinary consumption*,
- conventional consumer education to *global consumer citizenship* education and *consumer acumen*,
- consumer rights and responsibilities towards *human rights and responsibilities*, and
- a consumer culture towards *a culture of peace*.

My hope is that members of the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences (and others at the University) are open to exploring these ideas and their import on broad educational issues. I anticipate invigorating cross-border dialogues that include seasoned scholars, mid-and early-career academics, doctoral candidates and graduate level and undergraduate level students, as well as educational support staff. These conversations also would engage agents from government, industry and civil society so as to reflect the complexity of issues facing humanity in the 21st century.

As Docent, I especially want to focus on transdisciplinarity as a methodology and its role in higher education. I believe there is room for each of disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work (see Figure 2). I aspire to co-publish working papers and peer-reviewed papers that reflect emergent synergy between my interests and those of the Faculty. I am eager to supervise and teach doctoral candidates and to mentor home economics, craft science and education students in my areas of interest, which I anticipate will change radically as I engage with the thought processes of Helsinki scholars and thinkers. I envision helping organize a global conference on reshaping home economics in higher education. Dr. Turkki and I dream of starting a virtual home economics university where we can foster conversations and learnings around new approaches to future-proofing the discipline. I invite you to access Figure 2 my musings at my professional website



<http://www.consultmcgregor.com> and anticipate enriching, reciprocal intellectual partnerships during my Docentship.