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The theme of the 100th year celebration of IFHE is *Reflecting the past - Creating the future*. I was given the topic of individual empowerment as a home economist, leading me to conclude that the conference planners believe we cannot create the future we want for the profession unless each one of us can find our own inner power, become empowered. Ellie Vaines, my friend and professional mentor, once told me that home economists cannot empower anyone; rather, we *can* facilitate a process by which people find their own inner power, voice and agency. Dugan (2003, p.1) agrees, explaining that "if I can help you build your own power base, the power is yours, not mine." Upon hearing me say this in a class, a graduate student reframed the word empower by inverting the *em* to *me*, creating the idea of *me-power*. I was inspired by this idea; it deeply informed today's talk.

Also, Nachshen (2004) explains that while a universal definition of empowerment may not be possible (it is such a buzzword right now), it is possible to examine empowerment in specific contexts, in our case home economics. She also clarifies that empowerment can exist at three levels: community, organizational and individual. The higher number of empowered *individual* home economists we have, the more likely we are to collectively develop empowered organizations and communities (including individuals and families).

Three Professional Orientations to Being a Home Economist

Before I begin this discussion, I would like to share Vaines' (1993) idea about choosing an orientation to being a home economist. She basically said we could opt for one of three orientations: (a) technical, (b) empowerment, or (c) we can choose not to choose an orientation. If we opt for a technical orientation to being a home economist, we buy into the competitive, efficiency, scarce resources, consumption, technology, economic growth, empirical science, management focused, expert, power-over, piecemeal and fragmented approach to practice (see McGregor et al., 2004 for a detailed discussion of what this orientation looks like in practice, and Pendergast and McGregor (2007) for a profile of home economics practice within the ideology of patriarchy).

If we choose not to choose an orientation to being a home economist, we end up practising *individualized interpretations of the field* rather than practising from a common, accepted philosophical position informed by scholarship and reflective dialogue. Vaines (1993) characterizes this as a powerless position. McGregor and MacCleave (2007) tender a discussion of the degree of (dis)agreement about the profession's philosophical competency base, and McGregor (2004a, 2006b) offers the idea of philosophical well-being, making the case for collective agreement rather than individual stances.

Vaines (1993) then tenders an empowerment orientation for home economics as



Figure 2 Ellie Vaines and Sue McGregor, 1998, Finland

a third, preferred option, one that features *power with* people. From this position, home economists would embrace the following ideas:

- the world is a network of interrelated, living systems respecting the delicate, complex webs of life;
- people envision themselves as self-forming;
- people work together for the common good (the human condition);
- society is a community of persons actively involved in shaping a moral vision of daily life;
- power is shared;
- leadership is inclusive and transformative (power through people);
- efficiency (doing the thing right) is balanced with effectiveness (doing the right thing) and sustainability (not compromising others or other species);
- children become OUR children;
- change is a process of transformation within community;
- many ways of knowing and perceiving are essential (instead of just empirical); and,
- home economists are active participants and collaborators in communities.

I have embraced her empowerment orientation in this talk. Also, I concur with Mberengwa and van der Merwe (2004), also home economists, that empowerment creates *power that releases power* of self-cure as people gain control over their professional lives. This power leads to a more potent and efficacious sense of professional self and to more critical understandings of social and political power relationships at play. The objective is that the nurturing and release of this inner power becomes so much a part of professional life that home economists can unconsciously apply their understandings of self and others' power for the betterment of humanity.

Defining Empowerment

Power is a measure of how much one thing or person can affect, influence or change another. Indeed, 'power' is Latin for *to be able*. Adding the prefix *em* (Latin for *in*) to power modifies the word to create *empower*, which in simple terms means to invest with power or to equip or supply with an ability; to enable. To empower also means to give authority to someone, or give the means, ability or opportunity to do something (Answers.com, 2008). This definition may seem quite simple, but the idea of empowerment is anything but simple. There are many, many ways to define empowerment. Page and Czuba (1999) wisely suggest that a common understanding of empowerment is necessary to allow people to know it when they see it, and that this definition is framed by context and specific people. They further confirm that empowerment is: multidimensional, occurring on many levels; involves interconnected, social relationships; and, is a process, path and journey.

To provide some common ground for this talk, I suggest that within the context of home economics, empowerment can be viewed as a "process by which individuals and groups gain power, access to resources and control over their own lives. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals" (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998, p.91). Empowerment is the process of increasing the assets and enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and subsequent,

intended outcomes (Narayan, 2002). He explains that four elements are always present when efforts to develop empowerment succeed: access to information (because information is power); inclusion and participation (who, how and what role); accountability; and, organizational capacity to work together, self-organize and mobilize resources. This tells me that professional associations and academic training programs have to ensure these four elements are respected, if they want to ensure that individual home economists can find their me-power and become empowered to enable families to gain empowerment. This can happen through professional socialization.

Professional Socialization and Empowerment

Each profession has a culture, lingo and normative experiences that define it (Kieren, Vaines & Badir, 1984). Empowerment should be rooted in this professional culture. Home economics is a profession into which novice members are socialized, meaning they learn this culture and how to live within it (Kieren et al.). Most significantly, the *foundation for achieving individual empowerment* is established through the professional socialization process (Mberengwa & van der Merwe, 2004). Cornelissen (2006), a home economist, explains that “professional socialisation starts at the beginning of the educational programme and is a continuous, life-long process of learning formal knowledge, skills and rules, as well as informal and tacit knowledge, norms, values and loyalties within the profession. The process gradually leads to a professional identity” (p.41). Richardson (1999) describes socialization as a social exchange process by which people *intellectually internalize* the values, attitudes and beliefs of their chosen profession, and develop a commitment to a professional career.

Summarizing related literature, Lichty and Stewart (2000) identify three phases of socialization into home economics and a related career path, phases that occur over a period of several years: (a) *the anticipatory phase*, including academic training, career preparation, development of personal expectations of their new profession and career, and acquiring their first position; (b) *the entry and induction phase*, where the newcomers first confront the differences between what they expected and what they are actually experiencing as they learn their new roles; and, (c) *the continuing socialization phase* that occurs as the newcomer learns skills, adjusts to the position and to colleagues, and begins to feel like an insider. Their last phase parallels that of Richardson (1999): a developing commitment to a professional career in home economics, necessitating ongoing social exchange among fellow home economists.

An integral part of this conversation, this professional exchange process, must be about empowerment. Home economists must be committed to an ongoing intellectual engagement with notions of power, change, efficacy, consciousness and making a moral and ethical difference. Vaines (1993) agrees that choosing not to choose an empowerment orientation to practice means we either rely too heavily on a technical approach or, worse yet, end up with a whole collection of individual practitioners dancing to their own tune of what it means to be a home economist, without consensus on a coherent, consistent, critical orientation to practice. The public sees a disjointed, fractured profession, leading to the *perception* of powerlessness and a resultant loss of legitimacy (Pendergast & McGregor, 2007). This can be very harmful for the profession, because one of the five characteristics of a recognized profession is practitioner autonomy in exercising professional judgement and public recognition of

those judgements as legitimate and authorized (Jackson, 1970; Kieren et al., 1984).

Communities of Practice and Empowerment

To ensure that this conversation can take place, home economists can use their me-power to build and enrich professional communities of practice (CoPs). Practitioners in a profession must push the limits of their field of study or the body of knowledge becomes stagnant. A special kind of practice, in a special kind of community, is needed for this transcending work. CoPs are venues within which this boundary-pushing activity can have a healthy life and profoundly change practice in the field (McGregor, 2006b). CoPs are a “way of *talking about* the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action” [italics added] (Wenger, 1998 p.5). The intent of these communities of practice is to steward a particular practice, to nurture, enrich, spread and entrench a valued contribution to the profession; hence, to the human condition. Empowerment should be about all home economists getting involved in solving their own, professional problems so they can better serve families in society. Empowerment can lead to new ways of learning from each other and taking action together as professionals. Personal empowerment (me-power) can lead to collective home economics actions that achieve collective power to break the boundaries and work on the vanguard of change. This entails a strong enough sense of self-efficacy to engage in social change agency (to be discussed shortly) (informed by Mberengwa and van der Merwe (2004)).

Self-efficacy and Empowerment

Because empowerment involves a process by which people increase their intrapersonal power (Napier, 2006), those home economists who have found their me-power (have become empowered) will find a renewed (maybe a new) sense of self-efficacy, accompanied with a decrease in self-blame. Self efficacy is a person’s *perception* of their ability to make a difference by planning and taking action to achieve a goal; it is their belief that they are capable of successfully acting out *specific* behaviours. The higher the self-efficacy, the more likely people are to persevere, to embrace an empowerment orientation to their practice (Vaines, 1993). Also, self-efficacy affects what people will *try* to achieve, because it includes their self-confidence in their ability to successfully perform a specific type of action (McGregor, 2007).

Self-reflective capability (a person’s predisposition to speculate on their actions) is closely tied with self-efficacy. It entails analyzing their own experiences, thinking about their thought processes, and altering their thinking, ultimately altering their actual behaviour as a home economics professional. A related concept is self-regulation, wherein people think for themselves before they take action, and apply a moral compass to this intellectual exercise. Mitstifer (2006) refers to this as reflective human action theory. People can keep tabs on their professional behaviour, comparing what they observe themselves doing with internal or external norms and/or standards. Finally, linked to the process of self-regulation is self-esteem, the degree to which people have a high or low opinion of themselves (their sense of self-worth) (McGregor, 2007). Obviously, finding and releasing me-power opens the door for profoundly enriched home economics practice, grounded in self esteem, self-reflection, self-regulation and self-efficacy.

Social Change and Empowerment

An empowered home economist is a force to be reckoned with! This force can effect far-reaching social change. Indeed, an *agent* is a force that causes a change. In the case of the profession, change agents are people who deliberately try to bring about a change or an innovation, or whose actions result in change. They are conscious architects of events. Agency has the Latin root of *agere* which means “to do.” *Change agency* is the state of doing, of being in action and exerting power and influence to accomplish a desired social or political end. Bennet (2000) ardently suggests that being a change agent entails knowing oneself before being able to effect change in the outside world. He submits that people have to be aware of their own biases, perceptions, capabilities, limitations, prejudices, assumptions, motives, beliefs, values, expectations and the baggage and jewels they carry around with them. Not being aware of their inner self means people run the real risk of misunderstanding or misinterpreting the external world they encounter. If this failure to correctly understand the situation leads to harm for individuals and families, then the home economics professional is behaving unprofessionally and irresponsibly. Conversely, *self-knowledge* can mitigate such damage, leading to professionals who are accountable and answerable to themselves and the public at large (McGregor, 2006b).

This is another reason why it so important for individual home economists to find their me-power (to become empowered). Empowered people can work with others to change society at the broad level. They feel like they can advocate for change through modifying policies and practices that traditionally lead to oppression, exploitation and marginalization of citizens (Napier, 2006). Through the insights gained from revealing their inner power and voice, home economists are much better positioned to help individuals and families find the resources they need to enhance *their* self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-autonomy so they can take better control of their lives, drawing on their own strengths and that of others.

Social change agents are committed to a better way and a better world. They have the courage and commitment to challenge existing power bases and arrangements and societal and cultural norms, even in the face of uncertainty, resistance and possible failure. Such leaders do not wait around for someone else to take the lead; rather, they exhibit initiative, break bottlenecks, think outside the box and reframe setbacks as learning opportunities. They motivate others to the cause, maybe even inspire them, so momentum is built and sustained. These home economics leaders care about enabling others to find *their* inner power, capabilities and the fortitude to stay with the cause over the long haul. Finally, these politically astute and socially sensitive home economists find ways to work in less visible, even covert ways, while not sacrificing transparency and accountability (McGregor, 2006b).

An empowered home economics change agent stands a much better chance of *a/so* enabling individuals and families to become self-determining and connected to empowered others, perpetuating the new cycle of power-with people (Vaines' (1993) empowerment orientation to practice) (Napier, 2006; Mberengwa & van der Merwe, 2004). The alternative is not welcomed; lacking empowerment entails stress, frustration and hopelessness (no connection to the future) because people are deprived of control and influence over their lives (Nachshen, 2004).

Personal Transformation, Paradigm Shifts and Empowerment

Aside from power and efficacy, consciousness is another concept that underlies the notion of empowerment (Gutierrez, 1995). Consciousness is understood to be a human's ability to be aware of his or her own thoughts through the process of introspection (inward looking) and self-contemplation (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). *Consciousness raising* is a key component of personal transformations. People need to undergo personal transformations as a prelude to finding their inner power (Mberengwa & van der Merwe, 2004). From these transformations, people grow, gain strength and develop confidence in their own capacities. This growth often comes with a price though, the loss of a familiar way of viewing the world and seeing oneself in the world; a paradigm shift (McGregor, 2006b).

Changing who we are changes how we practice (Palmer, 1998). Finding our inner voice entails changing how we know ourselves to be as a home economist. Because people's values, deeply held beliefs, and attitudes (worldview) are very difficult to recognize and also very difficult to change, the process of personal transformation is challenging. But, home economists owe it to themselves and others to make a concerted, orchestrated effort to look deep inside and have the courage to find their inner voice and power so they can stand on their principles and professional philosophy (their me-power base) when they practice. Two useful theories to help home economists appreciate the tensions and complexity of clarifying and then transforming their world views (as a tool for finding their me-power) are transformative learning and transformative education. Although transformative learning can occur during events happening in a person's life course, transformative education best happens if it is planned for and facilitated (McGregor, 2008). Without going into detail, I recommend that home economists familiarize themselves with these two theories, and use the insights they gain: (a) to appreciate the process involved when living through a disorienting dilemma that leads to (un)intended and life changing inner reflection, and (b) to encourage professional associations to plan transformative educational experiences that help home economists find their me-power. As a start, I humbly offer two works I have written that deal with my lived experiences of transformative learning (McGregor, 2004b) and transformative education (McGregor, 2008). Both experiences contributed to my ongoing journey of building my me-power base from which I practice my profession.

Empowerment as an Expert Novice and Integral Specialist

So far, I have developed the case for why it is important for home economists to gain individual empowerment and, to a lesser extent, how they might go about this personal journey. This entailed weaving together the ideas of orientations to being a home economist (privileging the empowerment orientation), purposeful professional socialization, creating communities of practice, building self-efficacy, becoming a change agent, and intentionally striving for personal transformation and paradigm shifts (or at least paradigm clarification). The result should be stronger, wiser, philosophically-well home economists, secure in their own power and voice. But, saying each home economist should find his or her me-power is not enough. I feel compelled to explore what this power base might comprise, given today's realities. To help me do this, I turn to a fellow home economist, Donna Pendergast

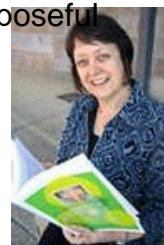


Figure 3
Donna
Pendergast

from Australia.

Pendergast (2001) wisely coined the phrase *expert novice* to describe a new approach to practice. Instead of assuming a technical orientation to practice, being just a technical expert, home economists can strive to be an expert at being a novice. Because the world, people and communities are changing so fast, we have to change too. To do that, we have to become amenable to expecting change, and become comfortable with continually having to learn new things while letting go of expertise if it is not meeting the needs of society anymore. This means being secure in who we are as a professional.



Figure 4 Kaija Turkki visiting Sue McGregor in Canada, 2007

Along the same line of thinking, Kaiji Turkki (Finland) offers us the idea of an *integral specialist*. She tenders a new definition of *specialization* (rejecting 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* with “expertise that integrates, links bridges, coordinates and communicates” (2006, p.46). With these new innovations in mind (expert novice and integral specialist), the next section of this paper will offer suggestions of what this me-power base might comprise, giving the demands and opportunities individuals and families face in the 21st century.

To help me set up this discussion, I will use the metaphor of the journey, because empowerment is a process akin to a journey. Members of any profession are always on a professional journey. The etymology of journey is Middle English for *a day’s travel*. By my rudimentary calculations, home economists have been traveling for over 365,000 days to get to their current professional crossroads (365 days per year times 100 years). Many individual members of this professional community may be tired travelers that have reached a decisive point in time - they have reached the proverbial crossroads (McGregor, 2006a).



One has to wonder about the nature of the conversations unfolding at this juncture in our 365,000 step, 100 year-long journey. People who are tired and lost (fading inner me-power) often ask the locals, who know nothing of the preceding journey, for directions; they engage in trivial small talk rather than substantive conversations (the Latin word *trivia* literally means "three roads") (McGregor, 2006a). In a recent analysis of home economics thinking, I discovered evidence that several individuals are engaged in deep reflection and dialogue, striving to be unwavering and resolute in their contemplations about the 21st century vision for the profession (McGregor, in press).¹ If each of us stopped to take the time to reflect on

¹These include: Kaija Turkki, Jett Benn, Donna Pendergast, Dorothy Mitstifer, Rosemarie von Schweitzer, Sekiguchi Fusa and colleagues in Japan, Barbara McFall, T. Tuomi-Gröhn and colleagues in Finland, Gale Smith, Linda Peterat and me. There are others!

these new directions, to see how well they resonated with our perception of what it means to be a home economist, I am convinced that many of us would become newly and refreshingly empowered, would find a new inner voice from which to practice.

Figure 5 presents a summary of the leading-edge, proposed elements of a 21st century home economics philosophy from which to find individual empowerment as a practitioner (McGregor, in press). These ideas are contrasted with those that we have carried with us during the last century, and used to draw strength and define who we are as home economists. We embraced integrative and holistic practice rather than integral practice; multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary practice instead of transdisciplinarity; transactional and transmissional management instead of transformative leadership; complicated, perennial family problems instead of complex, emergent social problems of humanity; the scientific way of knowing rather than critical, narrative and other ways of knowing; fragmented specializations and separate subjects rather than practicing from a common philosophical base; effective and efficient practice to ensure well-being and quality of life rather than efficacy to enhance the human condition; and, isolated and disconnected individual actions rather than communities of practice based on rich webs of relationships.

As well, we valued balance, certainty and security and tried to reduce tension, conflict and change. We avoided chaos and hoped for constancy. We saw our body of knowledge as subject centered rather than agency centered. We operated within the confines of patriarchy rather than trying to position home economics beyond the boundaries of this crippling ideology. We were coopted into the capitalistic, consumer-centered economy instead of opting for consumer citizenship and mindful economies of care and locality. We strived for mastery of content and specializations and aspired to be technical experts instead of fostering stewardship and empowerment. Home was a place for shelter and furnishings, rather than the center of humanity. We accepted Newtonian science as the basis for all knowing, leading to fragmented approaches to practice and problem solving rather than embracing the new sciences (chaos theory, quantum physics and living systems theory). We focused on competent practice rather than on education for life competence. Our pedagogies involved transactional and transmissional learning rather than transformational learning and authentic pedagogies that value the lived experiences of students. We took daily life for granted, assuming it could be managed rather than advocating that everyday life is sacred for humanity necessitating reflective leadership. The list goes on.

Brown (1993), McGregor et al. (2004) and Pendergast and McGregor (2007) have **shouted loudly...** this way of knowing ourselves as home economists was not wrong, just not enough. Times changed, families changed, the world changed. As we worked harder and harder, yet saw families face wider and deeper challenges, some of us began to lose confidence in who we are - our individual inner power diminished and our social agency and political influence declined right along with it. This pattern of socialization in the profession need not continue. There are new voices shining their light into our future (see Figure 5). We can draw on their messages for strength as we look deep inside to explore our personal and professional philosophies (belief systems about what it means to be a home economist) and decide if we need to change - to transform and morph into someone new. Profession-wide, individual empowerment will

generate profound energy that we can all draw upon as we practice in the 21st century. It starts with each one of us, and grows. Individual empowerment as a home economist is our future imperative.



Figure 6 Stand together in our me-power

<http://www.oxford.anglican.org/files/images/stand.jpg>

We all need to stand up with pride and say, **“I am strong. I stand within my power and gather energy, ideas and people around me. I am a pioneer, working on the edge, having fun while I do it. Families, communities, the human condition and the planet matter; hence, home economists matter because, *from our new me-power base, we can help others become, energized, focused, relentless change agents for the good of humanity.*”**

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Expert Novice **Integral Specialist** **Efficacy Change**
Reflective human action **Respect chaos, emergence**
Human protection **Home as habitation** **Empowerment**
Transdisciplinarity **Transformative** **Citizenship**
Celebratory, reflective leadership **Human Condition**
Communities of Practice **Education** *around* sustainability



Inner Me-Power Base

<http://tbn0.google.com/images?q=tbn:WaGHHqviAzV3aM:http://www.galleryofinspiration>

Qualities of Living **Home as Place for Humanity**
Wholesight - many ways of knowing **New Sciences**
Education for life competence **Integral Practice**
Beyond Patriarchy **Stewardship** **Holomovement**
Authentic Pedagogy **Everyday life is sacred**
Web of complex relationships **Human Security**
Body of Knowledge is agent-centered **Patterns**
Multiple levels of reality **Critical consciousness raising**

Figure 5 - Emerging elements of professional philosophy, new foundation for me-power