

## Sustaining Home Economics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Root System as Metaphor

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The stated intent of the conference is to consider how the sustainability of natural, human, social, economic and manufactured capital is *located in home economics practice*. My talk is about how to sustain the profession of home economics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century so it is around to deal with issues of sustainability. Sustainability means the ability to sustain. Sustain means to keep something in existence, to keep it in good repair and use, and to keep it from failing during stress or difficult times. This is done by providing support from below so that it does not sink. Indeed, sustain is Latin *sustin ere* for from below.

I propose that home economics support is a philosophical framework upon which we ground and base our practice. With careful thought of what constitutes this framework (assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitute a particular way of viewing reality), home economics will be able to flourish, guaranteeing that there are practitioners available to work on issues of sustainability, practitioners located within a sustainable profession and discipline.

Within the past 15 months, I have explored ideas about what could constitute the philosophy of home economics practice, given the context within which families live (McGregor, 2004, 2005a,b,c, 2006; McGregor et al., 2004). The main theme that has emerged from this reflection is that home economics cannot stand still, because the world is changing too fast, too often, and too dramatically. We need to learn how to find a balance (a) between learning new facts and data (*information*), (b) between seeing patterns within this information leading to new *knowledge* and, most significantly, (c) bringing processes into our professional work that make space for dialogue between us, families, government and business, and create the deep need within people to change the world for the better. We need to figure out how to think differently about our approach to work. We cannot sustain ourselves as a profession if we simply learn new information and techniques and then simply transfer that information to families, while ignoring a more future-oriented strategy of becoming critical, reflective thinkers who are able to help people find their inner voice and social action stance. Coping with, and adapting to, relentless change are not enough. People also must know how to influence and shape change so that humanity benefits from change, rather than being harmed. That is how we locate sustainability within home economics practice.

Let me share one more play on words before I continue. One of the key words entrenched in the word sustainable is *stain*. The word stain derives from Old French *desteindre, destaign*, meaning to deprive of color. To stain something can also mean to tarnish or taint it and bring its reputation into disrepute. If we want to be around to work on sustainability issues, the one thing we must not do is stain the profession of home economics. To make sure the profession shines, and is vibrant in color and strength, instead of being dull and demoralized, we have to develop, agree to and use a philosophical framework that will keep us strong, relevant and dynamic. This talk offers suggestions for this philosophy.

To reiterate, the stated intent of the conference is to consider how the work of sustaining five different kinds of capital is located within home economics. This capital approach was also used at the 2005 Australian home economics conference (Davidson, 2005). I would like to suggest that the concept of capital be extended to include intellectual or professional capital. A profession's most valuable resource (capital) is the knowledge of its people - its *intellectual assets or intellectual capital* (Synder & Wilson, 1998). Intellectual assets are critical to a profession's overall vision and strategic plan (Sullivan, 2000). To make sure this type of capital

is current and accessible in home economics, members of the profession must continually consider how their practice might need to change to reflect the insights gained from constantly improving their wisdom. At the 2005 Australian home economics conference, the idea of *leadership capital* was introduced to the profession. The word capital refers to resources that are available for contributions to the growth of something. Leadership capital is a resource that our profession can draw on as it strives to sustain itself. Hoenig (2003) defines leadership capital as the resources available to fuel an agenda (in the case of this conference, the agenda of locating sustainability in home economics). Leadership capital is always at stake (vulnerable), always in flux, and always a determining factor in the success of any endeavor. What is so challenging for any profession is that this type of capital is invisible because it involves people, relationships and ideas (philosophy), all effecting reputation, character, competence, and creativity.

As a caveat, this talk is about how to think about home economics practice rather than what to think about. The former informs the latter. So, instead of spending all of my time explaining the different components of the proposed philosophy of home economics, I will share a tool for how to grapple with the complex of ideas comprising this philosophy - a metaphor. Metaphors are temporary language, often pictures, that help us move from the familiar to unfamiliar, from old to new ideas. They are useful tools for conveying complex ideas (Judge, 1991), and home economics philosophy is surely a complex idea.

Finally, Schuster (1999) clarifies that philosophy means friendship (*philo*) and wisdom (*sophia*). What better way to have a conversation about home economics philosophy than doing so with new and old friends assembled at this conference.

### **Using a Root Metaphor to Discuss How to Sustain Home Economics**

I suggest that the profession of home economics is like a plant or a tree that has a stem/trunk and a root system. The root system is the part of the plant that is beneath the earth, invisible, yet providing support (I know that some roots grow above the ground). Roots anchor the plant, giving it security. They form the most central and essential part of the plant and are buried in the earth so deep that it is very hard to make changes to the system. The root system provides stability and nourishment for the plant. The roots absorb water and food from the soil and move these up the stem to the visible plant. If the soil does not contain water and fertilizer, if the roots are not healthy and nurtured, then the plant will wilt, and eventually die. But, plants can withstand an incredible amount of abuse. If even one fourth of the root system is still being nourished, the plant can recover from this near-death experience and flourish again. For this talk, the root system and soil represent the philosophy or leadership capital that sustains practitioners, the stem represents the conduits by which practitioners learn about, and inform, the philosophy, both of which sustain the profession and its members (the plant).

### **Invisible Roots versus Visible Trunk and Leaves**

Consider that, for large trees, while 80% of the tree is the visible trunk and leaves, 20% of the tree is the invisible roots (Texas Cooperative Extension, 2004). To extend the metaphor, this means that the visible part of home economics is much larger than the invisible philosophical system. Yet, the smaller, invisible and complex system of philosophical stances (our root system) is the framework supporting the whole profession. If it is not healthy, the profession cannot be healthy. It can take a large tree from one to 10 years to die from root suffocation or root fungi, conditions which develop from lack of soil drainage (too much water). Still extending the metaphor, it is possible for the philosophy of the profession to become

suffocated over the span of decades, if there is no attempt to drain away the parts of the philosophy that do not work anymore. It can take years for any symptoms of an inappropriate philosophy to materialize (McGregor et al., 2004). This is why it is so important for members of the profession to continually tend to its philosophical underpinnings, its roots, else it risk a slow, but eventual, decline.

### **Transport and Feeder Roots**

The good news is that the root system comprises two types of roots. First, is the larger, transport roots. A large tree has hundreds of miles of these roots that anchor it in the soil. What is interesting is that the transporter roots are, in fact, made of dead, woody matter that used to be alive (they even contribute to the body of the trunk of the tree). The second type is a feeder root (they feed the living plant). These feeder roots are alive and growing, and are at the very tip of the transport roots, always pushing further into the soil. Just behind the tip of these roots are tiny root hairs that stick out and absorb water and dissolved nutrients from the soil (Texas Cooperative Extension, 2004).

So, in home economics, even the older philosophies that formed earlier and current practice (transport roots) serve a function because they helped us get to where we are today. But, to move forward as a profession, the feeder cells must be kept alive, meaning new philosophical stances must be created, nurtured and brought to the surface of the plant. Counting on the old or current philosophy (brittle roots) to sustain the profession can only work for so long. New and fresh ideas are continually needed. Also, this part of the metaphor could suggest that not everyone has to be on a philosophical quest. In large trees, one quarter of the root system is feeder roots (seeking nourishment for the plant) while the other 75% is roots that have transported the plant to its current state. This suggests that one in four home economists should be striving to advance the philosophical stance of the profession with the other 75% absorbing and thriving in the profession because of their work.

### **Watering the Root System**

We all know that trees and plants need to be watered in order to be sustained. Either this happens through nature, by humans watering the plant or some combination. One particular feature of trees and their roots has a huge impact on how effective the watering techniques will be for the health of the tree. Picture a tree. Imagine lines that drop from each side of the tree down to the ground. The root system for this tree typically spreads out in a circle four to seven times as wide as the tree at its widest point (where the imaginary lines meet the ground). People often make the mistake of watering the tree too close to the trunk (where the dead roots exist). Given that the feeder roots are at the end of the network of transporter roots, the best place to water a tree or plant is at the edges of the root system, far from the trunk (Texas Cooperative Extension, 2004).

Applying this metaphor to home economics is easy. In order to make sure the philosophy is current and relevant, and on the leading, outside edge, there must be a cohort of leaders perched on the edge of the profession (feeder roots) who are continually seeking new ideas and paradigms to reshape practice. These members of the profession need to be supported and encouraged to continue with their philosophical quests. They are the ones who are feeding the profession with refreshing and revitalizing ideas. They are the lungs of the profession, making sure that the energy that sustains the profession is available and sustainable.

Furthermore, the best place to apply fertilizer to a plant is near the drip line of the tree

canopy (Koning, 1994). If, at this point of the conversation, we assume that this is where leaders are often practising, at the outer edge of the profession (at the drip line), then it makes sense that we ask them to assume the role of advancing a philosophy. They play a key role in sustaining the profession. From this position, they are better able to generate leading edge philosophies to the rest of the profession thereby providing nutrients and sustenance to home economics.

### **Stress During Uprooting**

For this paper, I have assumed that the profession has a root system that is fibrous in nature (rather than one tap root, like a carrot). One of the inherent dangers of having a fibrous root system is that the tree can easily be blown over because the roots are not very deep (they are wide spread). But, it also means it can very readily recover from being uprooted, since not all of the root system is destroyed when the tree is blown over (Koning, 1994). It may look different when it regrows, but the fundamental parts of the tree are still there. We all know that home economics has been uprooted many times over the past 100 years. Yet, it still manages to recover, and it does look different now than it did in the past. Part of the reason it can recover is because of the strength of its philosophy. But, if the tree gets torn up (blown over) too often, the necessary, but fragile, feeder roots can get torn off, leaving only the dead, brittle transporter roots for support. Without the feeder roots, the plant cannot persist over long periods of time. For home economics, this means two things. First, there must be a concerted effort to ensure that the profession does not get exposed to conditions that will uproot it. Otherwise, members of the profession are left functioning from the old philosophy (brittle old section of its roots) which may not be appropriate anymore. Second, the profession: (a) must have people striving for a renewed and viable philosophy; (b) there must be people who are actively nurturing that philosophy (comprising values, mission, principles, concepts and theories); and, (c) the rest of the profession has to be open to receiving these ideas and incorporating them into their collective practice.

### **Supportive Root Balls**

Another interesting fact about a plant or tree is that, more than 98% of the root system stays in the ground, when the tree is pulled from the ground. When this uprooting takes place, unless done properly, precious feeder roots are yanked out of the ground and shaken off with the dirt, leaving only the dead, brittle roots. When this happens, a plant can suffer strong set-back shock when it is replanted, and may even perish. To prevent this shock from happening, to make sure the nourishing feeder roots stay attached, anyone removing a plant from the ground is advised to create a root ball comprising a network of feeder roots attached to the soil. It is especially important to form a root ball when the new plant is in a nursery and the ball should be held together by burlap or some other wrapping. Without good roots, even the most perfectly trained plant top will not survive. The new plant must contain adequate live roots to allow it to get established and flourish in the new landscape where it is being planted.

Extending this part of the metaphor to home economics takes us into the realm of creating new members of the profession, and, just as importantly, moving existing members into a new paradigm. First, for the students of the profession, higher education programs have to ensure that students are exposed to, and have a chance to critique and adopt, a full range of approaches to practice that prepare them for the changing world - a philosophy that sustains them. They need this professional orientation so they can leave university and establish

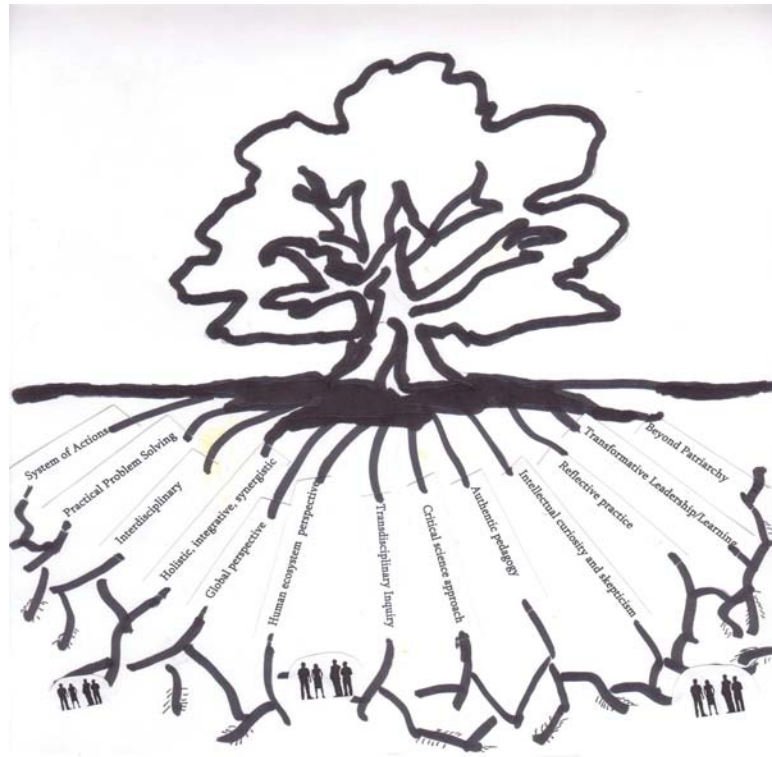
successful careers in the profession. Using the metaphor again, we can say that the uptake of nutrients for the plant (new ideas) occurs in the very fine network of young-root areas. We have to socialize our young professionals to see the merit of the philosophical quest - they are our future leaders.

Second, when working with those already in the profession, advocates for a new philosophy need to be sensitive to the trauma that can ensue when people are asked to move to a new location, in this case a new mental space and resultant, different practice. Those advocating for philosophical change have to ensure that the new approach contains parts of the old ways of practice that are still working (transport roots) as well as new ways to think about practice (feeder roots with soil attached)- a good root ball. If the person being uprooted says they feel like that they have been yanked out of the ground, then those advocating for a different philosophical stance will have to support the person (stake up the plant) until new growth can start.

Also, if the trunk of the tree (the conduits that take the new philosophy to the profession) is not centered in the root ball (the philosophy), then the plant (the profession) will not have a well-distributed root system (philosophy) leading to large wounds at different places in the profession. To avoid this situation, there must be coordination, and a good degree of consensus, among higher education institutions, professional development associations and those advocating for a new philosophy (McGregor & MacCleave, 2005). If they cannot agree on the new direction being proposed for the profession, the profession will not be healthy because its principled foundation will not be secure.

#### **Components of Proposed Philosophy to Sustain Home Economics**

Very few, if any, home economists have the privilege, even the ability, to see the whole philosophical foundation of the profession (just like few people are able to truly comprehend the true root system of an entire tree because of how big it really is - hundreds of miles of root system). Like trees, philosophies are huge. Individual leaves and roots (akin to practitioners in home economics) are very small in relation to the size of the whole tree (the profession). To complicate matters, the root system (philosophy) is invisible, yet totally supporting the tree. Yet, we must make the attempt to represent the foundation of the profession on one page, because, otherwise, how would people even begin to imagine what is being asked of them (Texas Cooperative Extension, 2004). Figure 1 shows a healthy tree with a trunk and a fibrous root system. The components of the proposed philosophy for the home economics profession are represented by the different branches of the root system. The people at the end of the larger roots are leaders, who continuously seek ways to sustain the profession. Each leaf represents one practitioner, with the entire tree representing the whole profession in practice. As will be suggested, ***anyone can be a leader, regardless of title or position.***



**Figure 2 -** Root Metaphor of Home Economics Philosophy ©

*Very succinctly, there are 13 fundamental ideas recommended to sustain the profession for future work on issues of sustainability (Figure 1). All of these ideas are drawn from, and are fully referenced in, McGregor (2006). The more familiar ideas include: the human ecosystem perspective, the notions of interdisciplinary, integrative and holistic practice, a global perspective and the three systems of actions and practical perennial problem solving approach (two older ideas that are not well known). These six relatively familiar terms will be discussed first (representing the transporter root system). They got us this far and are still providing support. These are followed by seven new ideas being proposed for the profession so that it can better sustain itself for the future. These are feeder roots that will create new strength, fortitude and vision to place the profession on the vanguard of this new century.*

**Human Ecosystem**

Human ecosystem is a term used to refer to the interactive system between a group of living creatures (humans and other species) and the environments in which they live. Instead of assuming that people are separate from everything else on earth, a human ecosystem perspective provides a focus on the two way relationship between individuals and families as they contribute to, and extract resources from, their near environments in order to meet their basic needs, enhance their quality of life and well-being and thrive as a social institution. These environments include the: (a) household and family environment; (b) local community; (c) human built environments (roads, housing, etc); (d) economic, social, political, cultural and other institutions; (e) the natural environment and other species; and, (f) the biosphere. This perspective lets home economists perceive individuals and families interacting, daily, in a complex web of human and

ecological relationships, connecting all to the biosphere - sustainability.

### **Interdisciplinary, Integrative, Holistic**

We have always described ourselves as an interdisciplinary profession. This word has a very specific meaning, relative to multidisciplinary, and must be taken to heart if we truly want to create new knowledge and find solutions to families problems. Interdisciplinary work refers to coordinated interaction among two or more disciplines with the intent of transferring methods from one discipline to another either for: (a) new applications, (b) new analyses, or (c) even the generation of entire new disciplines. For home economics, the interdisciplinary approach was advocated by Ellen Swallow Richards, in the late 1800s, as a way to enable the new discipline to develop over time. Work that is interdisciplinary in nature has people seeking synergy between multiple disciplines so they integrate their learnings into new understandings of how to advance familial well-being and quality of life. Synergy means two things work very well on their own, but work even better when woven together.

Furthermore, this part of our philosophy helps us say that an individual or family problem cannot be fixed by looking at only one part of the issue. We must draw on insights gained from many other disciplines and use this information and knowledge to work with individuals and families to solve their problems. We have to assume that everything is related to everything else. We need to appreciate that we have to be responsible, yet creative, in our problem posing and solving because each family's level of resources and lived experiences is different. Synergy can be found by drawing on many disciplines and perspectives. Holistic, systems thinking drives this approach to our practice.

### **Global Perspective**

A focus on a *global perspective* helps us begin to be accountable for our responsibilities to other citizens and to value diversity and differences while we look for common threads among all of the world's citizens. A global perspective also involves a respect for our reciprocal relationship with nature and the millions of other species that are not human. It appreciates that everything is connected to everything else. All, working together, are relevant to creating balance, harmony and the future of all species and the planet.

### **Systems of Three Actions**

The term three systems of actions refers to a complex problem solving process advocated for home economics. When we work with a person or family with a problem, this approach involves deciding, with them, which combination of coping with, adapting to and shaping change is most appropriate. The challenge is to find the appropriate balance between the three ways of thinking about how to solve a problem (Greek concept of *action*), rather than automatically using techniques and approaches that we used in the past or in other situations. In more general terms, we are charged with figuring out the best combination of: (a) whether people need to gain more skills, information or techniques (technical action in order to meet basic needs); (b) whether they need to talk to each other, or personally reflect, about values, meanings, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs so they can relate better with each other; or, (c) whether they are ready to find their inner power so they can work on revealing power imbalances in society that keep people oppressed, marginalized, exploited and persecuted. The best combination of these three types of actions is different for each problem being examined. In home economics theory, these actions are called technical, interpretative (communicative) and emancipatory (critical or empowerment action).



## **Practical Perennial Problem Solving**

The perennial problem solving approach entails a focus on problems that families encounter every generation, but with the assumption that the approaches to solving these problems have to change since the context will have changed. From this approach, members of this profession assume that things happen in *context*, thereby preventing them from assuming that what worked for a problem before will automatically work again. For example, after World War II, in North America, housing issues dealt with a need for many new homes because of an increase in marriages and children. In Europe, housing issues would have focused on the destruction of homes due to the ravages of war. In the 21st century, housing and shelter issues are still with us, but they look different now. In North America, for example, home economists are grappling with homelessness, gentrification, problems with excessive urbanization, and isolated rural communities. The need for housing and shelter never goes away - it is a perennial problem (perennials are plants that are planted once and come up every year afterwards). But, the approaches and solutions to address this reoccurring need, faced by every generation, must change with the times.

The practical part of this approach does not refer to the everyday understanding of the word practical. Instead of adopting a technical how to do things with expert advise approach, practical practice draws from its Greek roots and means *thinking before we act*. We have to take the time to respond rationally to challenges and questions rather than doing what we have always done, what we have been told to do, what will help us keep our jobs, what is in the textbook, etc. Before acting, we have ask our selves what *could or should* be done (normative and substantive queries), rather than just trying to figure how to do it. Normative refers to focusing on values and substantive means focusing on ideas (Brown, 1985).

### **Newer Philosophical Ideas**

*More recently, leaders in the profession have been calling on new approaches to practice that augment the longer standing approach briefly outlined in the previous section. The newer ideas include the critical science approach, reflective practice, transformative learning and leadership, transdisciplinary inquiry, authentic pedagogy, intellectual curiosity, and freeing home economics from the patriarchy trap. Each one is very briefly explained.*

### **Critical Science Approach**

The critical science approach is all about revealing power in society and how this power effects well-being, quality of life and wellness of individuals and families. It is a focus on creating safe environments where individuals can engage in dialogue and conversations with others so they can find their inner voice and power, understand their personal value and belief system and attitudes, and figure out what has meaning for them and why. With these insights, they gain "me-power" (*empowerment*) and are closer to reaching their fullest potential as global citizens. From this perspective, home economists do not believe that people can "be empowered." Rather, we assume that they than can find own their inner power and strength with us facilitating the process. They do this by learning how to question their assumptions, prejudices, biases and other parts of their belief system that prevent them from being authentic. Power of this kind is found not given and, once found, can never be taken away. This is also known as the critical empowerment approach or the emancipatory approach to practice. The end result is people working for justice, peace, security, rights, accountability, freedom and equality.

### **Reflective Practice**

Reflective practice literally means to stop, slow down, and think about the way we are approaching our work in the profession and why this way and not another. This reflection can occur before (what might come), during (what is happening right now) and after any professional action. The intent is to step back from the immediacy of the situation and examine our beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviour in a dispassionate manner. The result is knowledge about ourself - what we believe, what things mean to us, what we each value. Self-knowledge helps us gain courage to act in situations of uncertainty or in value conflicts and to be responsible for our actions. There are deep connections between reflection, self-knowledge generated from this process and our ultimate practice in the profession. Work that is not considered carefully, and at length, may not serve family well-being and quality of life in the end.

### **Transformative**

Transformative learning and leadership are all about inner change leading to a better ability to work toward a vision of the future that is sustainable. Learning that is transformative involves bringing people through uncomfortable disorienting experiences to a place where they are more self-aware, more conscious of conditions of society, and more predisposed to continually search for new meanings, not just more facts and information. Transformed learners are progressing toward being autonomous, critically thinking individuals who negotiate their own meaning instead of uncritically acting on those understandings suggested by others or doing what has always been done. These learners will have been personally transformed, changed in such a way that it is not possible to go back to the way they saw the world before.

Transformative leaders take this idea one step further and assume that this person has come to believe that anyone can be a leader, despite her title or position. Transformative leaders succeed in: (a) articulating powerful, long term change agendas; (b) getting people to change inside as they embrace this new agenda; (c) accepting the idea of power through people instead of power over them; (d) grounding people in a moral dimension; (e) striving for others to exceed their own expectations, reach their fullest potential; and, (f) getting them to challenge the status quo. Transformational leadership begins with self-development and self-awareness and extends to the coaching and developing of others so they become agents of change in the larger society. Transformative leaders help others clarify their own world, develop a commitment to democracy and emancipation, and have the courage and desire to work for the empowerment of all people.

### **Transdisciplinary**

A very new form of inquiry being suggested for the home economics profession is transdisciplinary inquiry that takes us *beyond* just work between disciplines (interdisciplinary). It is a deeply complex form of learning and problem solving that involves cooperation among *different parts of society* in order to meet the emergent challenges of society. It moves us far beyond interdisciplinary - synergistic work among disciplines - to work that weaves together academic *and* civil society to understand and change the entire world, not just bits and pieces of it. Out of the discovery, respect for the unknown and resultant dialogue between academia and other parts of society, new results, new concepts, new ways of knowing, new relationships and new interactions are produced, offering a *new vision of reality*. The problems dealt with from this perspective are far beyond the conventional concept of technical problem in home economics. They include human aggression, harmonious distribution of resources, development of anthropocentric (human centered) world views, and the realization of human empowerment, a fertile human condition and emancipated human potential through authentic practice and

transformative leadership.

### **Authentic Pedagogy**

All home economists are educators in some way or another. They play a role in helping people develop their innate capabilities and potential as humans. In fact, the Greek root of pedagogy includes *agogos*, meaning *leader*. Pedagogy refers to the process of educating people into their true and genuine human nature. Most of us understand this term to refer to the activities and strategies that we use to teach. When done properly, pedagogy combines cultural ideals and habits (ethos) leading to educational training that prepares people for liberty, freedom, nobility and beauty. This education leads to people capable of being good citizens. An *authentic* pedagogy is concerned with learning in the profession that meets the standards of intellectual rigour (curiosity and skepticism) and connectedness in a supportive environment that recognizes and values diversity. From this perspective, teaching leads to students who are independent thinkers (empowered). They can connect new learning to their own experiences and *make meaning* of their learning. Students can make decisions about their own learning needs, participate in the learning process and reflect on the whole process. They consider their work in relation to what the community needs (local contexts) rather than learn in abstract isolation. They engage in dialogue in a community of learners. The teacher moves the scope of the students' learning beyond the formal classroom and respects the knowledge learned this way. Finally, learners become agents of hope and social change because of new awareness, connections and possibilities.

### **Intellectual Curiosity**

Without a conscious effort, home economics professionals can get so bogged down in day-to-day practice that intellectual stimulation, curiosity and time-consuming skeptical thinking take a back seat, perhaps to the detriment of the evolution of the knowledge and philosophical base of the profession. Being intellectually curious means we are aroused by uncertainty and conceptual conflict leading to a quest for knowledge. This heightened state of intellectual awareness, in the context of uncertainty and the unknown, is an important motivator for scholarship in the profession. Intellectually curious home economics professionals will have a strong desire to ask deep questions, identify fallacies in underlying assumptions and challenge, at least question, existing practice or status quo. We would be fascinated with the kinds of issues and problems within their field and are attracted to exploring new avenues of exploration to address these perennial problems. We also would be driven to uncover new information and insights that may well challenge theories or practices in their field leading to new wisdom and practice. Members of a profession will truly respect the *spirit of inquiry* and facilitate constant attempts to improve and refine theory and practice, especially through deep examination of the philosophical base of the profession.

### **Free from Patriarchy**

One final, deeply challenging, stream of thought is that of freeing home economics from the trap of patriarchy. Any social, political, economic or educational system that grants privileged status to males, and permits or encourages their domination of women, is a patriarchal system. Accepting a patriarchal society as the only way to understand and operate has had, and will continue to have, profound effects on the home economics profession. The most visible result is the marginalization of home economics in the academy, the policy arena, the media and the education system. The profession cannot be very effective if it is barred from being at the

core of the action effecting family well-being and quality of life. This philosophical stance holds that we have to find a way to move from the outside to the inside of the circle of influence. Instead of changing names, aligning with other departments, or using the language of accepted, male dominated disciplines, we have to conceive power as creative, participatory and mutually shared. We must value life and nature, a cyclical, contextual approach to time and issues, communal approaches, and humanitarianism. We must value partnerships, collaboration and ongoing critique of power relations. Tenets of this power base would be social justice, gender justice, peace and non-violence, care and giving, solidarity, transformative practice.

We have to become assertive, meaning we have to stand up for our profession while not stepping on the rights of others. We have to find the courage to state our positions on the issue of home economics positively, consistently, with conviction. The longer the profession remains confined within the boundaries of patriarchy, the longer sources of new insights are closed to us. These new insights provide the power to change individually, and to change the profession from a liberated stance, free of the influences of patriarchy. The result will be home economists working towards a world free of dominance, hierarchy, racism, gender bias, inequalities, militarism - a world that is truly human and where home economists are no longer relegated to the margins but are the core of the world's work (Pendergast & McGregor, in press).

### Conclusion

This talk used a tree metaphor to describe a different way to think about how to think about home economics. The objective was to find a friendly way to begin a conversation about how important a sound philosophical framework is if we want to sustain the profession for future work on sustainability. So much valuable work already has been written about issues of economic, ecological, social and human sustainable development; yet, very little has been prepared to help us think our way into the future as a profession. We need a strong, relevant and dynamic foundation that we can draw from, as we work on issues of sustainability. Our roots need to be deep. Our roots need to be nurtured. Our roots need to be forever pushing beyond the conventional boundaries of what we already know and how we think about our work. And, we need to do this intellectual work together - remember that philosophy means friendship and wisdom. *The most effective way to locate sustainability within the work of home economics is to sustain ourselves.*

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