

Home Economics in the 21st Century: A Cross Cultural Comparative Study

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Abstract

A feature of the 2008 International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE) World Congress is the launch of the IFHE Position Statement - Home Economics in the 21st Century (IFHE, 2008) – hereafter referred to as he21C. This paper reports on findings of a survey administered to investigate home economics teachers' level of agreement with the propositions in the Position Paper using extracts taken verbatim as triggers, along with general questions about home economics. The survey was administered to a convenience sample in Scotland and in Australia, with a total of 264 responses. A cross-cultural comparison of findings identifies similarities and differences, revealing a high level of agreement with many of the extracts taken from the Position Paper, both within and across cultures. The overwhelming majority (93%) concur that home economics is multidisciplinary and located within the human sciences, while 96% of respondents agree that home economics prepares individuals for their personal and professional lives. However, several aspects were clearly contentious, including the lack of agreement about the retention of home economics as the preferred name of the field. These findings offer valuable insights into the degree of connection the IFHE Position Paper makes with home economics teacher professionals, potentially highlighting the areas where most focus is required for development work by the IFHE. The clearly contentious issues relate to the stance in he21C to focus on re-branding and repositioning as well as renaming the profession, presenting a strategic challenge for the Institute. The survey findings and subsequent discussion lead to the recommendation that IFHE extend the present research to Africa, Asia and the Americas and use the findings to build professional learning communities in all five (including Europe and the Pacific) IFHE regions to reculture members of the profession, so that the beliefs espoused in he21C are adopted.

Introduction

The International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE) is the only global organisation representing the profession of home economics. With members from 49 countries, IFHE has been developing the field of study, research and practice for the last one hundred years. The position paper—he21C—is a proactive attempt to locate the profession in the contemporary context by serving as a platform, looking ahead to viable and progressive visions of home economics for the twenty-first century and beyond. The product of extensive global consultation with IFHE members and the home economics profession, it is intended to be a

compass for the profession, and to be used to provide defensible arguments for individuals and professional groups in the field.

It is based on agreed beliefs and understandings, and engages some of the key challenges the profession must face. Not surprisingly to those familiar with the history of the field, of these challenges, the name of the profession remains one of the most contentious and potentially divisive issues. Launched at the July 2008 IFHE World Congress, he21C is an initiative aimed at collective reform, creating an opportunity for change in this contemporary field of study.

The views held by home economics teachers about he21C are of interest to ascertain the degree of connection with practitioners in the field, particularly since most people first experience the field of home economics (by whatever name) as a student in school. Furthermore, the teaching profession is currently experiencing a time of challenge and uncertainty, both broadly as a profession (OECD/UN, 2001), and specifically for home economics teachers (Pendergast, 2006). As home economics teachers look to their professional communities for leadership and inspiration, he21C may be a tool that offers cohesion for the home economics professional community. Herein lies the potential for he21C to serve as a catalyst for reculturing, a process which *“creates a climate of trust in which teachers can pool resources, deal with complex and unanticipated problems, and celebrate success”* (Hargreaves, 1995, p.17).

The Context

Home economics as a profession is at what Pendergast (2006) calls a convergent moment, or opportunity phase. This concept of ‘convergent moment’ holds that a number of important societal and historical factors are currently aligning, providing a never before experienced opportunity to re-vision the profession. Pendergast argues that these convergent factors must be seen as a catalyst for major reform - making this a defining moment for the profession. Evidence of this opportunity can be seen in the broader educational reforms sweeping the nations around the globe, as systems and structures take on board and reconsider what makes an appropriate education for participants of the twenty-first century and beyond (OECD/UN, 2001; Anderson, 2004). Within such a climate of change, this study seeks to explore the views of two groups of home economics teachers, both located in contexts where education is under review, and both with a history of home economics being challenged and feted over the last century. The contexts of Scotland and Australia located in two IFHE regions (Europe and the Pacific) were selected because of the origins of the researchers.

Home economics in schooling in Scotland and Australia - the teaching context

In order to gain insights into the working environments of the respondents to the survey, this section outlines the Scottish and Australian contexts, drawing out some key features of each.

According to the key text *Effective Learning and Teaching in Scottish Secondary Schools: Home Economics* (SEED, 1996) home economics plays an important role in shaping societal, human and family betterment. It suggests that the subject is defined by and concerned with *“using and managing human and material resources for the benefits of individuals, the family and society”* (SEED, 1996, p vii). It goes on to identify its contribution for all pupils, in

relation to personal development and life skills, technological, creative and aesthetic capabilities in the home and workplace, leisure pursuits and career opportunities available in home economics, industry, caring and service sectors. The opportunities for interdisciplinary and core inserts such as health and technology are emphasised, as well as the development and integration of specialist knowledge, transferable and specialist craft skills and management capabilities.

Scottish curriculum reform (Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, 1997) endorsed this rationale, while reinforcing the key position of the subject in helping to improve the problematic Scottish Diet. The reform organised the learning into three contexts namely: Health and Food Technology, Lifestyle and Consumer Technology and Fashion and Textile Technology. An audit of the courses available (Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) website, 2008) provides illustration for a wide range of courses involving a range of transferable and life skills and knowledge acquisition at different levels within these contexts. Increasing numbers of countries are introducing Technology Education into school curricula (Stein et al., 2000) for reasons of enhanced economic growth (Jarvis & Rennie, 1998) and the development of general educational outcomes such as creativity, problem solving, decision making, independence, critical evaluation and thinking skills (Barlex, 2000). The most recent Scottish curriculum developments (Scottish Executive, 2006) endorse these and other outcomes through four overarching capacities, namely developing students to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. Each curriculum area contributes to these capacities and home economics situated within the areas of health and wellbeing and technologies, is effectively positioned to meet learners' needs within the current social inclusion model for Scottish education.

From a distillation of curricula documentation in the UK, Horne et al., (2003) identified the social/interpersonal, cognitive and manual skills established in home economics, and defined such life or living skills as those of transition, of growing up and finally of independence. In acquiring the majority of these skills, the perceptions of young people surveyed was that they relied heavily on informal channels (mainly mothers), with the influence of formal education being low for a number of skills. Horne et al., suggest that such informal learning prohibits standardisation, may resort to self learning resulting in errors and misunderstandings, and cannot address gaps identified thus impeding the development of young people as empowered consumers. For pupils who had studied home economics, formal learning was more pronounced in the areas of food preparation, food hygiene and nutrition, suggesting that formal education is an optimum channel for the acquisition of living skills.

For the purposes of this comparison, the situation in the state of Queensland in Australia is provided. Home Economics appears in the curriculum for the first time in the Middle Phase Stage 2, typically in Years 8-9/10. In this context, it is often under the umbrella of one of the Key Learning Areas (KLAs), usually Technology or Health and Physical Education, or it may also appear as a separate subject. It is most commonly offered as an elective area of study. *The Home Economics Education Subject Area Syllabus and Guidelines Level 4 to Beyond Level 6* (Queensland Studies Authority, 2005) identifies the focus of home economics as:

... the wellbeing of people within their personal, family, community and work roles. Home economics encourages personal independence, living effectively within the wider society, and promoting preferred futures for self and others in contexts related to food and nutrition, human development and relationships, living environments and textiles (p.3).

In the postcompulsory years, Home Economics is a stand alone, approved subject. According to the *Home Economics Senior Syllabus* (Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (QBSSSS, 2001, p.4), studies in Home Economics aim to develop in students:

- Knowledge and understanding of the diversity of individuals and families, and of the basic needs that underpin their well-being
- Knowledge and understanding of the concepts, principles, processes and practices that inform the fields of study
- Understanding of the range of contexts, perspectives and issues that influence individual and family well-being
- Reasoning processes that are fundamental to critical and effective participation in a range of life roles related to food, textiles and living environments
- Skills and understandings to take informed, practical action that promotes the wellbeing of individuals and families in the contexts of food, textiles and living environments
- Commitment to active, informed and collaborative participation to promote the wellbeing of individuals and families in the context of a socially just and ecologically sustainable environment.

A two-year course of study in Home Economics must draw from the three areas of study: food studies; living environments; and textile studies. Each of the areas of study consists of a core plus electives. The minimum requirements for the two-year course of study are the core areas of study plus one elective from each of two areas of study. The general objectives of the syllabus are expressed in terms of: Knowledge and understanding; Reasoning processes; Practical performance; Attitudes and values (QBSSSS, 2001).

A number of perennial problems plague both Australian and Scottish home economics in schools, such as gender bias; low status; commitment to name. The reasons for these issues have been explored and explained in the home economics literature (see for example Brown, 1993; Pendergast & McGregor, 2007), and are connected symptoms of the ways in which home economics is viewed in education and the wider society. These problems are worth highlighting because they provide insights into the context in which the respondents of this survey work and indirectly provide an argument for the need for the he21C initiative.

Gender bias

Home economics in Australia, Scotland and most parts of the world, remains under the influence of a deeply gendered history, despite endeavours to move it to a more neutral identity (cf. Paechter & Head, 1996; Pendergast, 2001; Thompson, 1992). While much has

been done in schools to tackle gender bias in perceived higher status subject areas, the situation in more marginalised subjects has been less productive, leaving teachers isolated and disempowered in the fight against gendered regimes. Attempts to challenge perceptions and assumptions about home economics have occurred at both the official and the unofficial level. For instance, in the United Kingdom, *The Sex Discrimination Act 1975* made curriculum access, on the basis of being male or female unlawful in schools, while the publication of *Equal Opportunities in Home Economics* (1983) by the Equal Opportunities Commission expressed concern about the acceptance of traditional assumptions, sexist attitudes and values, and the support and tolerance of this by the majority of teachers, parents and pupils. At this time home economics had the widest gender differential of all subjects with the overwhelming majority being female (Attar, 1990). While attempts to make the subject gender free continue, the low proportion of boys at examination level is still evident today. Analysis of Scottish entries for 2000-2007 (SQA website, 2007) confirms male candidate entries decreasing in the area of textiles while averaging around 7% for higher level courses. However, Hospitality courses attract an average of 40% male candidates reflecting a growing commitment by the secondary education sector in meeting vocational aspirations and new curriculum initiatives.

This pattern is repeated in the Australian context. In Queensland for instance, in 2007, 211 males compared to 2684 females studied home economics in the final year of school, a total of 2895 students of 33655, or 8.6% of student enrolments. At the same time, 1413 males and 3564 females were enrolled in hospitality courses, a total of 4977, representing participation by 15% of Year 12 students. The proportion of males to females in hospitality courses is almost 1:3, much higher than the approximately 1:9 for home economics (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007). The effect of the gendered nature of the home economics enrolments is continued low status. The effect of the growth of hospitality, which has a closer gender balance, is of legitimising hospitality and increasing its status in comparison with home economics. Pendergast and Cooper (2003) identified the challenges the shift towards hospitality has created for the home economics profession, given the accelerated rate of implementation and uptake of vocational subjects over the last decade or more, including: increased demand on the physical resource requirements to meet industry standards (i.e. kitchens and other pedagogical spaces being redesigned as commercial sites); administrative issues such as flexibility in timetabling; choices between home economics or hospitality being included on student subject choice lists; the perceptions of home economics and hospitality being confused; and the major issue of the availability of appropriately qualified teachers to deliver it, the assumption being that home economics teachers are capable of this (Pendergast & Cooper, 2003), a particular challenge given there is already a teacher shortage of specialized home economics teachers (Pendergast, Reynolds, & Crane, 2000).

Low status

Low status concerns preoccupied the first (1896) British Association for Home Economics Teachers (Bird, 1993) and the belief externally that home economics is a low status area of knowledge continues today (Riggs, 1995; Pendergast, 2001), often perpetuated by intentional attacks to devalue the field. One notable example of this is the book by Attar (1990) titled: *Wasting Girls' Time: the history and politics of home economics*. This is not a localised trend,

but a global pattern. For instance, in Australia, the Department of Employment, Education and Training (1990, p.1) noted that:

Home economics is a classic example of a subject that has been bedevilled by perception of its relatively low status...it was a subject designed explicitly for girls and taught almost exclusively by women. Its focus was the private rather than the public sphere of activity, and unpaid rather than paid work. Its orientation was more towards the practical rather than the academic.

Low status is incontrovertibly connected to perception and image. Subject department image serves as a metaphor for its activities and values. For home economics, its complexity can be obscured by the overt and visual nature of its learning outcomes. However, if the field of study does not accurately articulate and display its core intentions, others can create an image expressing "value systems which hold allegiance to other fields of study" (Martin, 1998, p 39). Alongside the activities, settings and statements made in school departments, Martin (1998) argues: "[A]n image will also be perpetuated and coloured by historical anecdote, local mythology, animosities from past battles, ideas of pecking orders, assumptions, benign ignorance, ingrained attitudes..." (Martin 1998, p.40).

Name

In 2003 and 2004 the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), a national body in Scotland responsible for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees, commissioned research in three stages to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of the name 'home economics' (Marr, 2004). In the first stage home economics teachers, pupils studying home economics and careers advisers' views were sought. The findings showed that seven out of ten respondents (and eight out of ten teachers) wished a name change and one that would encompass all of the disciplines. There was also a lack of clarity about the subject focus being 'academic, vocational or practical life skills' (Marr, 2003 p.52). SQA concluded to change the name. Before proceeding to a final name selection, the views of the wider stakeholder community were sought, namely college and university staff where findings mirrored those of the first stage. The most popular words for a new title were food, health, technology, consumer and studies. Using these, the five names were offered for ranking to all previously surveyed stakeholders in the third stage. These were Health and Food Technology, Food and Textile Technology, Consumer Studies, Food, Textile and Consumer Technology and Health and Consumer Studies (the first two being the preferred choices of teachers and the most preferred overall). A change of government followed by the introduction of a major national curriculum initiative has affected the impetus for change and to date the name home economics remains in Scottish schools. It is worthy of note that, while a majority were in favour of a name change, there were strong and conflicting views and concerns about the names put forward.

Explaining these problems

As well as stereotypical views, outmoded prejudices and assumptions, the current position of home economics also stems from a number of constraining ideologies, which have hindered its progress. As Pendergast and McGregor have noted "[P]atriarchy is generally accepted as the basis upon which most modern societies have been formed" (2007, p.4) and often unwittingly

and well intentioned, home economics has been and continues to be compliant to its values and beliefs by reinforcing these and perpetuating stereotypes (Attar, 1990; Eyre 1991). Within modernist society this ideology operates on the basis of creating dualisms where one side is privileged (desirable) and the other marginalised (undesirable). As an ideology it favours men over women, bestowing power to the former and dependency to the latter (Pendergast, 2001). While females undertake subservient roles thus conceding to the supposition that there is an essential difference between themselves and males, this perpetuates the value system. Such modelling impacts on the socialisation and education of future generations thus reinforcing inequities in society. Dualism, functioning as the apparent norm in society has had particularly detrimental effects for home economics where home and work are divided into masculine and feminine spheres and into a hierarchy, with men in the more powerful positions (Thompson, 1992; Pendergast & McGregor 2007). The idea that home economics is women's knowledge located in the private, mostly unpaid rather than the public (highly valued and paid) domain; that it has become associated with lower achieving pupils; that it is positioned as a practical subject: that it is taught mainly by women, all exemplify dualism and add to its devaluation. Attar (1990) notes the perception of home economics as a weak academic subject limited to girls not clever enough to study higher status subjects results in its failure to attract more academic students. One of the effects of this is that home economics tends to be dropped by more academic pupils when it comes to subject choice (Paechter & Head, 1996; Blythman, 2006).

In debating its identity as part of the quest for recognition and legitimisation, there are those both internal and external to the profession who perceive that home economics is hindered by its name. They claim that to rid itself of its historical shackles and encapsulate its radically changed content and lessening focus on the home, a name change is necessary. Throughout its history the name change journey has persisted without resolution. Over the years, home economists involved internationally in the debate have bowed to reflect the contemporary pressures and drives of a multitude of internal and external voices. One home economist noted "[T]he old fashioned terminology is viewed as being one of the fundamental problems behind the negative and undefined nature of consumer science today" (Collins, 2004.p.5). After the (1994) International Year of the Family and resultant endorsement of the family, international home economists changed their name to incorporate the word 'family' (Pendergast, 2001, p.45). These demonstrate instances of seeking contemporary, in- vogue credibility and respectability, as Schweitzer notes "*a concession to the spirit of the times*" (2006, p.85).

The trend in name change in the USA has been steady since 1983 (Haley et al 1993, Kerka 1996, Munya, 2001) while in the UK, Further Education and Higher Education programmes and discipline related journals, the name of home economics has already, in all but one degree programme, disappeared (UCAS website, 2008, Kirkbride, 2006 p.9). In 1999 the *Journal of Home Economics* became the *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. The national IHEc (Institute of Home Economics) amalgamated with the UKFHEF (United Kingdom Home Economics Federation) to become the Institute of Consumer Sciences incorporating home economics in 2000 before its dissolution in 2007; this after an independent review revealed that with a decreasing membership, the national body "*demonstrated the characteristics of an organisation in terminal decline*" (Fisher, 2006). Name grappling may have been a

contributory factor here, with members feeling estranged, lacking a sense of belonging and identity. From a higher education perspective, Hutchison (1993) grappled with the name and its content in the UK, suggesting that in Higher Education *"a key reason for changing the title is to disassociate courses with the subject, as it is perceived in schools"* (Hutchison, 1993. p.4). With emphasis on industrial applications, a name change was justified to reflect this, in the hope of enhancing career opportunities for graduates, attracting research funding and increasing male recruitment. The words 'consumer' and 'management' were considered appropriate for inclusion into degree titles.

Once more the discipline is looking to gain credibility by highlighting what is valuable within a patriarchal ideology: family and home are marginalised, technology and consumer are privileged (and patriarchal) positions. Understandably, home economics wants to raise the bar but Davies (1995) argues that the discipline is in danger of losing credibility by changing what is already a globally recognised professional name. Pendergast & McGregor (2007) agree with this assessment, arguing that the name change debate is symptomatic of the profession acting in a compliant fashion with patriarchy. The name change debacle is cited as evidence of *"manifestations of a profession striving to be accepted by those in power, on their terms—an unachievable vision given patriarchal ideology"*. Schweitzer (2006) has urged the profession to constructively deal with the name change issue, which in her view *"must be resolved on a global scale"* (p. 86). Vincenti (1997) explained that some of those attending the Scottsdale Conference in the United States, where the decision was made to change the name to Family and Consumer Sciences, *"felt [the Conference] had created a new profession that not only built upon but transcended home economics"* (p. 306). It appears that this has not been borne out over time; a serious decline in membership of professional bodies indicates that the change of name has served to alienate, disenfranchise, and dilute the identity of the profession. The name of the profession remains a contentious issue worldwide, inside and outside the profession and this preoccupation with the label contributes to the oppression of the field.

MacFarlane notes that *"[P]erceptions are not neutral and no subject has a place in the curriculum by innate right"* (1994, p. 3) yet home economics in schools while striving to meet the needs of today's young learners, is a typical example of a marginalised subject with negative stereotypes where some teachers in their ongoing battle for recognition, have become compliant in order to survive, whilst others continue with tenacity to seek resolution. Bernstein (1984) argues that *"[W]e must be concerned with image, not because we want to manufacture it but because we need to discern how our signals are being received (indeed whether they are being received), and how these perceptions square with our self-image"* (p.15). Myths which go unchallenged can flourish, ultimately achieve status or received wisdom in national legend; and the future of any subject area cannot be fully understood without reference to its legacy. Notwithstanding the change of content and pedagogy, the school subject continues to be perceived using outdated language and clichés. As a result subject perception is shaped by external observers and it may or may not reflect its essence. Like perceptual awareness, *"what we see is what we expected to see"* (Gombrich, 1960, p.53).

Fortunately, moves to take leadership in this global dilemma are evident in he21C. But are home economics teachers amenable to chart home economics in the school context using this compass? The survey attempts to provide some insights into this question.

Methods

Instrument

The survey comprised two sections, the first with four (4) open-ended questions of a general nature. The second section had nine (9) extracts taken verbatim from the text of the Position Paper (see Table 1). This paper focuses on the findings of this section. Extracts were selected that were: pivotal to he21C; of particular relevance to the Scottish and Australian study population; and provided some clear directions on some of the contentious issues in the profession, such as those related to the name. Respondents completed a Likert scale response to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the extracts, and had the opportunity to add extended comments. During piloting, statement validity was ascertained.

Respondents

The survey was administered in two cultural contexts - Scotland and Australia, specifically Queensland. Both were convenience populations, based on the country of origin of the researchers. In Scotland, it was administered to a convenience population, this being the full cohort of delegates at the 2007 national home economics conference. There were 220 responses, representing an 87% response rate. It was assumed that participants' voluntary attendance at a professional development event predisposed them to comment willingly on their field of study. Six questionnaire responses were excluded as these delegates were not qualified, practising home economics teachers; the remaining delegates chose not to respond. Views expressed are considered nationally representative as, of the 32 local authorities who administer Scottish education, only two of these were without home economics teacher representation. In Australia the same survey was administered to a convenience sample of teachers attending a conference in July 2007. While the conference organisers were unwilling to distribute the survey to all delegates, a request to complete the survey, which was placed in a convenient location at the conference, was provided through a general announcement. 44 surveys were completed, representing approximately a 25% response rate.

Limitations/Bias

The number of Australian responses is less than the Scottish responses and reduces comparison validity.

Results

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed with the extracts taken from he21C, the majority agreeing with most of the extracts and thereby finding common ground in its scope, parameters, and purpose. The extract with most agreement (94%) for Scottish respondents is extract 4, the breadth of content for home economics; for Australian respondents (91%) it is extract 1, the definition of home economics. While there is overall a strong degree of alignment between Scottish and Australian respondents, in the area of the name and the re-branding strategy (E8, E9), there is a notable

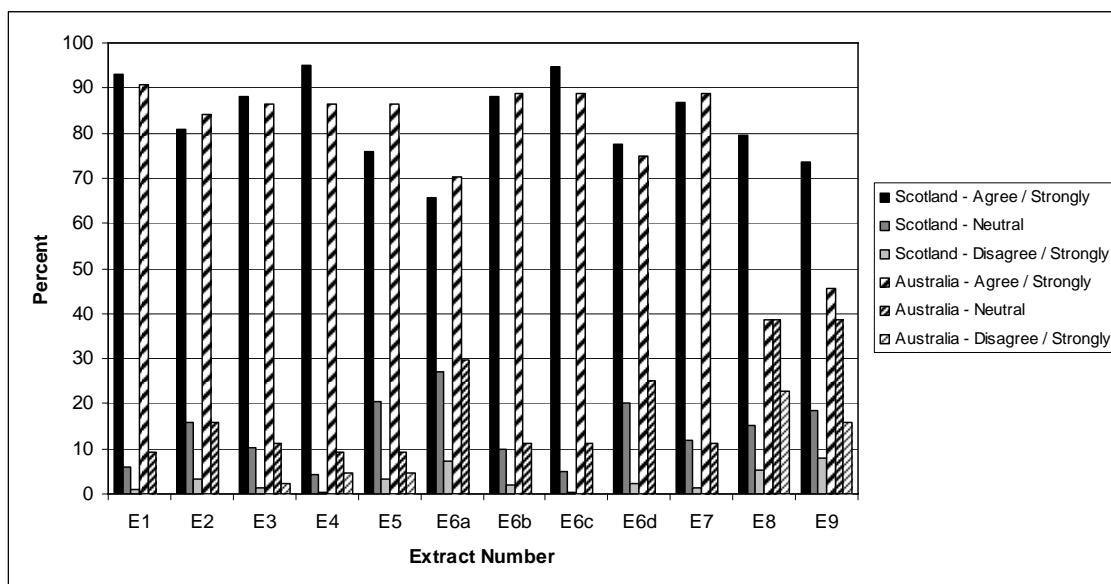
Table 1 Extracts from the *he21C*

Extract Number	Extract
E1	Home Economics is a field of study and a profession, situated in the human sciences that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities.
E2	Its historical origins place Home Economics in the context of the home and household, and this is extended in the 21st century to include the wider living environments as we better understand that the capacities, choices and priorities of individuals and families impact at all levels, ranging from the household to the local and also the global community.
E3	Home Economists are concerned with the empowerment and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, and of facilitating the development of attributes for lifelong learning for paid, unpaid and voluntary work; and living situations. Home Economics professionals are advocates for individuals, families and communities.
E4	The content (disciplinary bases) from which studies of Home Economics draw is dependent upon the context, but might include: food, nutrition and health; textiles and clothing; shelter and housing; consumerism and consumer science; household management; design and technology; food science and hospitality; human development and family studies; education and community services and much more.
E5	The capacity to draw from such disciplinary diversity is a strength of the profession, allowing for the development of specific interpretations of the field, as relevant to the context.
E6	Home Economics can be clarified by four dimensions or areas of practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. as an academic discipline to educate new scholars, to conduct research and to create new knowledge and ways of thinking for professionals and for society. b. as an arena for everyday living in households, families and communities for developing human growth potential and human necessities or basic needs to be met. c. as a curriculum area that facilitates students to discover and further develop their own resources and capabilities to be used in their personal life, by directing their professional decisions and actions or preparing them for life. d. as a social arena to influence and develop policy to advocate for individuals, families and communities to achieve empowerment and wellbeing, to utilise transformative practices, and to facilitate sustainable futures.
E7	The profession is constantly evolving, and there will always be new ways of performing the profession, This is an important characteristic of the profession, linking with the 21 century requirement for all people to be 'expert novices', that is, good at learning new things, given that society is constantly and rapidly changing with new and emergent issues and challenges.
E8	The preferred name of the field of study and profession is 'Home Economics.
E9	The profession is committed to re-branding and repositioning, not renaming the profession.

difference with Australian respondents indicating less support than their Scottish counterparts. In responding to extracts 6a, (one of the dimensions of home economics as an academic discipline) and 6d (as a social arena related to policy initiation and development), the majority of respondents agreed with the sentiments; however for both cohorts, Scottish and Australian, these illustrate a small but measurable decline in comparison to extracts E1-

E5, E6b, E6c and E7. A significant minority of respondents (from 20%- 27%) neither agreed nor disagreed with extracts 6a and 6d.

Figure 1: Combined Australian and Scottish Results: Responses for all extracts (n=264)



A closer analysis of the specific extracts, along with comments from the open response/comments section that followed each extract where respondents could add comments or explain their choice, provides greater insights into the statistical findings. The following is reported:

Extract 1

While the overwhelming majority (93% Scotland, 91% Australia) of respondents agreed on the home economics definition offered in extract 1 and the multidisciplinary nature of the field, some wished for identification of the 'range of disciplines'. Regarding the range, one teacher commented:

This may be a weakness if other disciplines feel they should deliver these elements, especially if (school) management support a cross curricular approach.

Another questioned whether those outside the field recognised the range. As sustainability is becoming more of a contemporary issue, its prominence within the definition was consistently endorsed through positive comments by respondents.

Extract 2

Again, the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed (81% Scotland, 84% Australia) with extract 2 relating to the wider living environments of individuals and families, some citing the necessity for an adaptable curriculum structure which would include global issues without

weakening any syllabus by becoming too wide, resulting in a need for *“more information/resources”* and responsive timetabling in order to make space to teach global issues. Some respondents suggested that this aspect of home economics requires much higher prominence, as much to assist future global citizens, as to rid the subject of outdated and intransigent perceptions associated with cooking and sewing. Another pondered on the changes to family structures and work patterns and suggested more emphasis on the home: *“especially when we are dealing with ...so many fractured families”*. For both countries this quote seems pertinent *“keep the subject up to date... but the roots must not be forgotten”*.

Extract 3

There was a sense from the comments, that in highlighting the wellbeing and empowerment of individuals, families and communities, extract 3 portrayed an inclusive, sensitive and caring approach, independent of ability levels and that these values were favoured by the majority of respondents (88% Scotland, 87% Australia). Some suggested that family as a concept is undergoing change, is having to deal with a range of pressures and its importance to society should not be undervalued. One teacher commented:

With such fundamental changes affecting family life, it is so important to maintain these values which HE upholds.

Teachers offered help towards a solution by proposing that this area requires further emphasis in the curriculum and that whether activities are paid work or voluntarily based, the results will be beneficial to society at all levels. One respondent noted however that the extract:

...would probably fit any educationalist whether in the formal teaching profession or elsewhere.

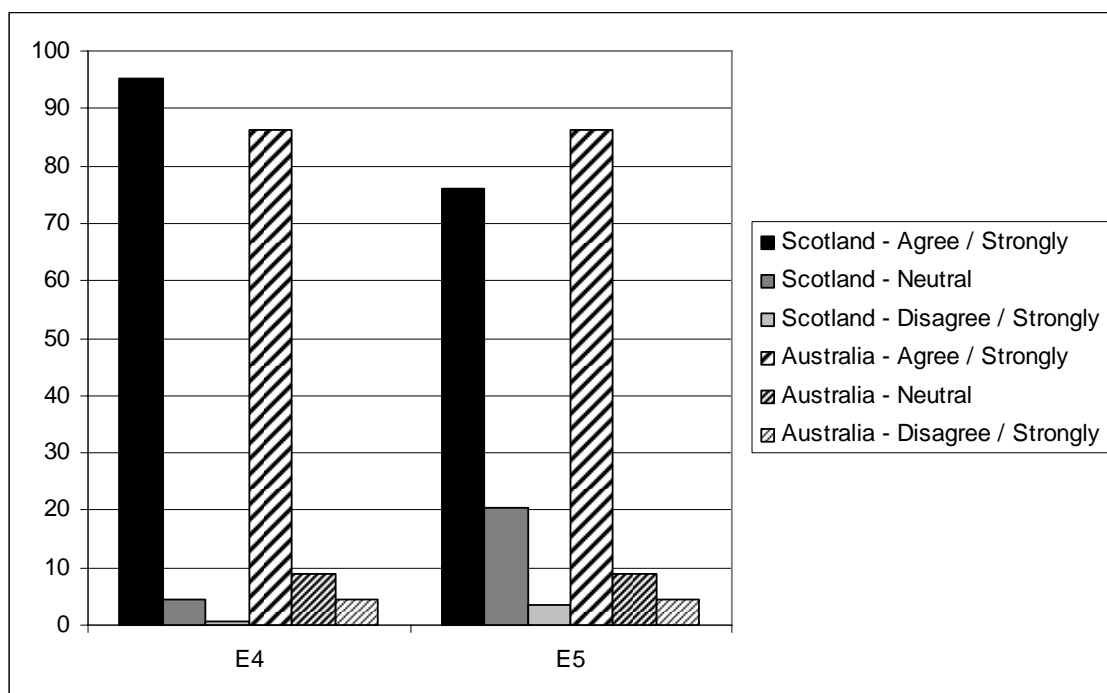
Extracts 4 and 5

Respondents also agreed with extracts 4 and 5 outlining the content of home economics (95% Scotland, 87% Australia), see Figure 2, with fewer comments made in comparison to other extracts. Curriculum breadth and depth was welcomed to allow pupils to: *“progress academically”*. While agreeing, some indicated that such a long and varied list of content may suggest vagueness or a view that home economics was a *“jack of all trades”* while another lamented that *“in schools this has been reduced and marginalised with other disciplines taking parts of home economics over”*.

While 75% of Scottish respondents and 87% of Australian respondents appraised such discipline diversity positively, comments expressed some reservation and uncertainty, for example:

Whilst this may be strength, it can also be a downfall if we pick and mix too much it may really lack specific direction (Scotland).

Figure 2: Combined Results: Responses for Extracts 4 and 5



This was also noted by Australian respondents:

yes, but this is also a drawback as our study has always had problems in identifying itself as a stand-alone discipline as we cover such a broad area across the core disciplines of Science, Humanities, Arts and Technology ...

and

...sometimes it's difficult to find the exact place that it sits in the curriculum.

However, this was balanced by views expressed regarding strength in diversity, the ability to make continued and further strong contributions to cross- curricular themes as they emerge while also:

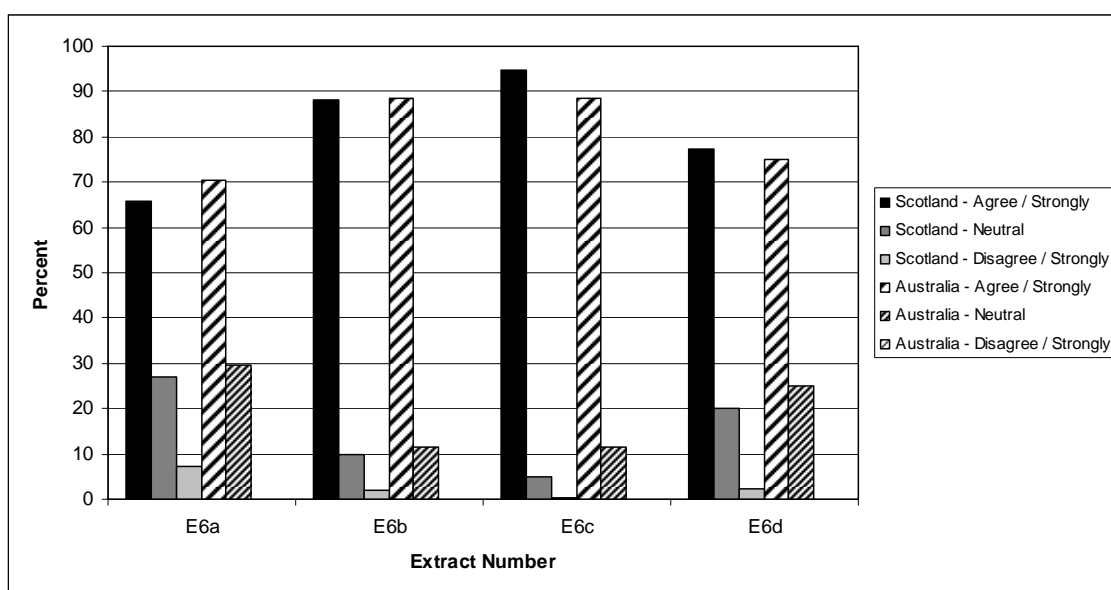
...developing the whole person. This is a real strength which draws students to this subject (Australia).

Extract 6

This extract had four subsections. The researchers were keen to find out from respondents their degree of agreement with the quite disparate aspects which have been brought together as the four dimensions of practice, viz: academic discipline; arena for everyday living; curriculum area; social arena to influence and develop policy (see Table 1).

Of the four dimensions offering clarification of home economics, there was a high degree of concordance from respondents (Scottish 88%, Australian 89% agreed/strongly agreed) for the dimension concerning home economics as an arena for everyday living and for the dimension as a curriculum area (Scottish 94%, Australian 89% agreed/strongly agreed) - see Figure 3. Comments reiterated the importance of life skills and the necessary repositioning of home economics as a core component of the curriculum.

Figure 3: Combined Results: Responses for Extracts 6a to 6d



Nearly two thirds of all respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the academic discipline dimension, with almost one third of all respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing (27% Scotland, 30% Australia). Supporting comments identified facets of the existing home economics curriculum suggesting there should be a sustained drive for the academic dimension of the discipline, as exemplified in one teacher's comment:

We fought long and hard for the academic recognition of HE, many teachers seem to have forgotten this (Scotland).

One Australian respondent commented:

I believe we need to educate and recruit new people who are properly qualified in our area. I am concerned about some of the people being trained in our area.

Of the Scottish teachers who disagreed (7%), only one justified her position by relating it to the skills/knowledge balance of home economics:

...I think the practical skills (are) more important.

The fourth dimension - as a social arena to influence and develop policy - had high levels of agreement by the majority of respondents (77% Scottish and 75% Australian respondents

agreed/strongly agreed). Those who agreed commented that this should be a priority for the profession, especially in Scotland with a recent, newly elected parliament where there may be the opportunity to influence and redirect thinking at that level. With the demise of the national association for home economists in the UK it was suggested that it is: *“not so prominent as it may have been”*. One Scottish teacher commented that:

if you have knowledge in a certain field, you inevitably use it to influence your interaction with others in all encounters.

36% of Scottish respondents expressed some difficulty in determining full meaning from some of the extracts. The policy dimension and the academic dimension share a small decline in majority agreement when compared to the other two dimensions. As teacher respondents, the *curriculum* and *everyday living* dimensions may be closer to their lived world. The percentage of respondents who disagreed with any of the four dimensions is small, ranging from 0-7%.

Extract 7

Almost 90% of all respondents agreed/strongly agreed with extract 7 and several comments highlighted and supported the continuing professional development needs of teachers and a productive partnership between school management, local authorities and the relevant education department to commit to this as: *“Innovation, adaptability and moving with the times in an ever changing world is vital”* (Scotland). One teacher suggested the possibility of research days which could be initiated through the recently introduced Chartered Teacher Programme in Scotland which provides opportunity for postgraduate study. Yet, even though supporting the extract, some negative views emerged, evidenced in this comment from a teacher:

Sad fact of reality is that many HE teachers are not as stated above and are still applying policy & practice learned years ago (Scotland).

Extracts 8 & 9

Regarding the extract *“the preferred name of the field of study and profession is home economics”*, there was a marked cultural difference in responses where 80% in Scotland yet only 39% in Australia agreed/strongly agreed. An equal percent (39%) of Australian respondents neither agreed nor disagreed suggesting a split response for the retention of the name. 22% of Australians disagreed, while only 5% in Scotland disagreed. See Figure 4.

Examples of justifications for keeping the existing name included its international recognition, the avoidance of confusion among the wider population and a lack of appropriate alternative titles to encompass its true nature. Others could think of no better alternative. While loyal to the name, some comments advocated a change to the internal ‘workings’ of the subject i.e. the learning and teaching rather than the name, or for home economists to adapt and promote what it is and can be. One Scottish respondent proposed that a minority

within the profession lacked confidence in the discipline itself. One respondent suggested that a change of name:

would derail the subject and could lead to its downfall (Scotland)

another

it is the quality of the people and what they do that speaks loudest (Scotland).

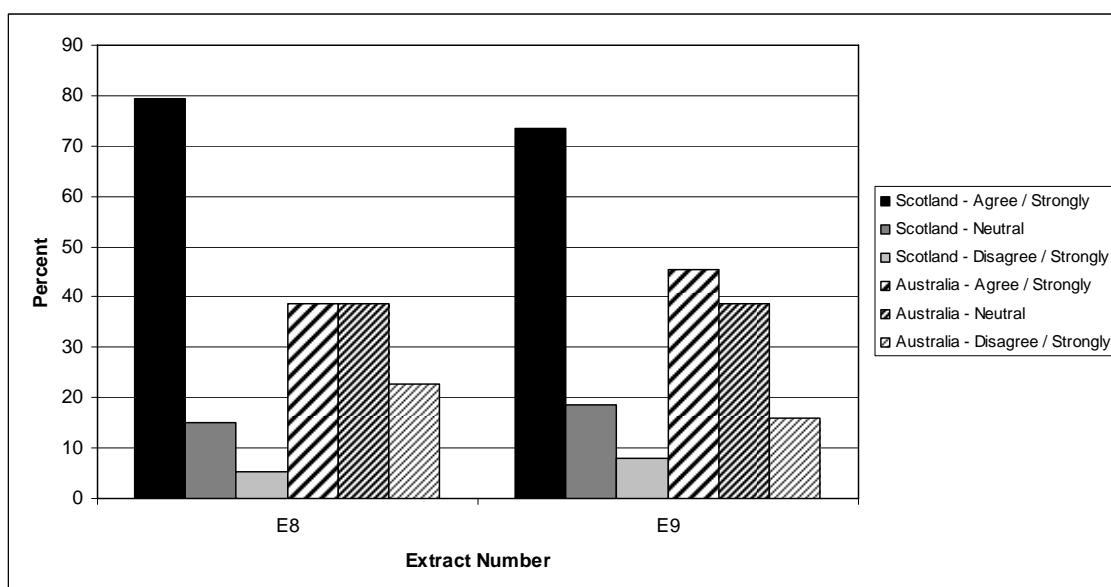
Australian advocates of the name argued that:

In too many schools it has been renamed, thus diminishing what is taught e.g. food technology

and

retain the name as it focuses on the individual and family

Figure 4: Combined Results: The Extent of Support for Extracts 8 and 9



Those who rejected the retention of the name suggested home economics was too domesticated, not sexy enough, too old-fashioned, not illustrative enough of modern trends or of its technology base, nor did it reflect the work being done where pupils progress into a diverse range of careers. Specifically, Australians opposed to the name made the following arguments:

This name is old fashioned and does not reflect modern trends. The subject is much wider than the home.

I find the name dated - in the 50s/60s. But I don't know of a better alternative

Food & Technology is a better name. I don't think Home Economics is applicable today - too old-fashioned.

In order to modernise the area, I think there needs to be a shift away from calling it home economics. I think this title gives people outside the profession a very limited idea of the subject - a 1950s perspective of the way we live - not a 2007 perspective.

And predictably, others can't think of a better alternative:

Only because I can't think on anything else that describes it better

and

But what else?

For the extract on re-branding and repositioning, there was also a marked cultural difference in responses where 73% in Scotland and 45% in Australia agreed/strongly agreed. A slightly smaller percent (39%) of Australian respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and likewise, only 19% of Scottish respondents. 16% of Australians disagreed, while only 8% in Scotland disagreed. This comment is typical of those who disagreed:

We need to look to the future, determine our direction and roles and market our expertise accordingly in an information rich society.

For those who agreed or strongly agreed with the re-branding direction, the following comment was typical:

we need an umbrella name to remind us that health/food/textiles/design etc are all concerned with the same field.

The Scottish respondents who agreed/ strongly agreed with this final extract commented that re-naming had been given too much priority and the areas of 're-branding' and repositioning and also revitalising, had been left behind. Working together was highlighted as being essential to its success. Maintaining a place alongside other subjects in the secondary school curriculum is also a concern at this time and so engagement with these strategies may endorse the subject's position:

This... is essential if we are to find our rightful places under the Curriculum for Excellence initiative (Scotland).

The internal workings of the discipline surfaced, in terms of pedagogy:

We need to keep pupils interested, never mind the name! (Scotland).

On occasion, some of the comments made by respondents devolved responsibility for home economics to systems or person outside the profession, or suggested an inability in sharing responsibility.

Discussion

In this study, respondents reported agreement with most of the extracts taken from he21C. However, an analysis of the comments supplied by respondents often conveyed a sense of disempowerment, repression, frustration and inadequacy. Such sentiments are neither novel nor new in the profession (McGregor et al., 2004). Particularly the areas of name and repositioning were areas of disagreement, both within each cultural group (and especially Australian respondents), and when comparing Scotland and Australian responses. Ironically, teachers in Scotland agreed to a name change in a previous study (Marr, 2004) yet here, just three years later, this study found majority support (80%) for its retention. Such vacillation also displays uncertainty and fails to create optimal conditions for change. Additionally, Consumer Studies was one of the names suggested by Marr but as with other options it was viewed as a narrow interpretation, unable to convey the integrity of the subject which has traditionally identified itself with breadth, the latter expressed in extracts 4 and 5 where teachers overwhelmingly agreed. The importance of projecting a consistent message is underlined by Bernstein (1984, p.64) who notes:

[R]ecognition comes from consistency. The identity must be transmitted time and time again. And the constituent part of the identity (the cues) must be consistent with each other.

In the relationship between home economics in higher education and schools Hutchison (1993, p.4) acknowledges that *"each is influenced by the other"* yet while well intentioned, in removing home economics from degree titles the sector exemplifies compliant behaviour, failing to appreciate the negative influence and, that each sector actually relies on the other.

There is also a lack of agreement as to the best alternative and it has been suggested (Schweitzer, 2006) that any name change should be conducted on a global scale, yet the title is internationally understood and is used by the International Federation for Home Economics which is in turn represented on international organisations. Furthermore, Martin warns that *"[A]ltering the name on the door can just be a way of putting up a barrier to the further intrusion of innovation"* (1998, p.39). This fracturing and shifting sands in a name change suggests a loss of common purpose and weakness (Brown, 1993; Pendergast, 2006) a lack of professional perspicuity, as well as illustrating the *"ceaseless need to seek societal legitimation and credibility"* (Pendergast, 2000, p.3). The problem of changing the name obscures more than it reveals. The fact that he21C is clear and directive in its stance on the name issue, stating without vacillation that *"the preferred name of the field of study and profession is home economics"* is a positive step for the profession.

Teachers and home economists in other professions need to be aware that by selecting certain areas of knowledge and particular activities, resources and experiences, they are also likely to be selecting particular values and attitudes. These will have an impact on how the subject is viewed, irrespective of the name given or courses taught. Clearly the overwhelming majority of teachers in this survey welcomed the diversity of disciplinary bases described in the he21C, agreeing this to be a strength. However the statistics for candidate entries in 2008 to the range of home economics courses in Scotland and Australia illustrate an increasing number of students choosing to study hospitality rather than home economics courses (SAQ

website, 2008; QSA, 2007). While this may raise the numbers of pupils in departments, it relegates home economics to a less favoured position. Teachers, in order to survive, may have taken the line of least resistance and allowed department courses to become largely practical, thus devaluing other learning skills. To promote and emphasise mainly practical skills would seem to reinforce attitudes which are held by others and pupils who vote with their feet as their needs and career aspirations are not being met. The often marginalised status of the home economics curriculum may become self-fulfilling when learners choose to study other subjects (Moss & Briwnant-Jones, 1983). Home economics as the vehicle for marginalisation, becomes the victim (Pendergast, 2001). In a similar situation and rather cruelly, but perhaps to encourage action, Moss and Briwnant-Jones (1983) suggested that *"Home Economics will attain the status its teachers deserve, rather than the status deserved by the subject"* (p.339).

Teachers need to address themselves to a wider range of subject-based and higher order skills than is currently the case. They need to look beyond the 'how to' technical practice and consider the (why) interpretive and emancipatory practices as well. They can, however, hold on to traditional practices in order to create a personal comfort zone which then inhibits or distorts the curriculum. Sometimes change is more apparent than real where efforts are made to create an impression of development, but this is expressly to do with protecting existing practice rather than projecting some genuine change fairly accurately to those outside the field. Currently, home economics in secondary schools in Scotland and Australia is at a critical juncture owing to difficulty in recruiting students to the profession (Pendergast, 2001; Buie, 2006; McKenzie et al, 2008). Added to this, the home economics teaching profession in Scotland is ageing with almost half of the teachers over 50 - a higher proportion than in any other subject, a pattern repeated in Australia (Pendergast, Reynolds & Crane 2001; McKenzie et al, 2008) and many other parts of the world. If the supply of teachers to teach the growing hospitality courses cannot be sustained, this teaching may fall to colleagues in the further education sector, destabilising home economics even further.

Summary and Conclusion

This research has highlighted several areas where focus is required for attention by IFHE, if it is committed to the intent of he21C. While limited to a comparison between two countries, the responses to the beliefs and positions advocated in he21C clearly show that there is some disparity between strategic directions set out in the document and beliefs held by teachers in the profession.

It is important to emphasise that the majority of the study respondents in Scotland and Australia agreed with most of the he21C extract propositions. In particular:

- E1 Home Economics is an area of study and profession in human sciences – 90% agreement
- E2 Historical origins of family and household translate well to contemporary living – 80% agreement
- E3 Home Economics is about empowerment, lifelong learning and advocacy – 85% agreement

- E4 Wide interdisciplinary base – 90% agreement
- E5 Disciplinary diversity is a strength – 80% agreement
- E6b Home Economics is a practice area for everyday living – 90% agreement
- E6c Home Economics as a curriculum area – 90% agreement
- E7 Profession constantly evolving – 90% agreement

There was less agreement with home economics as an academic discipline or an area to influence and develop policy. These responses are understandable from teachers who value practice and diversity (high agreement with E1-E4, E6b and E6c) but may not feel they can influence or develop policy from their position in the educational hierarchy.

- E6a Home Economics as an academic discipline – 70% agreement
- E6d Home Economics a social area to influence and develop policy – 75% agreement

The two areas for particular attention are:

- E8 Preferred name 'home economics' – around 60% agreement
- E9 Commitment to re-branding – around 60% agreement

Since IFHE has committed, through extensive international consultation, to keep the name Home Economics, further support and acceptance needs to be gained for the re-branding process. This will involve all members of the profession.

Having been trialled in Europe (Scotland) and the Pacific (Australia) it is recommended that this study be replicated in Africa, Asia and the Americas to assess agreement of the he21C proposals by home economics teachers across all IFHE jurisdictions.

As noted at the outset of this paper, there is a need to encourage further dialogue and contribute to professional practice by providing opportunities for reculturing and building community, essentially creating a climate of trust in order for the initiatives of he21C to have a chance of succeeding. The establishment of a community of enquiry is suggested here as a means of building collaboration and belonging, bridging the gap between research and practice by actively engaging those concerned (Pardales & Girod, 2006). Cassidy et al. (2007) describe such a community as composing groups of individuals from varying backgrounds and perspectives, committed to creating deeper understanding and practical solutions.

The concept of community works on the managerial concept of capacity building - working together for greater possible outcomes. Strengthening of social and institutional relationships are the focus for synergistic relationships, where benefits for all parties are the outcome. In this approach, there is an enhancement of individual's learning, and the possibility of advancing whole communities. Communities are often characterised by:

1. Wholeness, incorporating diversity

2. Shared values
3. Caring, trust and teamwork
4. Participation in a two-way flow of influence and communication
5. Reaffirmation of self and building morale; and
6. Institutional arrangements for community maintenance.

As the leading global Institute for home economics, IFHE is well placed to establish such communities. It is an international non-governmental organisation serving as a platform for international exchange within the field of home economics. It has consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC, FAO, UNESCO, and UNICEF) and with the Council of Europe. This community of enquiry would further strengthen two IFHE aims of global networking among professionals and providing opportunities for professional sharing.

Yet, there is an obstacle to overcome at the outset. In research commissioned by IFHE to better understand its membership (TNS infratest, 2004) membership and participation rates by home economics teachers is surprisingly low. The largest category of IFHE members are academics at university (47%), with 23% retired, 23% researchers, while just 15% are teachers in schools, the group of interest in this study. Furthermore, school teachers are significantly more often short term members, typically only remaining for between 1-5 years. So perhaps engaging in community building strategies with a focus on home economics teachers may be a mechanism for engaging teachers in IFHE, and thereby affecting the aspirational goals set out in he21C. Such a mode of operation, could offer insight into home economics teachers' professional thinking and may ameliorate comments such as this defensive, unquestioning position from a Scottish respondent, "*I am not involved sufficiently at a level where these manoeuvres are being undertaken*" and from a keynote speaker at the home economics conference in Scotland, "*I am a home economist who wants to initiate discussion about topics, then think, rethink, question and reflect*" (Renwick, 2007). The former may, for whatever reason, represent a reluctance to be fully self reflective about her own beliefs and the latter, the other end of the spectrum. Without a national association in Scotland, the space for such professional dialogue and the opportunity sought in comments from extract 9 to work together on repositioning is ripe.

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