On Conversation

Margaret Wheatley’s new book, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (2002), is likely to be as important to family and community—even world—health as her *Leadership and the New Science* (1994, 1999) was to leadership and management in business and organizations. Her insights about the application of chaos and complexity theory, quantum physics, and biology turned management and leadership on their “heads.” The simplicity of this new focus certainly “flies in the face” of current trends in technology and of the complexity of life we all experience.

New understanding about stability and change, freedom and control, and structure and creativity pushes our thinking to new levels about how we can live and work well together. This new book builds on the importance Wheatley places on developing relationships. The Kappa Omicron Nu leadership theory, *Reflective Human Action*, includes “develop relationships” as one of its four principles. Because we humans do not exist independent of our relationships, we need to place more emphasis on relationship enhancement. “Reality is created as people and ideas meet and change in relationship to each other” (Andrews, Miistifer, Rehm, & Vaughan, 1995, p. 4). Wheatley (2002) challenges us to move away from specialized techniques of discussion and negotiation to the simpler conversation model of meeting and exchanging ideas. She makes the following points:

... simplicity has a powerful ally—common sense. If we reflect on our experience, we notice that good solutions are always simple. Much simpler than we thought they’d be. Everyone has this experience, many times over.

Scientists are taught to seek the simpler solution. If there’s a choice between two possibilities, they choose the simple one. Simple solutions are called “elegant” in science. The beauty of the universe expresses itself in simplicity. (p. 21)

To further support her case Wheatley notes that in the description of humanitarian efforts she often hears the phrase, “Some friends and I started talking . . . .” She goes on to say that “Real change begins with the simple act of people talking about what they care about” (p. 22).

**Tips for Conversation**

Family and consumer sciences, in the concern for human and community development, would do well to encourage conversation as a premier skill for enabling empowerment and autonomy. Wheatley offers some tips (adapted from pp. 25-26):

♦ It only takes one to begin a conversation.
♦ Courage to begin starts with an engaged heart.
♦ Change efforts begin with friends, not with those in power.
♦ Change doesn’t happen from a leader announcing the plan.
♦ Change begins deep within the system.
♦ Change begins when a few people notice something they will no longer tolerate.
♦ Change begins when a few people respond to a dream of what’s possible.
♦ Change begins with a first step, then the next, then the next.
♦ People don’t have to start with power, only with passion.

Not only is Wheatley proposing conversation as important for making relationships but she dares to call it a change strategy. That’s *simplicity*!

When we humans don’t talk to one another, we stop acting intelligently. We give up the capacity to think about what’s going on. We don’t act to change anything. We become passive and allow others to tell us what to do. We forfeit our freedom. We become objects, not people. When we don’t talk to each other, we give up our humanity. (Wheatley, 2002, p. 26)

Paulo Freire (1995), in his important work in helping poor people transform their lives, also believes that conversation is powerful in clarifying thinking and in developing courage to act. He operates with the assumption that every person can be a clear thinker and a courageous actor.

**New Behaviors**

Wheatley holds that conversation helps us connect at a deep level,
develop a sense of unity, and discover our collective wisdom. New behaviors are required for conversation of this kind (p. 29):

- We acknowledge one another as equals.
- We try to stay curious about each other.
- We recognize that we need each other’s help to become better listeners.
- We slow down so we have time to think and reflect.
- We remember that conversation is the normal way humans think together.
- We expect it to be messy at times.

**Messiness**

Meaningful conversations depend on our willingness to forget about neat thoughts, clear categories, narrow roles. Messiness has its place. We need it anytime we want better thinking or richer relationships. The first stage is to try and listen well to whatever is being said. Eventually, we will be surprised by how much we share in common. The deeper order that unifies our experience will show itself, but only if we allow chaos early on. (Wheatley, 2002, p. 33)

The ability to accept messiness has to do with valuing chaos and believing that there is an unerring ability to find order out of chaos. Learning not to suppress messiness and to allow unconnected thoughts to emerge are unnatural behaviors in this era of efficiency and rushed decision-making. With willingness to listen and curiosity about diversity of experiences and ideas will come a collective wisdom in its own time. A rush to making sense will inevitably mean that collective thought has been jeopardized.

**Willingness to be Disturbed**

Another uncommon ability is the willingness to be disturbed. The problems of today require us to admit that we don’t know and are confused.

To be curious about how someone else interprets things, we have to be willing to admit that we’re not capable of figuring things out alone. . . . It is very difficult to give up our certainties—our positions, our beliefs, our explanations. . . . Curiosity is what we need. We don’t have to let go of what we believe, but we do need to be curious about what someone else believes. (Wheatley, 2002, p. 35)

This ability is at the heart of a global perspective—as a matter of fact, it is essential for human rights issues at home, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, community, state, and nation. Wheatley concludes that “[i]t[s] not differences that divide us. It’s our judgments about each other that do” (p. 36).

We can’t be creative if we refuse to be confused. Change always starts with confusion; cherished interpretations must dissolve to make way for the new. Of course it’s scary to give up what we know, but the abyss is where newness lives. Great ideas and inventions miraculously appear in the space of not knowing. . . . I need new ideas and solutions for the problems I care about. I know I need to talk to you to discover those. I need to learn to value your perspective, and I want you to value mine. I expect to be disturbed by what I hear from you. I know we don’t have to agree with each other in order to think well together. There is no need for us to be joined at the head. We are joined by our human hearts. (p. 37)

**Becoming a Conversation Starter**

The major portion of Wheatley’s book suggests some deep conversation starters for rich and meaningful conversations, but ultimately the conversation starter has the freedom to begin with whatever issue or dream that is relevant. She suggests that in the beginning you involve only those who are eager. As the conversation continues the group can decide who else should be involved. Starting small and simply fits with the overall notion of the simplicity of conversation.

**Summary**

It is the thesis of this article that by turning to one another, our world can be changed through meaningful conversations. In this connection it seems most fitting to revisit a portion of the Brown and Paolucci (1979) proposed mission: “The mission of [family and consumer sciences] is to enable families . . . to build and maintain systems of action, which lead . . . to enlightened, cooperative participation in the critique and formulation of social goals and means for accomplishing them” (p. 23).

Conversation, as promoted by Wheatley, is a useful approach for individuals and families to participate in self-reflection and self-direction to determine their future. McGregor (2001) describes a reflective approach that integrates Reflective Human Action (Andrews, et al, 1995), family and consumer sciences, and peace education to enable families to achieve personal and societal security, respect of human rights, accountability for choices and actions, a healthy and sustainable environment, and social justice for all. Certainly meaningful conversation is one means to those ends.

Many thanks to Meg for her insights about conversation as a means to restore hope to the future.

**References**


KON Conclave 2003

Kappa Omicron Nu Leadership Conclave & Undergraduate Research Community Undergraduate Research Conference

Hyatt Arlington at Washington’s Key Bridge, Arlington, Virginia

August 7-10, 2003

Theme: Integrating Academic & Co-Curricular Goals

The Hyatt Arlington, across the Key Bridge from Georgetown in Rosslyn, is minutes away from National Airport and located across from the Rosslyn Metro station, which provides access to all of the magnificent attractions of Washington, DC. Georgetown is accessible by walking across the Key Bridge or by a local shuttle.

Call for Applications

2002 Kappa Omicron Nu Election

Nominees for Board of Directors are needed for the offices of:

♦ Chair-Elect – one-year term plus two-year term as Chair
♦ Vice Chair/Program – two-year term
♦ Secretary – two-year term

Nominees for Committees are needed for:

♦ Editorial – three-year term
♦ Nominating – two-year term

Any Kappa Omicron Nu member who would like to volunteer is urged to submit an application form by July 15. See www.kon.org/board_info.html and www.kon.org/committees.html or request an application from the National Office.

The members of the Nominating Committee are: Anne Weiner (chair), Shirley Hymon-Parker, Diana Carroll, Virginia Moxley, and Frances Shipley.

New Online Publications

♦ Leadership 105 – Making Change on Campus – www.kon.org/leadership_105.html
♦ Leadership 106 – Adviser Empowerment of Officers – www.kon.org/leadership_106.html
♦ Developing a Research Project – www.kon.org/developing_research.ppt
♦ Professionalism and Career Networking* – www.kon.org/professionalism.ppt

* The PowerPoint publication, Professionalism and Career Networking, and the accompanying notes are useful for preprofessional and professional audiences. A reflection activity follows the presentation of the first eleven slides, and an optional follow-up activity is included. This activity is especially appropriate for integrating academic and co-curricular goals. University professors can utilize this program to focus on the concept of professionalism in orientation and capstone courses.

The Undergraduate Research Community for the Human Sciences is designed to create a framework and community to augment the scholarship of learning and teaching in preparing students for graduate education, the workplace, and responsible citizenship. It will serve as a catalyst for increasing the experiential content of undergraduate education in the human sciences. In other words, this project develops a model to advance both undergraduate student development and a national undergraduate research agenda for the human sciences.

Mission: The mission of the Undergraduate Research Community (URC)
is a dynamic and pervasive culture of the human sciences for developing the next generation of scholars.

Year 1 Report
1. A Planning Conference of Participating Institutions was held to identify and work on priority issues.
2. A pilot survey was undertaken to establish a baseline inventory of undergraduate research programs in preparation for further study.
3. Plans are underway to focus on faculty development.
4. Plans are underway to sponsor a workshop on the development of institutional plans.
5. The First Undergraduate Research Conference was held August 2-5, 2001.
6. Planning for the Online Undergraduate Research Journal took place during the August 2-5, 2001 Conference.
7. Planning for the Second Undergraduate Research Conference was begun.
8. Twenty-two human sciences units affiliated as Participating Institutions.

Year 2 Report
1. Three more units affiliated as Participating Institutions, making twenty-five plus the three founding institutions.
2. The Undergraduate Research Community and the Academic Committee of the Board of Human Sciences sponsored the NASULGC Pre-Conference: “Institutional Planning for Undergraduate Research in the Human Sciences,” November 9 and 10, 2001 at the Grand Hyatt in DC. Two half-day sessions were scheduled to explore alternative models and facilitate work on a vision and strategies for a comprehensive unit plan for undergraduate research, consistent with the overall university direction for undergraduate education and supported by the administration and faculty of the unit. Toufic Hakim, the author of the CUR publication, At the Interface of Scholarship and Teaching: How to Develop and Administer Institutional Undergraduate Research Programs, facilitated the Pre-Conference in collaboration with the CUR Founders: Julia Miller, Virginia Mosley, and Dorothy Mitsifer.
3. Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences - This journal was organized during the First Undergraduate Research Conference of the Undergraduate Research Community (URC) for the Human Sciences at the Kappa Omicron Nu Conclave, Grovener Resort, Orlando, August 2-5, 2001. On October 15, 2001, the Editorial Committee announced the Call for Papers and set the first deadline for papers as January 15, 2002. The first issue will be located at www.kon.org/urc_research_journal.html. Managing Editor: Dorothy I. Mitsifer
   Editorial Committee: Students: Jennifer Bremmeman, Jessica Byers, Rachel Coolman, Evelyn Davila, Genevieve Frank, Jennifer Green, Jenné Johns, Lanetta Nachtrah, Erica Poindexter Faculty: Julia Beamish-Virginia Tech, Nina Collins-Bradley, Nancy Morris-Ashland, Alan Reifman-Texas Tech, Won Song-Michigan State

4. Leadership, Undergraduate Research, & Faculty Development Conference to be held at Michigan State University, August 2-4, 2002.
   This conference will feature undergraduate research presentations, leadership workshops, and faculty development workshops. The research presentations offer undergraduate students in the human sciences the second annual opportunity to present research on the national level. The leadership workshops offer Kappa Omicron Nu chapters and undergraduate researchers an annual leadership development opportunity. The faculty development workshops are designed to help individual faculty and faculty teams to promote undergraduate research on their campuses.
   The conference will be held in the Human Ecology Building and the MSU Union at Michigan State, and lodging is arranged a block away at the East Lansing Marriott at University Place. Access to East Lansing by highway is available by way of I-96. The Capital City Airport in Lansing is the destination for plane travel. For more information, see www.kon.org/conference_2002.html.

Invitation to Affiliate as a Participating Institution

Human sciences units are invited to apply for status as a Participating Institution of the Undergraduate Research Community for the Human Sciences. Affiliation offers institutions the opportunity to participate in the development of the national structure for building a cadre of undergraduate researchers that will bring credibility to the profession and among the disciplines.

To affiliate with the URC, each unit shall submit a one- or two-page letter of commitment that responds to the criteria for institutions to qualify as a Participating Institution and includes the following: Name of Coordinator, including address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address; Sign-off by the Dean and the Provost; Brief description of present vision and unit plan for implementation of undergraduate research program. A sample letter is available at www.kon.org/sample_letter.pdf.

FCS Education Leadership Academy

Iowa State University has created the FCS Education Leadership Academy, allowing students from around the world to work in cohort groups during the summers at ISU to earn master’s and doctoral degrees in FCS Education with premier faculty from around the country. Distance education opportunities will further assure that participants can maintain their professional positions while committing to graduate study. Visit www.fcs.iastate.edu/academy for more information or contact Dr. Cheryl Hausafus at 515-294-5307; hausafus@iastate.edu; 1055 LeBaron Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-1120.

2003-2004 Scholarships, Fellowships, & Grants

Scholar Program
Variable national grants to chapters based on the prior year’s total initiates, awarded once each biennium.
Master’s Fellowships - application deadline April 1
Eileen C. Maddex Fellowship, $2,000 - awarded annually from an endowment in the Omicron Nu Fellowship Fund in honor of her contributions as Omicron Nu Executive Director.
National Alumni Fellowship, $2,000 – awarded by the National Alumni Chapter.
Doctoral Fellowships - application deadline January 15
Hettie M. Anthony Fellowship, $2,000 - awarded annually for doctoral research from an endowment in the Kappa Omicron Phi Fellowship Fund in honor of her as founder of Kappa Omicron Phi at Northwest Missouri State University.
Omicron Nu Research Fellowship, $2,000 - awarded annually for doctoral research from the Omicron Nu Fellowship Fund.
Research/Project Grants - application deadline February 15
One or more grants are awarded annually that meet the criteria of the Kappa Omicron Nu research agenda. Cross-specialization and integrative research is the research priority for the honor society. Multi-year proposals will be considered.
National Alumni Chapter Grant, $1000 - awarded annually as a project of the National Alumni Chapter.
New Initiatives Grant, $3,000 - awarded annually from the Kappa Omicron Nu New Initiatives Fund.
Applications and further information about fellowships and grants may be secured from the Kappa Omicron Nu National Office, 4990 Northwind Drive, Suite 140, East Lansing, MI 48823-5031 - Telephone: (517) 351-8335; Facsimile: (517) 351-8336; e-mail: dmitstifer@kon.org.

2002-2003 Scholarship & Fellowship Recipients

Scholarships and Awards

Forty-six Scholar Program
Grants for Chapter Scholars - $150-$8500
Three Undergraduate Student Presentation Awards - $250 each - TBA

Master’s Fellowship – Omicron Nu/Eileen C. Maddex Fellowship
Ericka M. Hedgecock, University of North Carolina at Greensboro - $2,000 – Interior Architecture – “Pohjoinen Valo Museo (Museum of Nordic Light): A virtual exhibition of naturally occurring lighting phenomena in the Nordic region.”

Doctoral Fellowship – Omicron Nu Research Fellowship
Roshni R. Molls, Penn State University - $2,000 – Nutrition - “Iron Status and Immune Response in Homebound Older Women.”

Doctoral Fellowship – Kappa Omicron Phi/Hettie Margaret Anthony Fellowship
Pearl Stewart, University of Delaware - $2,000 – Individual and Family Studies - “Change and Continuity in a Rural, African American, Extended Family: A Case Study”

National Alumni Chapter and New Initiatives Research Grant
Jennifer Paff Ogle, Colorado State University - $4,000 – “Pregnant Couple: Spousal Contributions to Women’s Body Image during Pregnancy” – This research is integrative in nature and makes connections across textiles and clothing, food science and human nutrition, human development and family studies, and marriage and family therapy.

Virginal Mothers, Groovy Chicks & Blokey Blokes: Re-thinking Home Economics (and) Teaching Bodies
by Donna Pendergast

Published by Australian Academic Press - © by Donna Pendergast, 2001
Available for $21.95 (U.S. funds, including U.S. postage) from:
Kappa Omicron Nu
4990 Northwind Dr., Suite 140
East Lansing, MI 48823-5031
(T) 517.351.8335 - (F) 517.351.8336
demitstifer@kon.org

(Don't write to find out if you qualify for a discount.)

Foreign orders invoiced for postage at cost.

Donna Pendergast’s book deals with the stereotypes of teachers to explore the bigger issue of teacher identity and the impact on teacher status, supply, and satisfaction. Case studies of atypical home economics teachers give rise to new possibilities for changing the long-suffering, marginalized status of the “proper” teacher, grieving for a legitimate identity. Her final paragraph puts it in perspective: “The thinking I am proposing in this book rejects the boundedness of traditional truth...
claims and modernist dualism, and instead alludes to the possibility for enacting a politics of difference. It does not attempt to ‘overthrow’ orthodoxies, including the heterosexual normativity of mainstream home economics pedagogy, just as four atypical teachers will not ‘overturn’ it. This thinking neither expects to nor has it embarked on this as a mission. The effect, however, can be unsettling.”

* Family and consumer sciences education is still called home economics internationally.

In Donna’s words from the back cover of the book:

There is an expectation that teachers are and will be transformers of society as they prepare young people to deal with an ever-changing world. While this role has never been greater, the status and respect once enjoyed by teachers has declined internationally over recent years. Diminishing status and negative stereotypes have in turn contributed to a growing teacher shortage crisis. Home economists, as a group of increasingly scarce teachers, have carried their share of negative stereotyping, led by tired clichés such as cooks and sewers and stitchers and stirrers. This book encourages re-thinking of home economics and home economics teaching by providing insights into the embodied pedagogy of teachers who refuse to live by tired clichés. It explores ways in which these teachers engage in fun and pleasure, demonstrating that transformative moments are part of their classroom culture. This re-thinking offers challenges not only for home economics teachers, their profession and home economics as a cultural practice, but for the broader teaching community engaged in embodied pedagogy, thereby providing a paradigm shift for re-thinking the status and perceptions of teachers and teacher professionalism.

This book review is reproduced from The Journal of the Home Economics Institute of Australia, Vol. 9, No. 1, page 51, with kind permission from the Home Economics Institute of Australia.

Much has been said and written about Home Economics’ problems of legitimization, its negative image and marginalized status in the educational system and in society. And in past decades, little has been achieved by way of recognition of Home Economics’ contributions to society and to give it the credibility it deserved. This may be about to change.

Dr. Donna Pendergast, in her clearly written and well researched book with its delightful title, argues that Home Economics’ dilemma arises from the way our “modernist” society is organized and how we think about power and knowledge relationships. She challenges us to re-think Home Economics from a “post-modernist” perspective to allow it, and its practitioners, to escape from the bondage of last century’s dominant ideology.

In eight carefully crafted chapters the author presents, both on a practical and theoretical level, her observations, insights and conclusions. In particular, she addresses how “the material bodies of Home Economics teachers are read as inscribed by social and cultural meanings about the nature of the discipline” (p. 9). Chapter One, “Setting the Scene,” deserves careful reading as it is a road-map through the possibly unfamiliar conceptual and philosophical terrain of some of the subsequent chapters.

The chapters following, Chapter Two: “Negative History of Beliefs” and Chapter Three: “Home Economics—Marginal Subject,” examine the educational, institutional and societal forces which have shaped and characterized the profession over the past century and have produced Home Economics as a marginalized subject area. Why and how this has occurred is further explored in Chapter Four: “Body Subjects—From Modern to Post-modern Concepts of the Body.” Our dualist thought patterns, characterizing present-day “modernist” society, are said to be the root of the problem. Dualities such as center/margin, mind/body and controlled/uncontrolled, which advantage one aspect to the neglect of the other, have resulted in the Home Economics body being perceived as “skilled and suffering.”

Chapter Five: “Disciplining the Body of Home Economics Teachers” explains how this duality of “skilled and suffering,” having become the conventional stereotype, is unwittingly promoted and propagated by a large majority of Home Economics teachers themselves in their version of the “proper” professional practice of their subject area. Reference is made throughout to current literature and the author’s own scholarship and research findings to support these significant conclusions.

However, readers will be pleased to discover that this is not the end of the book, there is more, there is a way forward for Home Economics. That such limiting dualities are unimportant and inappropriate are graphically illustrated in Chapter Six: “Four Odd Bodies: Home Economics as carnival.” Four “atypical” Home Economics teachers, practicing at the margins of present-day Home Economics culture, and their students, are interviewed. It is clear that these teachers transgress convention, that they put their whole being, their mind and body and soul, into their teaching and that, as a result, they make teaching and learning fun.

By accepting the risks and pleasures of teaching in such a manner, these teachers are able to escape from the
conventional Home Economics’ stereotype, they see themselves as “skilled but not suffering.” The theoretical basis for this is a “postmodernist” re-conceptualization of people, not as fixed entities in a dualist framework, but as subjects shaped and re-shaped by unconscious desires and language. This important theme is further elaborated in Chapter Seven: “Carnivalesque in the Home Economics Classroom.” In the concluding Chapter Eight: “A Shift from the Familiar to the Unfamiliar—Re-thinking Home Economics,” readers are invited to concentrate on and explore a different theme at each reading.

With this book, Dr. Pendergast has shown the way forward for Home Economics. It is highly recommended as essential reading for all Home Economics professionals and students. Furthermore, the book should also be purchased by all persons who still champion an out-dated and negative stereotype of Home Economics.

Beatrice Paolucci
Shaping Destiny through Everyday Life

Author: Margaret M. Bubolz, Professor Emeritus, College of Human Ecology, Michigan State University.
Editor: Linda Nelson, Professor Emeritus, College of Human Ecology, Michigan State University
Associate Editors: Burness Wenberg, Associate Professor Emeritus, College of Human Ecology, Michigan State University. Nancy Axinn, former faculty member at Michigan State University and international consultant. Dorothy I. Mitstifer, Executive Director, Kappa Omicron Nu national honor society.
Recently I was visiting with a colleague who was not formally trained in Family and Consumer Sciences but has devoted her career to teaching at the University level in our profession. She was somewhat dismayed at the lack of understanding the students have about our profession and how the collective disciplines contribute to the integrative whole. In the course of our conversation, she said: “Don’t the students know that they are part of a revolution? That they are not just here to get an education degree but to make a difference, to be leaders in a changing world?”

As I have reflected on her comment and thought about the role of Kappa Omicron Nu in leadership development of students and professionals, I concluded that one of our challenges as Family and Consumer Science professionals is to approach leadership in a way that is consistent with the realities of the society in which we live. Too often, we view leadership as something that happens or that it is the role of the KON Board instead of seeing our individual role as a leader. It has been said that leadership is not just a personality trait but is also a social role. Indeed, leaders guide and change behavior through ideas as well as example.

So why is this relevant to us? As you know, the primary objective of our profession is enhancing the well being of individuals and families. In the mission statement of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, the core values include diversity, equality and human rights, global and community perspective, and a healthy environment that positively affects the human condition (Chadwick, 1999). However, in a recent paper on Reflective Human Action, McGregor (2001) states that most of our Family and Consumer Sciences programs, either by design or omission, prepare students to be managers more so than leaders.

Whether we agree with this or not, it is important for us to know the differences between management and leadership. Covey (1992) compares and contrasts the two as follows: leaders give direction for transformation based on principles whereas managers control resources according to procedure; leaders adapt to situations while sharing power and strengthening people whereas managers react to situations while trying to maintain power at the lowest cost; and leaders work on changing the system and infrastructure by looking at the lens to determine if it is “right” whereas managers work within the system by looking through the lens and directing the work to be done. Although both roles are necessary, it is the leadership dimensions that are instrumental in helping us enhance the well being of individuals and families in a changing world.

Kappa Omicron Nu is all about leadership. The mission of Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society is empowered leaders in Family and Consumer Sciences, and therefore, your Board focuses on creating empowered leaders through Scholarship and Research, through an Organizational and Management Environment that supports mission-driven programming, and Member Development through strong affiliation networks that develop empowered leaders. However, we cannot do our job without you. As your Board chair, I encourage you to get involved, to enhance your leadership skills, and help us lead the revolution.

**References**

