Transdisciplinary professionalism for Home Economics

Sue L. T. McGregor

Mount Saint Vincent University

Abstract

This paper developed the argument that in order to practice in postnormal times (marked by chaos, complexity, and contradictions), Home Economists need to consider a different approach to professionalism. Accepting that transdisciplinarity is a way to engage with the chaos, complexity, and uncertainty, this paper introduces the idea of transdisciplinary professionalism. Home economics is first profiled as a profession, especially a service profession. The general notion of professionalism is discussed, followed with an overview of transdisciplinarity, leading to some thoughts about what transdisciplinary professionalism might look like in Home Economics including a shared ethos, shared accountability, a focus on the issues, and cross-sector professional identities. In addition to learning what it means to be professional in our own small area of practice, Home Economists would have to learn to identify, critique and learn professionalism in collaborative relationships across professions, disciplines, and other sectors. Transdisciplinary professionalism would go a long way toward positioning the Home Economics profession as it copes with, understands, critiques, and influences postnormal times.

Key words: Keywords: Home Economics, professionalism, transdisciplinarity, transdisciplinary professionalism, postnormal times

Introduction

Home economists are practicing in interesting times, meaning the times are disorderly, troubling, and disorienting (Martin, 2015). Ideas like capitalism, market fundamentalism, top-down politics, and corporate-led globalization have historically guided and shaped the normal, modern world. In these contemporary times, these concepts have become detrimental to the well-being and quality of life of global citizens and to the human condition. As a fallout of normal times, the world is witnessing the marginalization of huge swaths of humanity, uneven development, and a pervasive lack of peace and security in the form of global terrorism (coercive fear, worry and dread).

Today’s interconnected and interdependent world is further characterized by rapid change, realignment of power, constant upheaval, and chaotic behaviour. We are living in postnormal times. Sardar (2010) defined this transitional era as “the in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have not yet emerged, and nothing really makes sense” (p. 435). Postnormal times are marked by 3 Cs: chaos, complexity, and contradictions, leading to uncertainty and ignorance (meaning lack of knowledge or relevant education) (Sardar, 2010). Professional Home Economists are charged with helping individuals and families survive and thrive in these times (Pendergast, McGregor, & Turkki, 2012). This paper suggests that to
practice in postnormal times, Home Economists need to consider a different way to view professionalism (taken to be the expression of skills, competencies, and knowledge associated with a profession) (Cuff, 2014).

Gidley (2010) suggested transdisciplinarity as a way to engage with the chaos, complexity, and uncertainty of postnormal times. With the realization that we are living in a postnormal era, the call for transdisciplinarity has become urgent (Nicolescu, 2014). For the last 35 years, Home Economists have been encouraged to embrace the idea of transdisciplinarity (Brown, 1993; Daniels, 1980; McGregor, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2011a, 2011c). The prefix trans before the noun discipline refers to approaches to understanding the world and addressing humanity’s problems that involve people from all walks of life that do not normally work together (Nicolescu, 2010, 2014). “Transdisciplinarity is about dialogue and engagement across ideologies, scientific, religious, economic, political and philosophical lines” (Shrivastava & Ivanaj, 2011, p. 85). No one perspective, discipline, profession, or world view constitutes a privileged place from which to understand the postnormal world (Nicolescu, 2010).

Diverse minds working together, who do not normally work together, is becoming ‘the new normal’ in postnormal times. The term new normal refers to a previously atypical situation that is becoming the current, expected state (Maisel, 2013; “New normal,” 2009). What matters for the Home Economics profession is that this new normal is redefining how people in postnormal times understand professionalism (i.e., the belief system about how to perform in one’s profession, regardless of the times). Transdisciplinarity could be a way to augment and enrich our discipline’s approach to addressing the problems faced by individuals and families in postnormal times. The assumption is that what Home Economists currently know about what it means to be professional might have to change if they engage in transdisciplinary work.

In order to address the problems stemming from chaos, complexity and contradictions, practitioners will need to emphasize the professionals’ role of communicating effectively across disciplines, professions and cultures (Crowe, Brandes, Avilés, Erickson, & Hall, 2013). They will need to increase their awareness, acceptance, and appreciation of diversity, as well as embrace professionalism across cultures. Given that many of us already respect the power of the interdisciplinary and integrative approach, Home Economists could consider characterizing themselves as transprofessionals (merging and transcending professional boundaries). This new term conveys the idea of professionals working beyond the professions (Casimiro & Hall, 2011), just as transdisciplinarity means working beyond the disciplines (to be discussed shortly). Transcending professions and disciplines will entail transdisciplinary professionalism.

Linking professionalism with transdisciplinarity is a very recent conceptual initiative, emerging just three years ago within the health profession education field (see Wynia, 2013). Cuff’s (2014) book on this nascent concept is titled Establishing Transdisciplinary Professionalism for Improving Health Outcomes. She defined transdisciplinary professionalism as “an approach to creating and carrying out a shared social contract that ensures multiple health disciplines, working in concert, are worthy of the trust of patients
and the public in order to improve the health of patients and their communities” (p. 2). Late last year, Gibbs (2015) released a book titled Transdisciplinary Professional Learning and Practice, which “weaves a story of transdisciplinary professionalism” (p. 3). He felt that transdisciplinary professionalism reflects transdisciplinarity applied to professional practice. Briefly, it involves identifying, critiquing and (re)learning professionalism in collaborative relationships across professions, disciplines, and other sectors instead of just within professional boundaries.

To develop the idea of transdisciplinary professionalism in Home Economics, this paper first profiles Home Economics as a profession, especially a service profession. The general notion of professionalism is then discussed, followed with a succinct overview of transdisciplinarity, leading to some preliminary thoughts about what transdisciplinary professionalism might look like in Home Economics.

**Home Economics is a profession**

Home economics is a profession, comprising professionals who value professionalism (Brown, 1965, 1980; Brown & Paolucci, 1979; Nosow, 1964; Weigley, 1976). Wynia (2013) provided a very succinct overview of how constructs with the root profess are interrelated (see Cuff (2014) for a richer discussion):

Profess: To speak out in public, openly declare
Profession: A group speaking out, together, about their shared standards and values
Professional: An individual member of the group; an act or behavior that is in conformance with the declared standards and values of the group
Professionalism: a belief system (an “-ism”), holding that professional groups are uniquely well-suited to organize and deliver certain social goods; there are established shared standards and values to govern the work, and ensured adherence to the standards. (Wynia, 2013, p. 16)

Home economics is a profession. It was actually referred to as “a new profession” at the very first Lake Placid Conference in 1899 (Brown, 1980). Brown (1965) and Brown and Paolucci (1979) juxtaposed Home Economics against a collection of criteria applied to any profession. Succinctly, Home Economics is a profession because it has a body of knowledge that it calls its own, and which is necessary for the good of society. This complex body of knowledge is systematic, logical, and derived from research. Acquiring it necessitates a prolonged period of study in higher education. Professionals have a monopoly on this knowledge, and they can each readily identify with it. Members need approval to enter the profession and licensing or certification to practice. They hold an esteemed position in society, and are viewed as legitimate contributors to public affairs and policy. Also, service to the public involves intellectual activity, including practical judgements (think before you act). Members of the profession actively assure the public that their work is morally defensible. The scope and purpose of the profession are necessarily limited to ensure the level of competence and independent thought required to be a professional in the field of practice (see McGregor, 2005).
In summary, professions possess a systematic theory and knowledge base, have authority (the power to influence thought and actions) and community sanction for the execution of their authority, adhere to ethical codes and standards of practice, and all professions have a culture of their own that inculcates the other four dimensions (Kieren, Vaines, & Badir, 1984).

Home Economics is a service profession

Cuff (2014) applied transdisciplinary professionalism to health and medicine because it is a service profession, as are education, engineering, and social work. Home economics is also a service profession (Brown, 1980; Kieren et al., 1984). By this, Brown (1980) meant

a) It is action-oriented toward being of service to society or some segment of society; that is, it is mission-oriented.

b) It deals with questions that arise from sources external to the profession. The solutions to these society-oriented issues relieve pressure or satisfy certain needs or values of society or segments of society.

c) Through an interdisciplinary and integrative lens, service professions draw on any and all existing knowledge that might contribute to the solution.

They see the problem in its whole context rather than in fragments or parts (see also Halmos, 1970).

Professionalism

Because this paper is about the new concept of transdisciplinary professionalism, each of these concepts is explained before merging them into a new construct, starting with professionalism. Professions that are service-oriented are deeply concerned with the professionalism of their practitioners. Professionalism dates back to the Hippocratic oath (400 BC) (Cuff, 2014). “Eileen Richards and early advocates of Home Economics ... championed professionalism” (Stage, 1997, p. 32). Professionalism entails the expression of skills, competencies, and knowledge associated with a profession (Cuff, 2014). The suffix ism conveys the notion of a system of beliefs about something, in this case with being a professional. Professionalism is “the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection for the benefit of the individual, [family] and community being served” (Epstein & Hunder, 2002, p. 226). “To embody the conception of professionalism, the individual [Home Economics practitioner] interprets and translates the characteristics of the profession to patterns of action that are ethically defensible” (Roubanis, Garner, & Purcell, 2008, p. 44).

The concept of professionalism is multifaceted. It encompasses (a) legal and ethical issues (professional parameters: boundaries and scope); (b) a myriad of responsibilities (to self, profession, clients, colleagues, communities, employers, and society); and, (c) exacting behaviours (appropriate relationships, acceptable appearances, profession-related attitudes, knowledge, and skills) (Brehm et al., 2014). Evetts (2003) referred to the “appeal and attraction of the concept of professionalism” (p. 402). She explained the notion of professionalism as a normative value system. This value system is central to the work of the profession and provides norms for practice. The normative value system is reproduced
through (a) similar educational backgrounds and training, and, (b) professional associations. The latter ensure that practitioners develop and maintain a shared work culture and professional identity, as well as shared ways of perceiving and solving problems. These norms constitute beliefs about what is deemed appropriate, effective and efficient for a profession.

In more detail, professionalism involves professionals holding themselves to two sets of values. One set is common to all professions and includes rational thought, rigorous thought, openness to examining thought, and freedom of thought, all amounting to intellectual honesty (Brown, 1965). The second set of values relates to the specific profession in question, in particular the central purpose of that profession. “The [Home Economics] profession exists because it attempts to answer certain related questions which are significant problems in the society” (Brown, 1965, p. 73). The following quotes reflect consistent expressions of the second set of Home Economics values comprising its professionalism, listed chronologically:

- The Home Economics profession is about “the self-fulfilment of the individual through sound home and family life” (Spitze, 1965-1966, p. 64).
- Brown (1978) said the profession is concerned with “practical problems of the home and family,” problems requiring reflective decision making of what should be done (p. 15).
- East (1979) proposed that Home Economics “be focussed on the home in order to improve humanity” (p. 141).
- Brown (1980) asserted that Home Economics is concerned with “the human problems of the home and family” (p. 56); that is, with “the conditions and problems of the family” (p. 104).
- Kieren et al. (1984) posited that “the broad overall goal of Home Economics is to provide benefits to mankind [sic] [by] helping individuals and families” (p. 118).
- Thompson (1992) suggested that home economics is “basic to human survival and to surviving humanity” (p. 183).
- “The field of home economics has its foundation in the existence of individuals, as well as humanity as a whole” (Sekiguchi, 2004, p. 1).
- Pendergast et al. (2012) urged Home Economists to “ensure that the profession is part of the future of humankind” (p. 9).

Weigley (1976) explained that by upgrading the profession and emphasizing professional conduct, we can “achieve the goal of true professionalism” within home economics (p. 253). This higher standard involves elevating and dignifying the work of the profession so it is accepted by society (Houle, 1980). To that end, Kieren et al. (1984, p. 118) envisioned a “new breed” of Home Economists with attendant professionalism (beliefs) pursuant to bringing about meaningful changes in society. This new breed of professionalism would entail, amongst other things, cooperation between intra and inter-professional teams with a focus on complex issues with no answer(s). Leadership, including political action, would be offensive (not defensive or protectionist), and the goal would be for all people to collaborate and work together to achieve worthwhile goals of global citizens. Home economists would help individuals and families help themselves solve their daily problems (instead of telling them...
what to do). Professionalism of this magnitude was deemed necessary to enable the profession to practice in a way that benefited human kind (see also Robertson, 1983).

Transdisciplinarity

Home economics has historically characterized itself as interdisciplinary, and prided itself on being able to draw on many disciplines, and find synergies from this disciplinary integration to problem solve (McGregor, 2014b). The operative word is between disciplines. Although Home Economists are supposed to work with individuals and families and other sectors as they address perennial problems, we have not changed the way we frame ourselves—we still call ourselves interdisciplin ary. Transdisciplinarity goes beyond this and refers to initiatives that are at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines, extended to include the rest of the world (Nicolescu, 2002, 2007).

Transdisciplinary approaches to addressing the challenges of postnormal times transcend disciplines, moving to another space entirely, one where all voices are respected and needed, not just academics in higher education (not just Home Economists). The assumption is that for Home Economics, this means working with people from other sectors of society as well as drawing on other disciplines’ knowledge. This outreach and bridging have historically been key to our work, but we still frame ourselves as interdisciplin ary, intimating we draw on only disciplines. Trans (which means across, beyond, back and forth) would convey something else entirely.

Succinctly, transdisciplinarity is considered to be a higher stage of research and knowledge creation than are mono, multi, and interdisciplinarity. It is not limited to these ternary, disciplinary relations; rather, it concerns relations in the global system, without strict borders between disciplines or between higher education and the world (Brylina, Kornienko, & Kabanova, 2014; Klein et al., 2001). Brylina et al. described transdisciplinarity as “the synthesis of the disciplinary and the extra disciplinary... leading to a holistic-emergent (synergetic and evolutionary) picture of the world” (2014, p. 1009). Extra disciplinary refers to things that lie outside of disciplinary boundaries.

Chaos, complexity, and contradictions usually convey deconstructive notions of things breaking down or becoming convoluted and unmanageable. Transdisciplinarity, as worked out by Nicolescu (2002, 2011), assumes a constructive role for chaos, complexity, and contradictions as well as ambiguity and uncertainty (key features of postnormal times). Out of this vortex arise potential and possibilities, where a combination of disparate ideas can form a complex new whole. Transdisciplinary synthesis (Brylina et al., 2014) allows for people to creatively combine such things as various ways of seeing, knowing, comprehending, and envisioning the world. It includes the dialogue of cultures, and the synthesis of scientific and extrascientific knowledge (lying outside what is scientific). The sciences become open to other disciplines, especially the humanities and the arts, and the academy becomes open to knowledge arising from the lived world (i.e., social intelligence). This boundaryless interaction requires cooperation, collaboration, and respectful dialogue and listening amongst an array of people with diverse expertise and experiences. Complex problems are thus solved through a process of intersubjectivity and knowledge consolidation, whereby a space is created where contradictory ideas can temporarily be reconciled (Brylina et al., 2014; McGregor, 2015; McGregor & Donnelly, 2014; Nicolescu, 2011).
Nicolescu (2002) further proposed that knowledge consolidation happens by using inclusive logic rather than the exclusive, deductive and linear logic of the normal sciences. Inclusive logic makes room for contradictions because nothing is excluded (leaving things out means less than optimal solutions). Inclusive logic is employed to help people from diverse paths in life integrate insights from many different realities (e.g., sciences, economics, ecologies, politics, industries, communities, arts, lay people, spiritualities). This inclusive synthesis leads to a new image of knowledge, called synergetic knowledge (Brylina et al., 2014) or transdisciplinary knowledge (Nicolescu, 2011; McGregor, 2015).

This synergetic, transdisciplinary knowledge is alive and always changing because the problems and the people trying to solve them are alive and changing as they work together (Nicolescu, 2010; McGregor, 2004, 2015). Siloed, specialized, monodisciplinary, exclusionary processes are inadequate in postnormal times. The world needs new forms of mutual learning and problem solving, involving all sciences, the humanities, the arts, technology, and societal sectors (especially practitioners) to meet the complex challenges of the 21st century (Klein et al., 2001); transdisciplinarity meets these requirements.

Transdisciplinary professionalism

The paper now develops the argument that transdisciplinary professionalism has a place within Home Economics. In a Home Economics textbook, Fleck noted that “professionalism is a dynamic, ongoing process and is not static” (1980, p. 477). Furthermore, the meaning of professionalism is not fixed; rather, it is highly contestable, and needs to be challenged in new contexts (Evetts, 2003), like these postnormal times. “The professionalism of yesterday is not the professionalism of today, nor will it be the professionalism of tomorrow. Some core elements are the same, but the shadings change. And what issues get discussed as part of professionalism change as well” (Cuff, 2014, p. 10). With these sentiments in mind, this paper initiates a discussion of transdisciplinary professionalism in Home Economics in postnormal times (see Figure 1).
General overview

Transdisciplinary professionalism transcends normal approaches to professionalism (see previous section). Incorporating transdisciplinary professionalism into Home Economics practice—creating a new normal—would require changes in the thinking of Home Economic professionals and the public. It “would involve issues of cross-sector communication, differing values of multiple stakeholders, implications for leadership and respectful interaction, accountability, and reciprocity ... between professionals, [individuals and families], and the public” (Cuff, 2014, p. 111). In addition to learning what it means to be professional in our own small area of practice, Home Economists would have to learn to identify, critique and learn professionalism in collaborative relationships across professions, disciplines, and other sectors.

Shared ethos

Transdisciplinary professionalism would comprise a fully integrated approach amongst disciplines and other actors as they work together to create, profess, and apply a shared ethos (shared attributes of a culture) (Wynia, Kishore, & Belar, 2014). A whole new culture evolves during transdisciplinary work. Working within this new culture, while remaining grounded in the Home Economics professional culture, would be a powerful opportunity for our profession. In order to ensure a shared ethos, Home Economics would have to move beyond its familiar professional and disciplinary ethos. If engaged in transdisciplinary work, guided by transdisciplinary professionalism, we would have to reconcile the ethical relationship across multiple disciplines and professions as well as members of society and other sectors.

There are some challenges to this for our profession. Each discipline and profession has an ethos, a culture. Home economics is both a discipline and a profession. Regarding the former, an epistemic culture is the culture within a discipline that sustains and regulates core assumptions about knowing within that discipline (Knorr Cetina, 1999). A professional culture refers to patterns, characteristics and traits expressed by a particular group that belongs to a certain profession (Kieren et al., 1984). “Professionals tend to adopt the value system and develop behaviour patterns consistent with their peers; they learn to ‘walk and talk’ alike” (International Civil Aviation Organization, 2013, p. 2-11).

Home economists have to realize that a professional culture is different from the epistemic culture of the attendant discipline area; that is, it is different from the knowledge, methods, validity, and scope of the companion discipline (McWilliam, Hearn, & Haseman, 2008). For Home Economics, which is both a discipline and a profession, this distinction matters. Brown and Paolucci (1979) shared a deep discussion of how the Home Economics discipline comes to know and create knowledge (i.e., its epistemic culture). An integral part of professionalism in general is being able to identify, critique and employ a unique body of disciplinary knowledge, using profession-specific competencies and skills (Epstein & Hunder, 2002; Kieren
et al., 1984). Transdisciplinary professionalism challenges us to embrace a shared ethos in an emergent multi-sector culture, comprising people who do not normally work together.

**Shared accountability**

Because transdisciplinary professionalism crosses sectoral boundaries, people have to rethink the concept of accountability. Accountable means being *able to account* for one’s actions and decisions (i.e., give a satisfactory explanation). People are accountable *if* they can neutrally and accurately report on the sequence of their choices leading to the consequences (Planned Success Institute, 2002). People *take* responsibility but are *held* accountable (by themselves or others) (McGregor, 2014a). Transdisciplinary professionalism would have shared accountabilities as well as a shared ethos. All participants would be held accountable to each other, the process, and the value of professionalism (Cuff, 2014). Home economists’ obligations for accountability would transcend those they have for their professional groups and the people they serve. If people do not value professionalism, it will be difficult to hold the transdisciplinary initiative accountable.

While striving for *shared* accountability, diverse practitioners working on a postnormal issue would need to develop radical new means of thinking and acting collaboratively. They would need to document and recount collective work so they can be held to task for the consequences of any actions predicated on their decisions. This *trans*accountability would entail innovative and effective ways to transfer collaborative skills, values, and behaviors. It would also provide leadership that fosters ongoing research and innovation pursuant to addressing the postnormal issue. Another challenge to shared accountability would be to jointly identify desirable outcomes and decide how to best measure them, if indeed they are measurable (Cuff, 2014).

**Professional identity**

Each person enters their practice with a professional identity, understood to be a person’s self-concept as a professional (shaped by values, beliefs, attitudes). Transdisciplinary professionalism would mean Home Economists would retain this professional identity while at the same time building another identity when working within others’ practice and elsewhere (Burman, 2013). The transdisciplinary professional identity is a temporary one, changing with each transdisciplinary initiative. Developing an identity as a transprofessional practitioner is a challenge because it is difficult for people to shift their mind set from an ongoing one to a temporary one (in play during transcollaborations); they simply are not familiar with others’ perspectives. This transient identity evolves during transprofessional collaboration, and is said to occur when translation is no longer necessary between disparate collaborators because each person has fully integrated the others’ unique contributions (Chiocchio & Richer, 2015; Maguire, 2015; McGregor & Volckmann, 2011). Eventually, transprofessional *team knowledge* emerges (Brylina et al., 2014), akin to transdisciplinary synergistic knowledge (McGregor, 2015).

In the meantime, in order for transdisciplinary professional identities to evolve, deep respect must abound for the role of conflict mediation, negotiations, and resolutions during transdisciplinary engagements (McGregor, 2011b; McGregor & Volckmann, 2011). To that end,
when engaging in transdisciplinary professionalism, Home Economists would need to work with others to create a common language that can transcend stakeholder-specific jargon, thus making it easier to communicate with each other (Austin, Park, & Goble, 2008; Cuff, 2014; McGregor & Volckmann, 2011). Granted, this will be a difficult task given that all language is loaded with meaning as well as cultural, social and geographic knowledge. But with many years of research, discussion, collaboration, translations and persistence, it is a realizable goal.

Institutional frameworks

Existing professionals are required to be familiar with their guiding institutional frameworks including codes of ethics, regulations, standards, self-regulation, and laws. Meaningful transdisciplinary professionalism would necessitate the creation of new institutional frameworks. The creation of these new frameworks would require an ongoing multi-sector forum rather than just one-time efforts (Wynia et al., 2014). Professionals are cognizant of the necessity of working within the institutional frameworks for their practice to make the profession strong and sustainable. Transdisciplinary professionalism raises the fear that transgressions across professional boundaries might weaken the status of groups that may already be subject to professional insecurity (Taylor & McEwan, 2012), including Home Economics (Pendergast & McGregor, 2007). Any new institutional frameworks must be mindful of individual professions’ insecurities.

Evetts (2003) recognized this concern when she characterized professionalism as an ideology (a hegemonic belief system) rather than a normative value system. She said professions have a dual character, public interest and self-interest. Respectively, (a) they include the provision of service to the public (public interest), and (b) the use of knowledge and power for economic gain (private interest) and to assert legitimacy (self interest). Evetts (2003) maintained that professionalism can be used as a mechanism of professional change and protection (see also Moody, Petty, & Giglio, 2015). In order to both protect the public and control the profession’s market position, professionalism is used as a reason to control the licensing and certification of people in a profession. Transdisciplinary institutional frameworks would transcend this reality, while respecting it.

Multi-sector code of conduct

The behaviour of professionals is shaped by their beliefs, which in turn characterize their professionalism. Standards for professionalism are found in ethical codes of conduct. Despite that most professions have their own code (including Home Economics), it might be necessary to consider a multi-sector ethical code when dealing with transdisciplinary professionalism. Without such multi-sector codes of behaviour, the issues of unethical behaviour of professionals can have lasting effects on other stakeholders who may experience or perceive injustice and breaches of trust during the transdisciplinary work. Home Economists would also have to remain attuned to fiduciary and trust relationships when engaging with the other actors who are jointly concerned with the complex problem (see Cuff, 2014). Fiduciary means placing one’s complete confidence in another. It could be argued that individuals and families place their trust in Home Economists to represent their interests. Transdisciplinary professionalism entails Home Economists respecting this fiduciary trust while addressing the
larger issue at hand. Any multi-sector code of conduct for transdisciplinary professionalism should respect this concern for all sectors involved in the initiative.

Focus on the issue

Burman (2013) clarified that the focus of transdisciplinary professionalism would be the issue itself and not the client being served by the professional. Some Home Economists may resist this tenet of transdisciplinary professionalism. The profession has historically been concerned with the individual and the family experiencing the issue rather than the issue per se (Brown, 1980, 1993; Kieren et al., 1984). Not that we are not concerned with poverty, inequality, or injustice, but we have tended to pay attention to the symptoms experienced by families and not the underlying ideological and paradigmatic issues. Such issues include abuses of power, injustice, inequality, discrimination, social disequilibrium, unsustainability, and aggression. Providing families with technical information about malnutrition does not get at the root of the problem, which is the issue of inadequate food distribution in society due to inequality and injustice (Brown, 1993).

Focusing on the issue creates a space for as many perspectives as possible instead of limiting the contemplation to one profession or sector and what it alone can contribute. Doing so from a transdisciplinary stance (beyond disciplines and transcending professions) exponentially multiples the richness of solutions. If disparate sectors cannot remain open to others’ perspectives, the larger issue (with its many interpretations) cannot be presented, deliberated, and addressed. The solution of complex, postnormal problems entails iterative boundary crossing and collaborative work that transcends known borders. Transcend means climbing up and over to a new space (McGregor & Donnelly, 2014). Transcending sectoral borders to reach new spaces (insights, perspectives, views, opinions) ensures a richer profile of the issue at hand, rather than one particular sector’s position. This transsector work, shaped by transdisciplinary professionalism, means the issue becomes the focus and not the people directly experiencing it. The latter matter, but how their circumstances will be addressed depends on how the issue is framed and understood.

In summary, each transdisciplinary initiative intent on addressing a complex, postnormal problem would be characterized by these six aspects of transdisciplinary professionalism: the development of a shared ethos, the accommodation of shared accountability, the evolution of professional identities, the development of a multi-sector code of conduct, the creation of new institutional frameworks, and a concerted focus on the issue at hand. If a Home Economist engaged with a different collection of people on a different issue, a new transdisciplinary professionalism profile would emerge for that context, but remain grounded in these six fundamental dimensions. Figure 2 provides a succinct overview of the difference between Home Economics professionalism and transdisciplinary professionalism. Each time they enter a transdisciplinary initiative, Home Economists would have to (re)learn professionalism for that context.
Applying principles of transdisciplinary professionalism

McDaniel, Campbell, Rosenberg, Schultz, and deGruy (2014) shared insightful ideas about how to apply some of the principles of transdisciplinary professionalism. These ideas have merit for any Home Economics transdisciplinary work initiative. First, many transdisciplinary initiatives encounter tribalism (“I’m OK and you’re not”). The best way to overcome tribalism is exposing it for what it is, and then challenging it. Find ways to tease out the perceptions, biases and stereotypes (negative images) of all sectors engaged with the complex problem, and use those insights for dialogue about how to effectively work together and respect each other. Second, a key aspect of transdisciplinary professionalism is communication. Multiple communications amongst diverse actors are challenging and deeply affected by emotions. People can improve transdisciplinary team communication by explicitly working on relationships and skills pursuant to team collaborations, and then striving to generalize across the transdisciplinary team (McDaniel et al., 2014).

Third, transdisciplinary teams work best when there is trust, conflict management, commitment, accountability, and a focus on issues and results. The lynch pin is trust. It requires vulnerability, meaning the ability to open up around unfamiliar others (with their own agendas and motivations). Transdisciplinary teams must become comfortable with
making mistakes, showing weakness, and expressing fears. These traits lead to trust
developing across disciplines and societal sectors. Transdisciplinary professionalism flourishes
in a culture of trust. Fourth, transdisciplinary professionalism depends on conflict
management. People have to learn to refrain from dismissing differences and instead control
for their discomfort. The latter manifests in anxiety or embarrassment, both of which have to
be managed if diverse voices are to be expressed, heard, respected, and integrated (McDaniel
et al., 2014).

Finally, transdisciplinary professionals need to create a culture that welcomes feedback
rather than avoids it. Feedback entails responses that will ideally be used for improvement
and modifications of original input. “[A] necessary foundation of transdisciplinary
professionalism is openness to feedback, diminishment of professional hubris, and respect for
the value that other disciplines [and sectors] bring—the idea that we all have blind spots, do
not know everything, are constantly missing things, can improve our practice in critical ways,
and, most importantly, can learn from others who are not of the same discipline” (Watson as
cited in McDaniel et al., 2014, p. 107). Both power and communication within
transdisciplinary initiatives hinge on approaches to dealing with feedback.

Conclusion

This paper developed the idea that in order to practice in postnormal times, Home
Economists should consider transdisciplinary professionalism. Johnson (2010) claimed that it
takes a long time for one person’s hunch to evolve into a useful and successful idea. But, I
have a hunch this idea has merit for the profession. Home Economists are invited to engage
with the potential of transdisciplinary professionalism. Reframing our professionalism through
a transdisciplinary lens lets us explicitly acknowledge the challenges of postnormal times:
chaos, complexity, and contradictions. It helps us resist these seemingly negative orientations
and re-envision them as opportunities, possibilities, and potentialities.

Transdisciplinary professionalism respects our longtime inclination to draw on many
disciplines to garner the knowledge needed to address perennial problems. And, as a personal
service profession, we have always been socialized to work with the people who will be
affected by our actions (Brown, 1980). That being said, transdisciplinary professionalism
respects the voices and perspectives of other sectors as well. It challenges us to engage with
other ways of knowing aside from just interdisciplinary knowledge and family-based knowing.
Postnormal problems couched in chaos, uncertainty and contradictions compel us to draw on
as many voices as possible, not just our own Home Economics voice. And working with this
myriad of voices requires a new form of professionalism.

Importantly, transdisciplinary professionalism enables Home Economists to place the
imperatives of postnormal times at the core of our practice. It helps us transcend our
longstanding view of professionalism, which focused on working with individuals and families.
Transdisciplinary professionalism focuses on the issues, which can best be addressed via
iterative border crossings and cross-fertilization of disparate worldviews and perspectives. To
practice in this postnormal milieu, Home Economists need a new approach to professionalism,
replete with new skills, enriched judgments, and responsible and accountable, shared
behavior. Transdisciplinary professionalism would go a long way toward positioning the Home
Economics profession as it copes with, understands, critiques, and influences postnormal times.

Biography

Sue L. T. McGregor, PhD Professor Emerita (MSVU), is a Canadian home economist (45 years) with a keen interest in transdisciplinarity, integral studies, complexity, and transformative practice. She is Docent in Home Economics at the University of Helsinki, a Kappa Omicron Nu Research Fellow (leadership), and an TheATLAS Transdisciplinary Fellow. She has published 4 books: Creating Home Economics Futures (2012, co-edited with Donna Pendergast and Kaija Turkki), Transversity (2011, with Russ Volckmann), Consumer Moral Leadership (2010), and Transformative Practice (2006). She is a Principal Consultant for The McGregor Consulting Group (founded in 1991) http://www.consultmcgregor.com

References


