

**Isobel Contento, Ph.D., CDN**

**Mary Swartz Rose Professor Emeritus of Nutrition and Education at Teachers College,  
Columbia University**

The Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior (SNEB) announced Isobel Contento, Ph.D., CDN, as the recipient of the Emeritus membership in 2023. This membership is given to those individuals that have been SNEB members for 50 years.

Dr. Contento, Mary Swartz Rose Emeritus Professor of Nutrition and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, has had an outstanding career in nutrition education, with her research focusing first on determinants of food choice and then on nutrition education interventions with youth. Working with collaborators, she has published more than 100 journal articles and is a Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior Gold Author. She is also a recipient of the Helen Denning Ullrich Award of Excellence in Nutrition Education from the Society of Nutrition Education and Behavior. She has made numerous keynote presentations and conducted workshops in the US and more than a dozen countries and has worked with both U.S. food and nutrition related government agencies and international organizations.

Dr. Contento grew up in Southeast Asia, went to the University of Edinburgh, Scotland and received her PhD from the University of California, Berkeley, thus moving two-thirds around the circumference of the globe during this period. After teaching at Johnston College in southern California, which emphasized student-centered education and integrative learning, Dr. Contento joined the Teachers College, Columbia University in 1977 on Dr. Joan Gussow's invitation. In the early 1980s, Dr. Contento began to feel the limitation of the nutrition education approach that focused primarily on knowledge and skills, despite her own strong background in the sciences. In working with her social psychology colleagues, she became convinced of the importance of including motivational, social, and environmental influences to increase nutrition education effectiveness. The publications in 1980 of "Thinking about nutrition education: What to teach, how to teach it and what to measure," one with Dr Joan Gussow in 1984 on "Nutrition education in a changing world" and then, with several colleagues, a special 142-page issue of the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior (JNEB) in 1995 involving a review of 217 studies entitled "The effectiveness of nutrition education and implications for nutrition education policy, programs, and research: a review of research," helped the field recognize and embrace an approach to nutrition education that focuses on behaviors and uses a psychosocial theory lens to identify and address determinants of behavior change. Her definition of nutrition education as "any combination of educational strategies, accompanied by environmental supports, designed to motivate and facilitate voluntary adoption of food choices and other food- and nutrition-related behaviors conducive to health and well-being" became widely used and helps health professionals and researchers to accomplish the goals of nutrition education. In short, the evidence suggests that nutrition education is more likely to be effective if it focuses on enhancing *motivation* (why to take action), *facilitating change* behavior, (how to take action) and

promoting *environmental supports* for behavior change. Her textbook “Nutrition education: Linking Research, Theory and Practice,” first published in 2006, uses a systematic six-step process to design nutrition education based on this approach. It has been translated into three languages and is widely used by students, practitioners, education developers, and researchers alike.

Dr Contento attended her first SNEB conference in 1973, only a few years after the society was founded in 1968 and has attended every conference since. She immediately found it to be a home for her interests. She has been very active in the society having served on many committees and task forces, the SNEB Board of Directors, and the Board of Trustees of SNEB, including serving the latter as its president.

Dr Contento says that SNEB not just contributed to her career in nutrition education, but created and maintained it through nourishing and empowering her professional growth; indeed, she would not have had a career in nutrition education without SNEB. Also, Dr Contento believes that SNEB made the field of nutrition education possible and today SNEB is an important organization with a world-wide presence, providing a forum for discussion of important issues in the field. The Journal of Nutrition was always a good source of information for her. She has found the conferences to be especially meaningful: the many plenary sessions and presentations are thoughtful and challenging, and provide updates from research, practice, and policy. She states that she has learned from many colleagues on committees and from writing documents together. She has met many people who have become lifelong collaborators on different projects. More importantly, because SNEB is a small organization, it has a family feel to it and she has come to know many people who have become lifelong friends. She always looks forward to the annual conferences. Dr. Contento encourages future generations to attend the SNEB professional conferences, as well as to read the journal, so that you can network and meet people and build relationships with other nutrition educators, whether they are practitioners, researchers, or both. It is a place to meet people, and to become known. In addition, the meetings are always welcoming and enjoyable.

### **Author**

Sayaka Nagao-Sato  
PhD. Student, Ochanomizu University  
SNEB Student Member