

Piloting the Critical Nutrition Counselling course at Acadia University

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Purpose: The Critical Nutrition Counselling course offered the opportunity for students to envision the roles in nutrition counselling through a critical social theory lens.

Summary: The course was discussion-based with students and professor as co-learners. Students developed facilitation skills by leading discussions about *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* and *Close to the Bone: Life-threatening Illness as a Soul Journey*. Conceptual frameworks framing discussions were the Organizational Framework for Exploring Nutrition Narratives, Value of Nutrition Education, Collaborative Client-Centred Nutrition Education, and the Symptom Management Grid. Learning activities involved developing a list of truths about counselling, student presentations/ facilitated discussions on term projects on any aspect of nutrition counselling, interviewing community volunteers who were living with conditions requiring food/eating modifications, and facilitating a culinary therapy event.

Approach: Students submitted three papers; a reflection on developing the truths document, a term project written report, and a summative paper reflecting on weekly journal entries and the relevance of critical social theory and the truths to nutrition counselling.

Conclusions: Students had multiple opportunities to reflect on the complexities of clients lived experiences, their nutrition counselling needs/wants, and the complexity of dietitians' nutrition counselling roles integrating client-centredness, active listening to witness and respect nutritional narratives, and compassion.

Recommendations: The course will be re-offered; inquiries are welcome from colleagues interested in this pedagogical approach.

Significance to Dietetics: The course activities and learnings challenge the dominant view of behaviour change as the desired outcome of nutrition counselling. Dietitians have the privilege to enter into the lives of people when they are experiencing profoundly challenging life events. Rather than behaviour change, students learned about coping strategies involving individual and family experiences of eating, and to invite conversations about meanings of eating with changed health status as the basis of nutrition advice and support.