

Beyond Nutritionism

In spring of 2009 a research workshop entitled "*Beyond Nutritionism: Rescuing Dietetics through Critical Dialogue*" was held at Ryerson University and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Appropriately, for a springtime gathering, it marked the establishment of a new movement - **Critical Dietetics**.

At the workshop, leading international theorists, researchers, practitioners, students, and advisors had long-awaited conversations regarding gender, race, class, ability, size, dietetic epistemology, post-structural orientations to dietetic education, art, and poetry in the context of dietetics. The result was an animated, ground-breaking commitment to redefine the profession through **Critical Dietetics**.

What counts as "knowing" in dietetic practice? How do we, as nutrition professionals, come to know what we *don't* know? How does the evidenced-based culture of dietetics give voice? Where does dietetic culture render silence? What is it that we have already accomplished as a profession? In what ways do we continue to evolve? How can we further build upon the rich roots of our profession? What do we envision for the future of our profession? These are but a few of the difficult, essential questions that **Critical Dietetics** seeks to explore.

Critical Dietetics takes courage as we depart from familiar ways of doing and knowing. Indeed as Simmons (2009) challenged us in an earlier edition of *Practice*, it is time to "expand" (p.3) our dietetic identities to become more "pluralistic" (p.3), as we move beyond mere nutritionism (Pollan, 2008) in our work.

Critical Dietetics requires conviction for change, comfort with the uncertainty of not knowing, acceptance of the blurry divide between art and science, and a desire for our allies' knowledge in social sciences, humanities and natural sciences with whom we have much to integrate. We can grapple with the limits of science alongside the imperative to use it, and venture into the vulnerability evoked by the merging of personal and professional ways of knowing.

We are authors of our own experience and supportive witnesses to one another's growth in the midst of this new terrain.

Critical Dietetics: A Declaration stands as testament to the commitment the initial group has forged. It is extended as an invitation to our colleagues to become companion dietetic explorers in this exciting new movement. Together we can expand the body of knowledge in dietetics and shape the future of our profession.

See page 2 for information on the declaration and how to contribute to the **Critical Dietetics** dialogue.

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Practice is a quarterly update service for members only from Dietitians of Canada (DC). Back issues are available online at www.dietitians.ca/members_only/practice.asp.

Practice includes information on scientific and clinical developments and Canadian dietitians' experiences and challenges in practice. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and do not imply policy of the Association unless so stated. Articles are not peer-reviewed.

Submissions

Submissions of up to 800 words are welcome from DC members. Guidelines for writing reflective articles are available online at www.dietitians.ca/members_only/practice.asp.

Submission deadlines for each issue are:
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Spring: January 20 Fall: July 20

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Please forward submissions, suggestions and comments to the **Coordinator**:

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- Pollan M. (2008). *In defense of food: An eater's manifesto*. New York: The Penguin Press.
- Simmons D. (2009). Questioning my dietitian identity. *Practice*, 46, 3.

Dietetics is a diverse profession with a commitment to, and tradition of, enhancing health, broadly defined, through diet and food. We recognize the commitment and hard work undertaken by dietetic professionals of the past and present who continue to innovatively shape and reshape the profession from its roots in home economics to the incorporation of contemporary perspectives on health. While recognizing the multiple meanings of food and its power to nourish and heal, we acknowledge that food is more than the mere sum of its constituent nutrients. We recognize that human bodies in health and illness are complex and contextual. Moreover, we recognize that the knowledge that enables us to understand health is socially, culturally, historically, and environmentally constructed.

Building on the past century of dietetics and the "Beyond Nutritionism" workshop held at Ryerson University June 12-14, 2009, we extend an invitation to individuals in all areas of dietetics education, practice, and research to collaborate on the **Critical Dietetics** initiative.

Critical Dietetics is informed by transdisciplinary scholarship from the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. By contributing to scholarship, practice, and education, it strives to make visible our assumptions, give voice to the unspoken, embrace reflexivity, reveal and explore power relations, encourage public engagement and diverse forms of expression, and acknowledge that there are no value-free positions. Through these principles, **Critical Dietetics** will engage with the ever-changing health, social, and environmental issues facing humanity.

Assuming a critical stance means remaining inquisitive and willing to ask and hear challenging questions. Critical approaches grant us permission to imagine new ideas and explore new ways of approaching our practice. **Critical Dietetics** creates space for an emancipatory (i.e., liberating and socially just) scholarship by drawing upon many perspectives, philosophies, orientations, ways of asking questions, and ways of knowing.

Critical Dietetics derives its strength from supportive relationships, recognizing that it takes courage to step beyond familiar ways of knowing. It invites constructive dialogue and challenges us to discuss, debate, and rethink what we know and how we know it. It is a generative and collective effort which understands that strength comes from diversity and debate.

This declaration is therefore a bold invitation that welcomes different ways of thinking and practicing within our own profession and in collaboration with allied fields. We anticipate collectively expanding the body of knowledge in dietetics and continuing the inclusive, scholarly, collective, and pluralistic development of the profession. If you want to contribute to this dialogue and become a signatory of **Critical Dietetics**, please email your expression of interest to jgingras@ryerson.ca by January 7, 2010.

Sincerely,

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