Establishing an Integrated Curriculum for a Living Classroom

What is the purpose of this tool?

Gain guidance on integrating curriculum and long-term care activities that are useful to Living Classroom (LC) programs. It outlines requirements, considerations, and examples related to developing and delivering Personal Support Worker (PSW) education within long-term care (LTC) settings.

How do I use this tool?

Review the material provided to help guide your thinking and discussions about what curriculum and activities are appropriate for your LC. Ensure that the education and LTC partners have reached an agreement on each party's responsibilities related to the curriculum and activities.

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If you have any questions on this resource and the Living Classroom program, please contact livingclassroom@the-ria.ca.

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Considerations for LC Curriculum

A curriculum is the core of any educational program. It comprises a planned and coordinated series of instructions designed to ensure students acquire specific knowledge, skills, and the ability to apply that knowledge.

LC programs use a unique curriculum centred on experiential learning. This approach provides students with practical, hands-on experience and an integrated understanding of LTC environments. As a partnership model, LC programs embed PSW education within LTC homes to support workforce development in senior living. This shared learning culture engages students, faculty, residents, families, and team members. Students gain real-world experience and career readiness, while residents, families, and team members provide mentorship and benefit from student interaction.

LC Program Requirements

All curricula must address the practice, vocational standards, and competencies as defined by the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Safety (MCURES). Each program taught by an education partner comes with a well-defined set of competencies that must be met by the end of the program. Competencies are described as a list of capabilities that students must demonstrate before they can graduate from the program. Each education partner is responsible for developing a unique and efficient program to meet these competencies. To that extent, education partners develop a curriculum for each of the programs they teach.

For a PSW program to be considered a LC, there are other components that must be fulfilled. These components include experiential learning and an integrated curriculum where students regularly learn and practice their knowledge and skills in a real-world setting through engagement with team members, residents, and care partners. These components happen outside of the lab or placement hours.

The education and LTC partners need to come to an understanding and agreement about what they both provide to the curriculum. Generally, education partners lead the development of the curriculum, and LTC partners support activities that are a part of the curriculum. For instance, gathering residents and family members to engage with students or ensuring there is space at the LTC home for activities.

Accreditation

All programs must meet the MCURES PSW standard (January 2022), including a minimum duration of 600 hours of training (Fixing Long-Term Care Act). This requires educators to offer comprehensive PSW programs covering theoretical knowledge, practical skills, experiential learning, and placement.

Public College PSW programs follow their internal College Quality Assurance processes, which are overseen by the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB).

Career colleges may also choose to pursue approval from the National Association of Careers Colleges (NACC). While this additional review is optional and not required for PSW employment, it can demonstrate that a program has met an external standard of quality. Many career colleges, however, deliver strong MCURES-approved programs without NACC endorsement.

District School Board programs must also meet the requirements outlined in CESBA's Quality Assurance process, including a minimum program length of 660 hours.

Indigenous Institutions currently partner with public colleges and universities to grant credentials.

Updating Curriculum

LC programs emphasize intentional and integrated learning throughout their duration. Content is delivered from an interprofessional perspective, designed to be impactful, and supported by experiential activities. The curriculum is regularly refined and updated to reflect current best practices and meet competency requirements. Programs undergo reviews based on various factors. They may conduct an annual review of best practices, a quality assurance review every 2-3 years, and a resource evaluation every 4-5 years. Many of these processes involve partners and advisory committees to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of the workforce.

Please note that the frequency of program reviews may vary depending on the education partner.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning emphasizes active participation in practice and real-world settings where students can apply what they are learning into action. Mentoring or coaching can support students as they engage in these hands-on experiences. It involves connecting classroom knowledge to real-world situations, encouraging reflection for deeper understanding, and adapting activities to meet individual learning needs. This approach enables students to develop a broader range of skills, including critical thinking and effective communication.

For the PSW program that is delivered in the LC, additional curriculum-integrated experiences replace some traditional learning activities to promote experiential learning within a LTC setting. This keeps the curriculum delivery manageable for both instructors and students. It is highly recommended that experiential learning activities be a frequent component of an LC program. These experiential components should begin early and continue throughout the program. The Living Classroom Curriculum Integration Toolkit offers a variety of experiential learning activities for all parts of a LC program. Examples include:

- **Guest Speaker:** Team members, residents, and care providers visit the classroom to share personal experiences with topics being discussed.
- **Lived Experience – "My Story"**: Students are paired with residents to discuss and visually represent meaningful life events. This activity fosters interpersonal communication, highlights residents' life experiences, emphasizes person-centred care, and promotes reflection. It's often done early in the program to help students connect with residents and the care team.
- **Culture Fair:** Students organize a fair showcasing the cultural backgrounds of residents, LTC team members, and fellow students. With resident input, displays are created, and the fair is held in a central area within the LTC home. During the event, participants represent their cultures through music, food, and information. Other residents, families, and staff attend, fostering cultural exchange and sharing experiences.
- **Reflection with Adapting Communication**: Invite residents with impaired vision or hearing to the class to share their daily experiences and perspectives. Discuss the barriers they face and how LTC team members can support their independence. Then, explore how a PSW can provide support and review resident care plans to identify and use each resident's preferred communication methods. Ask students to write about what they learned from this experience.

> *"The Living Classroom model has transformed how we train Personal Support Worker students. By bringing education into the long-term care setting, it has provided students with meaningful, hands-on experience that builds confidence and deepens their connection to the community."*
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> **– Laura Patterson, Coordinator, Limestone Community Education**