


PROJECT BASED  
LEARNING: IS IT THE  
SECRET SAUCE OF LTC  
LEADERSHIP?

Christina Daley, PhD, NHA

# AGENDA

- 
- Current state of the industry related to staffing (overview)
  - What is Project Based Learning (PjBL)
  - Benefits of PjBL
  - How to implement PjBL at your facility
  - Barriers to PjBL
  - Q&A

# CURRENT STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

## CONTINUED WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

- 90% nursing homes currently have open positions, including 89% recruiting for RN positions
- 72% nursing homes indicate current workforce levels are lower than pre-pandemic
- Greater than half say workforce situation has stayed the same-worse

## CONCERNS ON CLOSURES

- Nearly 20% closed a unit, wing, floor due to labor challenges
- 66% concerned if workforce shortage persist may need to close facility

## STRONG RECRUITMENT & RETENTION EFFORTS

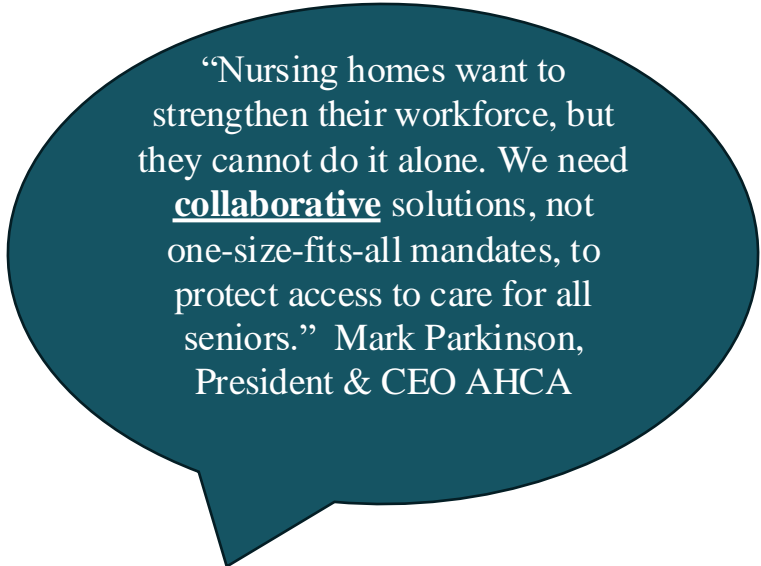
- 94% difficult to recruit; 67% facilities cite lack of interest
- 90% nursing homes increased wages in last 6 months
- 78% offered bonuses
- 70% promoted staff within their facilities
- 69% paid for staff training & education

## FINANCIAL CONCERNS

45% facilities operating at a loss or negative total margin  
56% struggling with occupancy

## LIMITING ADMISSIONS

- 46% limited admissions, with 38% having to turn away residents monthly/weekly; 7% turning away residents daily



“Nursing homes want to strengthen their workforce, but they cannot do it alone. We need collaborative solutions, not one-size-fits-all mandates, to protect access to care for all seniors.” Mark Parkinson, President & CEO AHCA



# ENTER: PROJECT BASED LEARNING

**PJBL IS A LEARNER-CENTERED INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD.**

**DEFINED AS A TEACHING METHOD IN WHICH THE LEARNER—IN OUR CASE, THE STUDENT—GAINS KNOWLEDGE THROUGH A PROCESS OF ACTIVELY ENGAGING IN “REAL WORLD AND PERSONALLY MEANINGFUL PROJECTS”**

## **DRIVING QUESTION**

Structured by the facilitator in a manner that motivates the learner and requires both collaboration and authentic problem solving

## **AUTONOMY**

Student autonomy in design and production of the project resulting in a meaningful artifact



# BENEFITS



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Strengthen ties with local education institutions & provider's reputation



## COST-EFFECTIVE SUPPORT

- Projected cost savings based on project support (research, data collection, QI initiatives)
- Productivity: allows for experienced staff to focus on other critical projects



## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- Students develop practical skills and real world experience
- Enhances critical thinking skills teamwork and communication



## INNOVATION

- Students bring new ideas, energy and innovative approaches to patient care perspectives, research and administration

# WHY PJBL IN LTC?

## TALENT PIPELINE

Scholarship has suggested that PjBL positively influences students' attitudes toward the learning process and the subject matter

- “Students’ self-rated aging skills, contact frequency with older adults and rewarding interaction with older adults” as significant predictors of a students’ interest in pursuing a career in the aging sector (Cummings et al., 2005, p. 643).
- Koder & Helmes (2008) surveyed psychology students to determine interest in working with older adults, finding placement (previous or planned) in the aging sector as the strongest predictor of interest.
- Temple & Thompson’s (2011) cross-sectional survey of 68 undergraduate health services administration students identified positively associated factors with interest in a career in long-term care administration included “experience in long-term care settings, quality of contact with unrelated older adults, satisfaction working with the elderly, and confidence in the ability to work in the field” (Temple & Thompson, 2011, p. 367).



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA-NC](#)



# HOW TO IMPLEMENT PJBL AT YOUR FACILITY

# FOUR PHASES



**PHASE ONE**  
**SETTING THE  
STAGE**



**PHASE TWO**  
**LAYING THE  
FOUNDATION**



**PHASE THREE**  
**APPLICATION**



**PHASE FOUR**  
**EVALUATION**



# PHASE ONE: SETTING THE STAGE



Faculty identified and collaborated with community partners to develop “driving questions” aligned with a PjBL approach.

Students registered for the class were educated on the approach.

A pre-reflection was administered to assess the student’s current knowledge of strategic planning and the associated process prior to the facility site visits

Initial tour & meeting with community partners

## KEY TOOLS

- Student Pre-Reflection
- Community Partner Evaluation
- Team contract





# EXAMPLES OF DRIVING QUESTIONS

How can we design an effective memory care unit for our dementia population in personal care?

How can we design an effective mentor program for CNAs in our skilling nursing facility?

How can we effectively identify and address resident family member concerns?

How can we design an effective onboarding program for personal care nursing assistant staff?

# SAMPLING OF STUDENT PRE-REFLECTIONS

## PROJECT BASED LEARNING

- I think that this opportunity will allow us to gain a better understanding of long-term care. This experience is also a great way to network with other healthcare professionals

## OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES

- I'm excited to be able to have firsthand experience at a senior living home because I have never worked in one."
- ...would say that I have mixed feelings about our community site. I can honestly say that I can never recall actually being in a long-term care facility before. I am thinking about the stereotypes that go along with nursing homes however I am optimistic that it will not actually be that way and I will gain a positive experience from doing work at a real facility.
- My experience in older communities is minimal so I am looking at this as a prime opportunity to expose myself to a new thing
- As usual, I don't get fuzzy warm feeling when I think of long-term care facilities.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- ...the work my group and I do for our project has a real chance of making a legitimate impact on the community site and its patients, so that is exciting. It seems as though this community site could really use our help... I believe we have the opportunity to really leave a lasting impact on this site and its patients, so I am anxious to get started.
- Going into this community site, I feel like we could make a big difference to the residents
- I feel like I am contributing to the community. I hope that I along with my group will come up with a plan that will be a positive experience



## PHASE TWO: LAYING THE FOUNDATION



In preparation for the off-site projects, students participated in classroom sessions covering key aspects of LTC operations including leadership, regulations, quality & safety, human resources, environmental design and finance

A series of scaffolded assignments were developed to assist students in establishing the basic skills and knowledge necessary to work in the field.

Students completed individual exit tickets during each class session soliciting input specific to the subject matter and relationship to their project

### KEY TOOLS

- Scaffolded assignments
- Exit tickets



## PHASE THREE: APPLICATION



Teams of students worked directly with the community partners.

Faculty coordinated scheduled dates where the teams met with assigned community partner leadership.

Meetings were scheduled onsite and via Zoom

Students had complete autonomy in their selected design

### KEY TOOLS

- Weekly status report
- Weekly meeting with administrator

## PHASE FOUR: EVALUATION



Teams presented their completed projects to the community partners

Students complete peer evaluations. Peer evaluations were based on the components outlined in the team contract

Community partners asked relevant questions and provide feedback on community partner evaluation

Instructor provides team feedback

Students completed post reflection

Community partners and instructor meet at the end of the semester to debrief on process

### KEY TOOLS

- Weekly status report
- Project artifacts
- Community Partner evaluation
- Peer evaluations
- Student Post Reflections

# SAMPLING OF STUDENT POST REFLECTIONS

## PROJECT BASED LEARNING

- This project based learning course made me feel like the class was worth-while, and that I got a tremendous amount out of the class. I feel like it was certainly a challenge, but we were given enough tools through interviews with CNAs and with the books, that we were able to do the job. I would especially recommend this class to people who were like me, and had no exposure to long term care, because I feel like when I search for jobs I will now be more open to long term care facilities.
- After researching and seeing the facility, I quickly realized that this project would help these people, because we were the best resource they had to help improve it

## OVERCOMING STEREOTYPES

- The experience has made me more comfortable with the thought of working at a nursing home facility. This experience really changed how I view long term care. It changed my views in the sense that I loved how passionate some of the people we were exposed to are about long-term care and nursing homes.
- My feelings towards the community site experience changed throughout the semester. Our very first site visit...made me apprehensive . . . As we got to know more staff and learn more...I felt more comfortable and had a better understanding of the needs of the facility. After finalizing our recommendations and presenting them, I feel hopeful [administration] will seriously consider our findings and suggestions and implement positive changes for best of the residents.
- This experience really changed how I view long term care. It changed my views in the sense that I loved how passionate some of the people we were exposed to are about long-term care and nursing homes

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- Going into this I had ideas in my head on how to improve the facility, but after visiting the site I realized not all of my ideas would be useful. Also after doing research and looking into different sources there were just some ideas that will only ever be able to happen in a movie or in a perfect world because of regulations and reality. I was constantly challenged to think of new ways in order to apply my ideas I had before with the current facility.
- I felt that I had a great deal of knowledge about all the things I needed but had no idea how to use them. This project was the first real practice I had in taking my knowledge an applying it in a real life setting. I felt very well prepared”



# SAMPLING OF ADMINISTRATOR REFLECTIONS

## TEAMWORK

- The team did a great job
- Great team, going to make great leaders in the field
- Team worked well together, needed some polishing but overall good group
- Group did a great job presenting ways in which the organization could enhance the physical spaces to make it a truly dementia friendly space

## PROFESSIONALISM

- They were great to work with, and our staff appreciated being able to engage with them
- Student were late to site meeting but once there did engage with families and work well together.
- In addition to the team's time at the organization, they did a wonderful job presenting their final results & recommendations to our staff

## PREPAREDNESS

- Could use some work on presentation but overall good interactions
- Each member came prepared for meetings and did a great job with staff. I appreciated their time in researching and presenting their ideas

## PROBLEM SOLVING

- The group extricated the data & put together a meaningful presentation and proposal for us to move forward
- The team members did a thorough job on researching design ideas, focusing on the Montessori Method and presented and presented ideas that are practical and could easily be incorporated into the current layout and structure.
- I was very pleased with the groups end product. I felt that their work was very beneficial to our organization & was very impressed at the level of understanding they gained during their project for our organization & a huge piece of hiring new staff



# GREAT, BUT...



## PLAN, PLAN, PLAN

Be aware of demands and time constraints (students and providers)



## ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Ensure you have administrative support



## DEMANDS

- Consider the impact of logistics
- Embrace technology



## DEBRIEF

Commit time to debrief with all parties  
Incorporate feedback into next projects

# CLOSING THOUGHT

*Somebody on the Orient Express gets killed (referring to Agatha Christie's mystery – Murder on the Orient Express), and the question is, who killed him? The answer is, everybody on the train killed him. And the answer about who killed healthcare is: the status quo.* Regina E. Herzlinger – Nancy R. McPherson Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School



THANK YOU



Christina Daley, PhD,  
NHA  
[cxd249@psu.edu](mailto:cxd249@psu.edu)

# REFERENCES

AHCA NCAL. (2023). State of the sector: Nursing home labor staffing shortages persist despite unprecedented efforts to attract more staff.

<https://www.ahcancal.org/News-and-Communications/Press-Releases/Pages/State-Of-The-Sector-Nursing-Home-Staffing-Shortages-Persist-Despite-Unprecedented-Efforts-To-Attract-More-Staff-.aspx>

Blumenfeld, P. C., Soloway, E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Guzdial, M., & Palinscar, A. (1991). Motivating project-based learning: Sustaining the doing, supporting the learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3 & 4), 369–398.

Buck Institute for Education. (n.d.) What is PBL? pblworks.<https://www.pblworks.org/what-is-pbl>

Burg, M. A., Waddell, R., Doty, R., Horne, C., Weilgas, C., & Davidson, R. (2001). Student interest in geriatric medicine. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 21, 1–12.

Cummings, S., Adler, G., & DeCoster, V. (2005). Factors influencing graduate-social-work students' interest in working with elders. *Educational Gerontology*, 31(8), 643–655. doi:10.1080/03601270591003382

Cummings, S., & Galambos, C. (2002). Predictors of graduate students' interest in aging-related work. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 39(3), 77–94.

Cummings, S. M., Galambos, C., & DeCoster, V. (2003). Predictors of MSW employment in gerontological practice. *Educational Gerontology*, 29, 1–18.

Daley, C. & Sciegaj, M. (2021). *Incorporating project-based learning approach in an advanced undergraduate course in long-term care administration-A spark that ignites the flame.*

Gorelik, Y., Damron-Rodriguez, J., Funderburk, B., & Solomon, D. H. (2000). Undergraduate interest in aging: Is it affected by contact with older adults? *Educational Gerontology*, 26(7), 623–638. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601270050200626>

Kane, M. N. (1999). Factors affecting social work students' willingness to work with elders with Alzheimer's disease. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 35(1), 71–85

Temple, A., & Thompson, J. M. (2011). Interest in long-term care among health services administration students. *Gerontology & Geriatrics Education*, 32(4), 367–378. <http://dx.doi.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/10.1080/02701960.2011.611556>