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RWU Professor Wins \$15,000 Grant to Improve Teaching to English Learners in R.I.

Kelly Donnell's team receives grant from Department of Education and Office of Innovation for program aimed at improving preparation for teachers of students who are learning English



Education Professor Kelly Donnell

August 22, 2018 | By Edward Fitzpatrick

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Kelly Donnell, an associate professor at the Roger Williams University School of Continuing Studies in Providence, won a \$15,000 grant from the [Rhode Island Department of Education](#) and [Rhode Island Office of Innovation](#) for a proposal aimed at improving preparation for the teachers of students who are learning English.

Donnell presented her proposal, "Supporting ESL Teachers Using Calibrated Videos of Practice," during last week's Ed Prep Design Challenge Pitch Fest, in Providence. A panel of judges awarded \$15,000 grants to two teams of K-12 educators and educator-preparation faculty. Both winning proposals focused on supports for English learners and closing the achievement gap for that growing population of Rhode Island students.

"It's fantastic. I'm very proud of Kelly and very appreciate of the Rhode Island Department of Education for putting this kind of design challenge out there," RWU School of Continuing Studies Dean Jamie E. Scurry said. "It's bringing higher education, K-12 and community partners together to really think differently about how we structure teacher education and supports for teachers. I hope it improves teacher learning and classroom interaction. I hope students benefit the most from it."

Donnell, program liaison for RWU's [ESL teacher certification program](#), noted Rhode Island is seeing an increase in the number of students whose first language is not English, and the percentage of teachers who are prepared to work with those students is failing to keep pace with that growth.

"It's exciting to be able to advance the capability of teachers in our most high-need school districts for English learners," Donnell said. "The thing that excites me is the opportunity to provide a bank of videos for best practices that can be shared with just about anybody. This process will not only benefit current candidates but teachers across the state if we find a mechanism to share this bank of videos."

Scurry said, "With open-source, best-practice videos, we are moving in directions that put teachers and students at the center of the conversation. While we're removing barriers for students, we're also removing barriers that prevent teachers from taking deep dives into improving their practice. Instead of it being an add-on, it will them to reflect on their own time and in their own space in ways that are appropriate and helpful."

Beginning in June 2018, these Ed Prep Design Fellows teamed up with representatives from educator-preparation programs to identify challenges and design solutions. Nine teams submitted proposals, with five teams moving on to the final Pitch Fest. The Ed Prep Design Challenge is an effort of the Rhode Island Personalized Learning Initiative, supported by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Jaquelin Hume Foundation, Nellie Mae Education Foundation, and Overdeck Family Foundation.

Donnell wrote the proposal with support and feedback from the members of her team of state teachers and administrators. The winning teams and a summary of their proposals:

Proposal: Supporting ESL Teachers Using Calibrated Videos of Practice

Team Members: Kelly Donnell from Roger Williams University; Theresa DeRiso, an ELA curriculum coordinator and literacy coach for Lincoln Public Schools; Liz Russillo, a teacher at Smithfield High School; and Alicia Storey, the assistant superintendent for Westerly Public Schools.

Summary: This project would determine "power standards" for Teachers of English as a Second Language (TESOL). The project would then create a bank of calibrated videos and accompanying feedback that differentiates between practice that approaches and meets the standards to be used as professional learning with clinical supervisors and teachers.

Proposal: EL Professional Learning Community

Team Members: Michael Broschart from Teach for America, Alexa Brunton from New England Basecamp, and Maureen Rooney, an elementary ESL teacher from Providence Public Schools.

Summary: This project would pilot a year-long professional learning community and mentorship cycle for new teachers of English-language learners.

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