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Juan Siliezar
Roger Williams University

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A Summer Intensive: What Developing More ESL Teachers in RI Looks Like

Teachers in RWU's ESL certification program reflect on their experience thus far



Leslie Tirocchi, left, and Nilda Caraballo are part of the inaugural class of an innovative partnership between Roger Williams University School of Continuing Studies and Providence Public Schools that's designed to develop more certified English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) teachers in Rhode Island.

August 21, 2018 | Juan Siliezar

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – It was the middle of summer break but this classroom of Providence and Pawtucket teachers were still in full teaching and learning mode.

The teachers are the inaugural class of an innovative partnership between Roger Williams University School of Continuing Studies and Providence Public Schools that's designed to develop more certified English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) teachers in Rhode Island. The state is seeing rapid growth in students coming into school districts needing to learn English. For example, one out of three students in Providence – where the majority of teachers in the program teach – are English language learners.

The certification program, approved by the Rhode Island Department of Education, allows practicing teachers to gain ESL competencies while on the job, greatly reducing the cost and time commitment for existing teachers to become ESL certified. Many traditional programs take two years to complete.

Over three weeks in the summer, this year's cohort attended a summer intensive set up as a mix of online learning, practicum experience and seminar-style classroom work.

The experience provided a preliminary foundation for the teachers to instruct English language learners using best practices and gain experience in those methods, said Kristina Soprano, program director for the certification program.

"It allows teachers to begin putting theory into practice before they go back to their own classrooms," Soprano said. "The teachers can take all the research, theories and practical experience they gain over the summer and bring it back to school in the fall."

On the last day of the intensive, the teachers took part in a full-day workshop where they reflected on their experience and worked on a mini case study of an ESL student.

In the gallery below are some of their reflections along with images of the teachers working in small groups:

Reflections on the ESL Summer Intensive



Bill Rives (right) a high school history teacher at Providence's Dr. Jorge Alvarez High School, says the first week of the summer intensive was spent learning online, reading best practices and research about teaching English learners. "The main thing you get is a grounding," Rives said. "You get a deeper sense of what we are trying to do at the theoretical level."

The next phase of the program is set to start when the school year kicks off in the fall. During that time teachers will begin meeting with instructional coaches to make individualized plans to progress through the program while teaching full-time. Upon successful completion of the program, candidates are eligible to apply for ESL teacher certification through RIDE.

Over the academic year, we will be following the teacher's efforts to bring you stories on their experience as they become ESL certified.

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