



# **SIUE leads nation in virtual training among early childhood educators, \$50,000 grant supports innovative pilot program**

January 29 2018 2:51 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is the first in the nation to implement the early childhood scenario in a [Virtual Learning Environment](#) with the goals of increasing early childhood workforce capacity and capital by providing teacher practice in classroom management, pedagogy and content.

A \$50,000 grant from the McCormick Foundation is supporting SIUE's pilot implementation and research of the scenario, under the direction of Anni Reinking, EdD, assistant professor in the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior's Department of Teaching and Learning. The project is in partnership with Illinois Action for Children.

"In many training programs, teacher candidates are placed with students in their first semester with minimal prior training," Reinking said. "However, using virtual learning environments is one way to provide more training before entering a real classroom. This is a great way to practice techniques in order to build confidence."

According to Reinking, the benefits of this technological approach are abundant. Engaging teacher candidates and early childhood educators in virtual learning environments increases the human capital of the workforce, provides experiences in a cyclical learning model and provides real-time feedback for individuals.

"We will work with early childhood educators in the Chicago area through professional development trainings focused on best practices in the early childhood teaching field," Reinking explained. "We will then use the virtual learning environment to implement best practices, while providing feedback in a safe, low-risk environment. We will go through this cycle several times with teachers associated with Illinois Action for Children using the early childhood scenario."

The University of Central Florida engineered the virtual environments. It's TLE TeachLivEä Lab is currently being used for pre-service and in-service teacher training at over 85 campuses in the United States.

SIUE will be the first to use the early childhood scenario in the research phase. SIUE's virtual learning environment has boosted teacher candidate preparation, and students will benefit further from Reinking's pioneering work with the program.

"This project will help SIUE students in the future who will be using the early childhood scenario for training and implementation purposes of best practices and lesson plans," Reinking said. "Along with this grant, SIUE's Excellence in Undergraduate Education

(EUE) program is providing funding for students to work in the early childhood virtual environment. This goes hand in hand with my work in Chicago with early childhood educators.”

Next, Reinking plans to apply for a McCormick Foundation planning grant which would be used as a catalyst for meetings, planning sessions and networking in order to take the early childhood scenario statewide.

The [SIUE School of Education, Health and Human Behavior](#) prepares students in a wide range of fields including public health, exercise science, nutrition, instructional technology, psychology, speech-language pathology and audiology, educational administration, and teaching. Faculty members engage in leading-edge research, which enhances teaching and enriches the educational experience. The School supports the community through on-campus clinics, outreach to children and families, and a focused commitment to enhancing individual lives across the region.