

MSU researchers partner with Racquet Up Detroit

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MSU education student Erin Novelly teaching during the RU Connected camp for Racquet Up Detroit.

Three years ago, a new youth development program took root in Detroit. As part of a national network of related programs, [Racquet Up Detroit](#) uses the sport of squash in combination with academic and service activities to help students achieve success in their lives.

Since the beginning, the literacy curriculum for the out-of-school program has been created in close collaboration with a team of scholars from the [MSU College of Education](#). And now the partnership has resulted in a summer camp for Racquet Up participants with promising potential to grow urban youth literacy through digital media.

This year the camp, called [RU Connected](#), was one of just 16 programs nationwide selected to win close to \$10,000 from the [Project: Connect Summer Youth Programming Competition](#) funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The relationship represents a unique addition to the many ways MSU is helping serve the needs of young people in Detroit.

“My dream for this is really coming true,” said teacher education Professor [Susan Florio-Ruane](#), who has been leading the outreach effort and now serves on Racquet Up Detroit’s board of directors. “My dream was to help create a community of learners in the city, that crosses the boundaries of school, community and non-school programming for kids, and that places MSU right in the mix.”

With Florio-Ruane, doctoral students Maryl Randel (Special Education) and Paul Morsink (Educational Psychology and Educational Technology) join Racquet Up staff for weekly discussions about improving and evaluating the program, as well as obtaining donated technological tools and other resources.

Morsink has been the leader for RU Connected, an eight-day learning experience using creative digital tools. After a pilot run in 2012, the camp grew this year to include research elements funded by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and more instructional staff. In fact, two

teacher education students were placed at Racquet Up this summer as part of the [Urban Immersion Fellowship](#). Katie Dennis and Erin Novelly, both seniors in elementary education, helped teach custom-created lessons designed to help kids become literate and critical consumers of the content they find online – and become more passionate learners in the process.

“Walk into the RU Connected classroom, and you will feel the difference,” said Derek Aguirre, executive director at Racquet Up Detroit. “You won’t find students mindlessly filling out worksheets by themselves ... you will find them co-creating in a collaborative web space like Google Docs or sharing feedback on each other’s Weebly-created websites. Technology has accelerated and democratized the learning process, and we’re taking advantage of that.”

Check out ruconnected2013.weebly.com for an in-depth look at the camp.

Racquet Up Detroit is based at the Northwest Activities Center in Detroit and serves about 40 students from two feeder schools. Students join as fifth-graders and can continue through high school, participating in activities three times a week during the school year and throughout the summer.

The second cohort of fifth-graders starts in January 2014. Visit racquetup.org for more information.

The [Project: Connect Summer Youth Programming Competition](#) is administered by the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory (HASTAC), and carried out in collaboration with Facebook, the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI), and Mozilla. It is part of the 5th annual Digital Media and Learning Competition that is encouraging the development of apps, badges, curricula, and other tools to maximize learning through making the online experience for young people more civil, safe, and empowering.

Tags: [Detroit](#), [educational psychology](#), [Florio-Ruane](#), [outreach](#), [Racquet Up](#), [research](#), [Teacher education](#), [technology](#), [urban](#)

- See more at: <http://edwp.educ.msu.edu/news/2013/msu-researchers-partner-with-racquet-up-detroit/#sthash.kshatgoh.dpuf>