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**UW-Madison partnership creates educational game development tools**

**MADISON, Wis. –** Studies highlight the benefits of playing educational video games, but a new partnership seeks to understand whether the act of designing video games boosts students’ computational thinking and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills.

Collaborating with [Microsoft](http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/default.aspx) and the [Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) Foundation](http://www.amd.com/us/aboutamd/corporate-information/corporate-responsibility/community/foundation/Pages/information.aspx), education researchers at the [Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery](http://discovery.wisc.edu/), located at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, have created the curriculum and tools to make the video game design program [Microsoft Kodu](http://www.kodugamelab.com/) – a computer language that lets children create and program their own games -- more accessible in K-12 classrooms.

Called [Studio K](http://www.eriainteractive.com/project_StudioK.php), the instructional toolkit makes it easier to teach students how to design video games and assess whether the activity affects their abilities to solve problems with computers.

“The Studio K curriculum breaks it down step-by-step for instructors to teach the skills for making a game, ranging from aesthetics to computing,” says Ben Shapiro, a UW-Madison researcher who leads the project. “But we’re also giving teachers learning analytics tools, including data visualizations, to monitor students’ progress, see when students are stuck or need help and give specific feedback about learning.”

With the support of Microsoft and the AMD Foundation, the team will collect data from middle and high school classrooms in Wisconsin and in other areas of the country in the coming months to explore whether game design skills are translatable to STEM fields and if Studio K tools influence instructors’ abilities to teach those skills.

Shapiro says he expects more students to build off of each other’s games and to introduce computer programming to younger students. The group also focuses on encouraging underrepresented groups such as girls and young women to experiment with game design, computer science and STEM fields.

So far, the UW-Madison team has piloted Studio K in classrooms and afterschool settings in Wisconsin, including the local Boys & Girls Club.

“Our club members have enjoyed the hands-on and interactive activities, the opportunity to work with college students and to be a part of a project that prepares tomorrow’s learners for fields in science and technology,” says Stephanie Berto, youth manager at the Boys & Girls Club of Dane County.

The AMD Foundation provided a $100,000 grant to support the project, which furthers plans to host pilot programs at other Boys & Girls Club locations in Bellevue, Wash., and Menlo Park, Calif.

“We’ve known for years that playing games can enhance STEM learning,” says AMD Foundation President Allyson Peerman. “With this exciting collaboration, we hope to uncover the link between making games and STEM learning.”

Microsoft has also provided support to the educational research team in order to create the new curriculum and tools.

“With Studio K, we are excited to see a platform come to life where play and learning will help researchers and educators better understand the STEM learning implications of game creation,” says Joe Booth, executive producer at Microsoft Studios.

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