

## **Club Industry's Fitness Business Pro April 2007**

### ***Fitness Business News***

#### **RESEARCH**

#### **USF Researches Fun and Games**

**TAMPA, FL** – Interactive fitness may soon have some research to support its effectiveness in keeping children fit and motivated. The School of physical Education, Wellness and Sports Studies at the University Of South Florida (USF) in Tampa Florida, had an open house last month at its newly opened **XRKade** Research Lab, where researchers will study interactive fitness. About 100 Y operators, school district personnel, manufacturers and other interested parties attended the event to see the equipment in action,.

“We had kid on equipment and as soon as people saw how much fun the kids were having and how much they were sweating – it was the visual that you can’t capture with words,” say Lisa Witherspoon, doctoral student at USF. Witherspoon supervises the lab, which was created because of her interest in this subject for her doctoral program. She plans to use the research to create curriculum for physical education program using interactive fitness programming.

The XRKade lab was created through donation from iTECH Fitness and the company’s corporate partners. Equipment included in the lab an X-Board, Dance Dance Revolution, **GameBikes**, 3-kick, Trazer, iJoy, CoreTrainer and Korebalance.

The lab will investigate the growing movement of technology-based interactive game activities. This ;movement coined interactive fitness or exergaming, is increasingly being used by public schools, YMCA’s, rec center and private fitness clubs to help children increase physical activity levels and maintain a healthy weight, says Mike Hansen, CEO and President of iTECH Fitness.

Some of the studies planned involve other departments at USF, including psychology, physiology, behavioral science and special education.

“There’s no concrete research being done on interactive fitness as a whole,” Witherspoon says. “You can find some on individual pieces of equipment but not as a concept as a whole.”

Beyond physiological studies, Witherspoon plans studies related to equipment with screens vs. non-screens, skill development and the motivational factor of interactive fitness.

The study's subjects come from the fifth grade classes at three elementary schools on the USF campus. Each class spends one physical education session each week at the lab. In the future, Witherspoon may expand the research beyond the fifth graders and beyond the three schools on campus, she says. She already has a waiting list of children whose parents have seen media coverage and want their kids involved.

She also may expand her research to include adults and senior citizens, she says, adding that much of the equipment can help with balance and core.

“If we can publish something that says interactive fitness and exergaming does encourage the population to be physically active, it's a powerful statement,” Witherspoon says. “We want to prove that exercise can be fun.”

Some fitness groups already are seeing the benefits of the interactive equipment even before studies have been completed.

“The Y's are already going crazy over this,” Witherspoon says. “I won't be surprised if the health clubs won't start picking up on this. Retention is their problem. If you can improve retention, that's what those clubs want. If it's proven that these programs improve retention, it would be a no brainer !”

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