

## InterActivity 2008 Spotlight

You could say that we're saving the best for last. Saturday, April 26, is the last day of InterActivity 2008 and the day of ACM's 2008 *Great Friend to Kids Award* presentation and the Healthy Partnerships Build Healthy Communities post-conference — two stellar sessions that will inspire you to learn more, make connections and take action. In this issue, we spotlight this year's *Great Friend to Kids Award* recipient Dr. Joe L. Frost, who is often called the contemporary father of play advocacy. We also interview Denver-area play researchers presenting at Thursday's Current Play Research salon. Finally, you'll read a who's who list of community partnership professionals in ACM Initiative News, all of whom will present at the post-conference.



Dr. Joe L. Frost

Joe L. Frost, Ed.D.; L.H.D.  
*Parker Centennial Professor Emeritus,  
University of Texas (Austin)*

Dr. Frost has been a leader in research on children's play and playgrounds for more than 25 years. He has published 15 books and more than 100 articles and reports on early childhood education, child development, children's play and play environments and child safety. He has lectured internationally and served as a consultant to the U.S. Department of Education, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice. Dr. Frost has served as president for the American Association for the Child's Right to Play, the Association for Childhood Education International and the International Play Association, USA.

**ACM:** Children aren't playing outside as much as they used to due to several factors, including parents' fear for their child's safety, confusing and frequently changing national safety guidelines for playground equipment, less green space and less time allocated for recess and free play and more time dedicated for structured learning and testing. In your opinion, which of these is the most threatening to a child's need to play outside?

**Frost:** All these factors are influencing the diminution of recess and free play. I would add indoor technology play, threat of lawsuits and common adult perceptions that play is trivial and inconsequential. Of all these, I believe high-stakes testing, as commonly practiced, is among the most indefensible and damaging educational innovations of the past century. If those supporting high-stakes testing were really concerned about the education of children, they would create programs that emphasize meaningful, real-life problem solving, individualized teaching/learning, creativity, imagination and a balanced program aimed at meeting children's broad developmental needs — including active outdoor play, communion with and learning in nature, the arts and humanities and academics.

**ACM:** Why is "executive function" important to a growing child, and what kinds of research have you done about this topic?

**Frost:** Executive function — learning to regulate one's own behavior — involves the development of a critical set of skills learned through play that is free, active, unstructured and social — play that is relatively unfettered by rules, regulations, standards and admonitions. This is not to dismiss the importance of adult assistance. Children need assistance in learning to plan and evaluate behavior in group and individual contexts, as well as in the classroom and on the playground. This is especially important for children who are, for whatever reason, deprived of play. They appear to serve as the "canaries in the coal mine," demonstrating the destructive consequences of play deprivation.

story continues inside



# ACM

## from the executive director

We are thrilled to be in Denver for InterActivity 2008 and are passionate about this year's theme, *Let's Play*. Meaningful, constructive early childhood play is at the core of every children's museum's mission, and it is one of the primary initiatives of ACM.

The goal of InterActivity is to serve as a "think tank" and a catalyst for developing and leveraging innovative new approaches that will advance informal learning. This year, InterActivity participants will have the opportunity to listen and talk about the latest play research, new techniques for creating playful environments and programs, how to encourage parents to become active "playmates," how to serve as community-wide play advocates and how to better communicate this message to community leaders, donors and the media.

In this issue of *ACMForum*, we took the opportunity to interview Saturday's InterActivity keynote and 2008 *Great Friend to Kids Award* recipient Dr. Joe L. Frost, Parker Centennial Professor Emeritus, University of Texas (Austin). Dr. Frost is recognized for his national leadership in the education community, his groundbreaking work on children's play and his advocacy for a child's right to play.

In addition to the interview with Dr. Frost, we also interviewed two panelists from InterActivity's Current Play Research salon (see page 4) to give you a glimpse into the range of perspectives that will be found at InterActivity 2008. Playgrounds: Laboratories for Outdoor Learning is the other salon, which will include data and compelling information to help museum professionals stay ahead of the play and learning curve.

I would also like to highlight InterActivity 2008's Post Conference: Healthy Partnerships Build Healthy Communities. This workshop is a great opportunity to learn how to take your museum's new or existing partnerships for improving the health and wellness of families in your community to a whole new level. See page 7 for a list of speakers and more information.

Finally, our thanks to everyone who has helped plan this year's incredible conference. The 2008 Program Committee, staff teams from The Children's Museum of Denver and ACM and the ACM Board of Directors have all worked hard to make InterActivity 2008 a play powerhouse.

I look forward to greeting you in person! Until then, please send us your comments and ideas about how we can better serve you and the field.

Janet Rice Elman



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## Dr. Joe L. Frost cont'd

**Frost:** Consider, for example, the growing prevalence of childhood obesity, one of the correlates of play deprivation. Our studies of obese children during recess play show that in general, obesity starts early and progresses with each passing year. We observe a growing pattern of inability to function socially, emotionally and cognitively during play. At ages three to five, they begin to restrict themselves to sitting, swinging and/or watching others play. In the primary grades, with added weight and declining function, they are typically chosen last for games and first to be put out; last to be considered "cool" and first to be rejected by social playgroups. Opportunities for developing social and cognitive skills and emotional well-being are compromised, and "executive function" is at risk. Obesity, commonly considered a consequence of play deprivation, thus becomes a cause. There are, of course, exceptions to this pattern; some children develop coping skills independent of mere physical appearance and competence. Our research is conducted at a school that enrolls more than 500 children ranging in age from two years through early teens. The obesity level is very low, about three to five percent. Most of the children have daily recess, daily physical education and many enjoy regular work and play in the natural habitats and gardens. We believe these extensive opportunities for active, creative experiences are major factors in the low obesity level.

**ACM:** You've written that adventure playgrounds are one of the most desirable play settings for young children. How do you define an adventure playground and what makes it ideal for children?

**Frost:** Adventure playgrounds began in Emdrup, Denmark, in 1943 when a landscape architect, C. Th. Sorensen, observed that children enjoyed playing with scrap materials and junk more than on the "finished" playgrounds created by adults. This observation inspired the first "junk" or "building" playground, later called adventure playground. "Classic" adventure playgrounds include trained play leaders, animals, gardens, building areas, tools, child-built structures, fire pits, storage bins, water and sand, game areas and mixed age groups of children, with special provisions for the youngest children. Several European countries still value these playgrounds and in many areas they are combined with city farms, especially in Germany. A number of playground workers/designers in the United States strive to emulate such playgrounds by integrating adventure concepts, nature and traditional components into playground creations. This integration is capturing the interest of a growing number of "play people" who see a crack in the door to bringing creativity and freedom back to the playground.

**ACM:** The University of the Incarnate Word (San Antonio, TX) houses perhaps the largest children's play and play environment research collection in the United States, including most of your books and research. Is the research available to the general public and is any of the collection available online?

**Frost:** The research collection on play and play environments at the University of the Incarnate Word (UIW) currently houses hundreds of books and reports. Additional volumes are added regularly with the intent of creating the most extensive collection of its kind. We plan to transfer additional volumes from my personal library as writing projects are completed. The collection is available to the public by reservation, easily secured by a phone call to the UIW library. An overview of the collection can be seen on the UIW Web site, [www.uiw.edu](http://www.uiw.edu), by entering "UIW Frost Collection." Portions of the collection will be made available online as technology is refined and resources permit.

**ACM:** What are you currently working on?

**Frost:** In cooperation with University of Texas faculty and graduate students, I direct a three-decades-long research program on children's play and play environments in Austin, Texas, utilizing three constantly changing playgrounds or play yards that feature a wide array of built equipment, nature areas, wildlife habitats and wetlands. I am working on articles to be published in each of the 2008 issues of *Playground Magazine* and just completed research papers to be included on the PlayCore, Inc. Web site; a chapter for the Elizabeth Goodenough book, *Where the Children Play*; and a chapter in a forthcoming book dedicated to the Jane Goodall Institute.

My most extensive current project is writing a history of play and play environments that has been in progress for about three years. The draft seems to be headed in the direction of a book focusing on how children's play and play environments evolved over the centuries, how they came to fall into such a diminished state and how proposed solutions may turn play back on its feet. The manuscript should be ready for a publisher before the end of 2008.

## Thoughts from InterActivity's Play Research Salon Panelists

Deborah J. Leong, Ph.D.

Professor Emerita, Department of Psychology, and Director, Center for Improving Early Learning, Metropolitan State College of Denver (CO)

### What interests you about the ways that children are playing today?

Today's children are not engaging in the same level of mature make-believe plays as they have historically. Children watch more television, play computer games, engage in adult-directed or supervised activities (like lessons) and have less time for make-believe play. Children lack play mentors. Many children never reach the levels of mature play necessary for them to learn important social emotional and cognitive skills. From the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, we know that make-believe play allows children to act at their most mature level — exhibiting higher levels of self-regulation, memory and attention. Vygotsky stated that children “act a head above themselves” during play.

### How has your research shed light on play and a child's development?



At Hawaii Children's Discovery Center, outdoor duck hunting takes on a whole new meaning.

Dr. Elena Bodrova (Mid-continent Research for Education in Learning, Aurora, CO) and I are studying the development of self-regulatory skills (executive function) in young children. We have developed an intervention, Tools of the Mind, that trains teachers on how to foster students' self-regulation by encouraging mature make-believe play and embedding self-regulation practice in all content activities. Our program was studied by Adele Diamond (University of British Columbia) and Steve Barnett (National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University) in a quasi-experimental neuroscience study done on our

Tools of the Mind intervention (*Science Magazine*, November 2007). That study found that children in Tools of the Mind had statistically significant higher levels of executive function/self-regulation when compared with a control group and that children with higher levels of executive function did better on tests of achievement. This study is the first to connect neuroscience measures of executive function/self-regulation with levels of make-believe play.

### What are some unexpected discoveries that your research has yielded?

Our research is based on the work of Vygotsky and his students and colleagues. An unexpected outcome of our work is that rising levels of self-regulation closed the achievement gap for the at-risk minority children in the program as well as lowered the incidence of behavioral problems. For example, in one center, incident reports (made when children are hurt in the classroom) went from 40 to 50 reports per month to one or fewer incidents reported. The influence on classroom atmosphere and social skills was much greater than we expected.

# MemberNEWS

## MILESTONES

Three museums have hired new leadership from within their talented staff. The Board of Directors at **Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose (CA)** selected Marilee Jennings as executive director. First brought on staff in 1987 to direct the capital campaign for the emerging museum, Jennings has contributed to the museum's growth for more than 20 years, most recently in the role of associate executive director. At the **Children's Museum of Southeastern Connecticut (Niantic)**, Christy Hammond, previously director of education, has been promoted to executive director of the museum. Finally, Jennifer Farrington will become president and CEO at **Chicago Children's Museum (IL)** beginning in May. This follows Farrington's promotion last fall from the museum's chief operating officer to president.

On March 13, The U.S. Senate confirmed Julia Bland, executive director of **Louisiana Children's Museum (New Orleans)**, as one of four presidential nominees to serve as members of the National Museum and Library Services Board. The Board advises the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). Bland is the second leader from the children's museum field on the current Board; President and CEO Jeffrey Patchen of **The Children's Museum of Indianapolis (IN)** has served on the Board since 2007.

**Children's Museum of Wilmington (NC)** welcomes Richard Lawson as its new executive director. Lawson has a background as an educator and principal at schools in southeastern North Carolina and is committed to increasing the museum's partnerships with area schools.

Museo Pambata convened the first Asian Children's Museum Conference in Manila, Philippines, February 23-26. 150 participants attended plenary sessions, workshops and small group discussions focused around the theme "Children's Museum as Bridges of Peace." Speakers included representatives from **Tropenmuseum Junior (Amsterdam, The Netherlands)**, **The Ruth Youth Wing, Israel Museum (Jerusalem)** and **Lord Cultural Resources (Toronto, Canada)**. Museo Pambata President and CEO Nina Lim-Yuson hopes the conference will become a biannual event.

Dr. Toni W. Linder, Ed.D.

Professor, Child, Family, and School Psychology Program, University of Denver, College of Education (CO)

### What interests you about the ways that children are playing today?

In many ways our children are playing differently, and less, than in previous generations. New play materials are electronic and may promote less creativity. Toys with lots of “bells and whistles” often are limited in the ways they can be used. For example, new electronic toys often promote linear thinking and looking for the “right” answer. Electronic toys frequently also reinforce individual, rather than group problem solving, which may result in an increase in isolated play for young children. Too much isolated play may potentially have negative implications for the development of social skills. A second issue involves the loss of various kinds of play. The limits on rough and tumble play, or even games such as tag, set by many parents and preschools inhibits social problem solving and negotiation of social roles in play. The litigious nature of our society also has resulted in the elimination of many types of play equipment that offered important sensory input for neurological development. These include teeter-



Kids get playful in “Under my Feet and Over my Head” at The Children’s Museum of Denver.

totters, certain swings and merry-go-rounds, which provide vestibular (or movement) input and help children develop a sense of “body in space,” balance and equilibrium, understanding of the parameters of movement and feed the important sensory information about the environment to the brain. A third issue is related to fear and concern for interpersonal safety. Few children now play freely outdoors, roaming their local neighborhoods and constructing their own playgroups. The fear of abduction and sexual abuse has led parents to seek organized, adult-supervised athletic activities, social clubs or afterschool classes and enrichment activities for their children. These organized activities are seldom playful in nature. A fourth issue relates to changing policy. With No Child Left Behind and the concurrent emphasis on academic progress, we may be experiencing what Dr. Edward Zigler, one of the founders of Head Start, has labeled “play under siege.” Some schools have eliminated or minimized the amount of time allowed for play, both in the classroom and outdoors.

### How has your research shed light on play and a child’s development?

Much of my work points to the interrelatedness of various areas of development. We have often looked at children as being comprised of pieces — language skills, motor skills, social and emotional skills and cognitive skills. My work looks at how all of these areas interact to promote development and, in the case of children with special needs, may work to inhibit development. For example, how a child communicates influences social interactions and behaviors. Children’s play preferences (and dislikes) are related to their motivation to explore and learn about the environment and relationships within the environment. I am looking at how observation of a child’s play can provide an authentic, functional approach to assessment that can tell us about the child’s level of development and individual learning approaches. In addition, I also look at how play enhances development and how adults and peers can facilitate a child’s development through promoting higher levels of play and play interactions across all domains of development. I have developed Transdisciplinary Play-based Assessment and Transdisciplinary Play-based Intervention as processes for encouraging parents and professionals to address children’s needs holistically and through play-based approaches. Emerging from this work, I also developed Read, Play, and Learn — a literature and play-based approach that integrates all developmental areas, emergent academics and play into a transdisciplinary classroom curriculum.

*Drs. Leong and Linder will join Suzanne Gaskins, Ph.D., professor of psychology, Northeastern Illinois University (Chicago), and moderator Jeri Robinson, vice president of early childhood programs, Boston Children’s Museum (MA), in presenting at the Current Play Research salon, Thursday, April 24, 1:30 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.*

# ACMNotes

## NEW MEMBERS - PARTIAL LIST

ACM welcomes its newest members!

### Emerging Museums

The Trailhead Discovery Museum & Arts Center (Crested Butte, CO)  
 Children's Museum Alliance, Inc. (Prescott, AZ)  
 Musee des Enfants (Paris, France)  
 Scientopia Discovery Center Inc. (Napa, CA)

### Individual

Sarah Hibler (West Tisbury, MA)  
 Tamar Landesberg (Ramat-Hasharon, Israel)  
 Pooja Munjal (New Dehli, India)  
 Michelle Perera (Rancho Cucamonga, CA)

### Staff/Students

Kris Nesbitt (Chicago, IL)  
 Marie Ham (Bolivar, NY)  
 Stephanie Deverich (Idaho Falls, ID)  
 Padmoute Gunraj (Miami, FL)  
 Dana Wilson (Rexburg, ID)

## Start Implementing Wakanheza Principles and Practices in Your Museum

Minnesota Children's Museum (St. Paul) has launched the online toolkit for its *Wakanheza* project, which received the 2007 *MetLife Foundation and ACM Promising Practice Replication Award*. The toolkit trains staff in positive ways to support parenting in public, particularly in challenging situations.

Access the toolkit from Minnesota Children's Museum's Web site at:

<http://www.mcm.org/wakanheza.shtml>



*Wakanheza* is the Dakota word for "child" and its closest English translation is "sacred being."

## ACM NEWS

### iMIS-Powered ACM Members Only Web site

We've customized new features on the ACM Members Only Web site specifically for you and each member of your staff. ACM emailed all members their logon and password information on January 3, 2008. Any staff member at your organization can create their own logon.

**How to get there:** [www.ChildrensMuseums.org](http://www.ChildrensMuseums.org)

### HOW TO LOG ON

Click the red Membership tab on the ACM Web site and select Members Only from the drop-down menu. Enter your logon and password and you're in!

Forgot your logon? Email [acm@ChildrensMuseums.org](mailto:acm@ChildrensMuseums.org)



### LOCATING INFO ON THE MEMBERS ONLY WEB SITE

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Welcome, Jane Doe!

This site makes it easy to interact with us when and where it is convenient for you.

From this site you can:

Find content from the previous Members Only site, including the Bulletin Board, Grant & Award opportunities, Good to Grow! Info, Request a Query, etc.

- Access Members Only content
- Manage contact and profile information
- Search the ACM Museum Membership Directory
- View and register for InterActivity

Register for InterActivity. It's secure, and ACM now accepts American Express and offers a pay-by-check option.

The ACM Membership Directory is now online! Find more than 100 points of data, from budgets to facility size, on open museums.

Have a new phone number or email address? Update your contact information with ACM so you continue to receive updates and opportunity emails.

### MUSEUM MEMBER DIRECTORY SEARCH

• Search for a museum(s) by contact person, institution, state or country

• Click on the institution name to pull up data

**Amelia Park Children's Museum**  
 29 S. Broad Street, P.O. Box 931  
 Westfield, MA 01086

Mailing Address:  
 P.O. Box 931  
 Westfield, MA 1086

Fax: fun@amelapark.org  
 Email: http://www.amelapark.org  
 Web Site:

Contact: Jennifer Kinsman, Executive Director  
 Head of Institution: Jennifer Kinsman, Executive Director

#### General Information

Museum Classification: Children's/Youth  
 Institution's Governing Body: Private Non-Profit  
 Sponsoring Institution: No  
 Incorporated: 1995  
 Total Planning Time: 2 Years  
 Opened to the Public: 1997  
 Most Recently Expanded: 2006  
 Targeted Age Level: 1-10 Years  
 General Operating Hours: Mon, Thurs, Fri 10a.m.-4:30p.m., Sat 10a.m.-1p.m., Sun 1p.m.-4p.m.  
 Admission Prices: Adult \$3.00, Child \$3.00, Senior \$2.50, Other rate - Under 1 Free  
 (See Photo Credits: 00000000)

#### Search ACM Open Museum Members

Last Name, First Name (Contains):

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ID	Name/Address	Email/Phone
1204	Jennifer M Kinsman Amelia Park Children's Museum P.O. Box 931 Westfield, MA 1086	fun@amelaparkmuseum.org (w)
625	Paula Peterson The Children's Museum in Easton P.O. Box 417 North Easton, MA 2356	paula@childrensmuseumeaston.org (w)(508) 230-3789
699	Lou Casagrande Boston Children's Museum 300 Congress Street Boston, MA 02210-1034	tlr@bostonchildrensmuseum.org (w)(617) 426-6500

## MEMBER EXHIBITS & PROGRAMS

"Children of Hangzhou: Connecting with China," sponsored by State Street and the National Endowment for the Humanities, will open May 14 at **Boston Children's Museum (MA)**. The interactive exhibit explores contemporary Chinese life and the ways children and families living in the modern metropolis of Hangzhou balance modernity and Chinese tradition and negotiate urban and rural values. The exhibit showcases the historic city of Hangzhou through the eyes of four Chinese children who introduce important elements and settings of their daily lives, including a classroom, an apartment, a children's library and a country farm. Boston Children's Museum, the exhibit's venue through January 4, 2009, is the first stop in a three-year exhibit tour throughout the U.S. and Canada.



"Children of Hangzhou: Connecting with China" opens at Boston Children's Museum in May.

**DuPage Children's Museum (Naperville, IL)** has opened its redesigned "Math Connections Neighborhood," underwritten by Tellabs Foundation. The array of new hands-on exhibits features a full-body crawl-through kaleidoscope, a big jumping mat and a huge balance beam. The exhibit areas allow children to explore math fun as they estimate, balance, classify, measure, sort, graph and explore geometry — making it easier for them to develop fundamental skills that will help them succeed in the future. The museum is introducing new math programming to complement the exhibits.

In preparation for the opening of its "ABC Garden" outdoor exhibit, **Betty Brinn Children's Museum (Milwaukee, WI)** is inviting children and families to bring their little green thumbs for an evening of gardening. Participants will fill whimsical garden boxes with flowers and plants that begin with each letter of the alphabet, from azaleas to zinnias. The event also will feature gardening programs, crafts and a story reading. The garden will open to the public on June 14.

## ACM INITIATIVE NEWS



### InterActivity 2008 Post-Conference Healthy Partnerships Build Healthy Communities

Saturday, April 26, 12:30 - 4:45 p.m.

Adams Mark Hotel, Denver, CO

*Pre-registration required; cost is \$50, includes lunch and materials. Participation limited to 80 individuals.*

Wrap up your InterActivity experience in Denver with a bang! Whether embarking on a new partnership or seeking to "tune up" an existing one, workshop panels and discussions will help attendees energize partnering practices while learning about new large- and small-scale opportunities for their museums.

#### Keynote Speaker

Chris Walker, director of research and assessment for the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, will provide a broad look at partnerships — assessing conditions for success and community mapping, with an emphasis on the process and challenges of collaboration and looking at impacts on communities and organizations.

#### Panel Speakers

- \* Kimberly Perry, Alliance for a Healthier Generation/  
William J. Clinton Foundation
- \* Lisa Franco, Local American Heart Association (CT)
- \* Carol Brennan-Smith, Stepping Stones Museum for  
Children (CT)
- \* Mike Turpin, United Healthcare, Northeast Region
- \* Liz Hufford, American Heart Association, National  
Center (TX)
- \* Jessica Luke, Institute for Learning Innovation
- \* Marilee Jennings, Children's Discovery Museum of  
San Jose (CA)
- \* Nora Moynihan, Port Discovery, the Children's  
Museum in Baltimore (MD)

*Please visit the Registration Desk onsite to add this workshop to your InterActivity registration.*



1300 L Street, NW, Suite 975  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202-898-1080  
Fax: 202-898-1086  
acm@ChildrensMuseums.org  
www.ChildrensMuseums.org

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**Building the capacity of children's museums to serve as  
town squares for children and families where play inspires  
creativity and lifelong learning.**

**Look for the ACM Staff  
at InterActivity 2008**

*ACMForum*, a benefit of ACM membership,  
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Questions? Comments?

Contact:  
Association of Children's Museums  
1300 L Street, NW, Suite 975  
Washington, DC 20005  
Phone: 202-898-1080  
Fax: 202-898-1086

*ACMForum* submissions can be emailed to:  
acm@ChildrensMuseums.org



From left to right: Karen Maude, Lila Elliott, Diane Kopasz, Eliza Katz,  
Chandi Rajakaruna, Janet Rice Elman, Kathleen Kelly Ngo and Korie Twiggs