
In Memoriam

JOE L. FROST

JOE L. FROST, the renowned scholar and educator who advocated for the importance of free, outdoor play, playgrounds, and recess, died on February 17, 2020. Frost was a charter member of the editorial advisory board of the *American Journal of Play*. In his more than fifty years of research, including twenty books and multitudes of articles and reports, teaching, consulting, and service, he became one of play's greatest champions.

Born in Parks, Arkansas, on March 25, 1933, Frost grew up on a small farm where he played in the woods, fields, and streams as well as in the nearby schoolyard, streets, vacant lots, and junkyards. He earned a doctorate in education from the University of Arkansas and taught for two years in the department of child development at Iowa State University. In 1966 he joined the department of curriculum and instruction at the University of Texas in Austin, where he taught for thirty-four years before retiring as Parker Centennial Professor Emeritus in 2000.

While at the University of Texas, Frost helped build the early childhood education program and began to focus his research on play and play environments. In 1973 he led the launch of the University of Texas Play and Play Environments Research Project, which started with building playgrounds and conducting research studies at Redeemer Lutheran School in Austin. Decades of research at this and other sites demonstrated the necessity of children's free, spontaneous, and natural play in physically challenging spaces. This research fed several of his scholarly books, including *Children's Play and Playgrounds* (co-authored with Barry Klein 1979), *Play and Playscapes* (1992), *The Developmental Benefits of Play* (coauthored with Pei-San Brown, John A. Sutterby, and Candra D. Thornton 2004), and *A History of Children's Play and Play Environments: Toward a Contemporary Child-Saving Movement* (2010), explored the history,

design, and developmental benefits of children's playgrounds.

In addition to his research, Frost's expertise and advocacy led him to serve as president of the Association for Childhood Education International and the International Play Association USA. He also acted as a consultant to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice, as well as an expert witness at trials for children who had been injured or died from the result of playground accidents. For his lifetime of work and service, the International Play Association USA gave him its Doctor of Play Award in 2004 and the Association of Children's Museums honored him with its Great Friend to Kids Award in 2008.

Throughout his career, Frost pressed for educators, politicians, policy makers, and adults in general to take children's play seriously. Lamenting what was wrong with America's playgrounds in a 2008 *American Journal of Play* interview, he explained, "We can't go home again to the time when virtually every child worked and played in the natural playgrounds of creeks and hills, mudholes, junkyards, overgrown lots, and fields and barnyards, but we can show the world how to bring little pieces of such rich, nurturing places to our schoolyards, neighborhoods, and cities."

—Jeremy K. Saucier