

CREATIVE DRAMA

IN GROUPWORK

SECOND
EDITION

Sue Jennings

ROUTLEDGE



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EDITION**

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This book is dedicated with much love to my mother Alice Edna Jennings, a dancer and counsellor, who was a very creative person herself.

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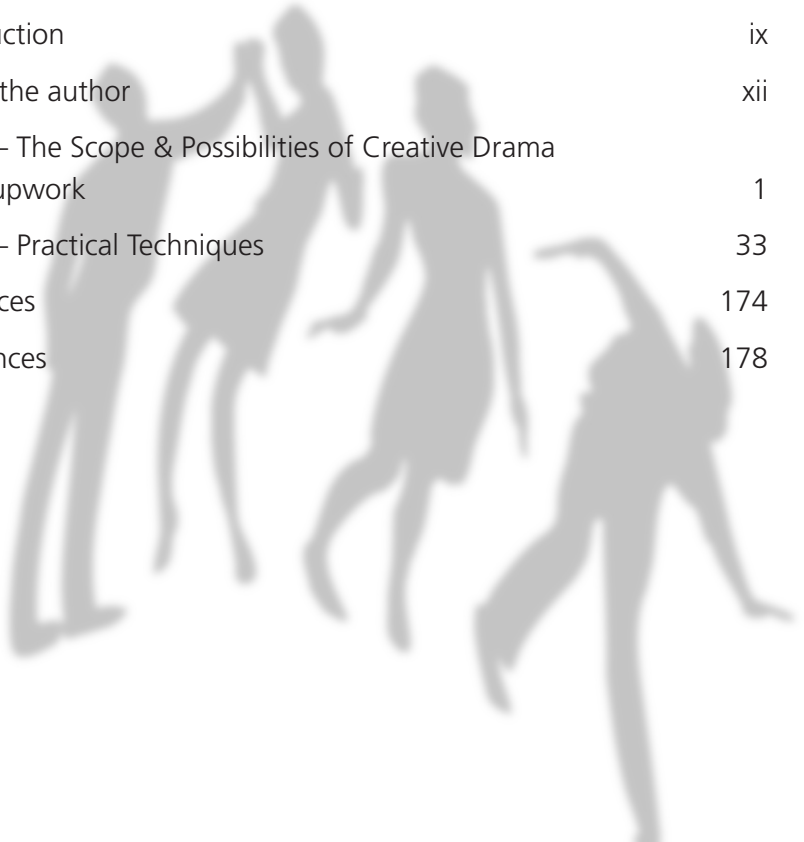
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Preface to the Second Edition

Since this book was first published in 1986, much has changed in the fields of therapies and work with people with special needs. Language has changed, organisations have changed and training and the 'professionalisation' of many activities has shifted the whole landscape of this type of work. All the arts are now accepted as 'Arts Therapies' and are State Registered with the Health Professionals Council (HPC): dramatherapy, art therapy, music therapy and soon dance-movement therapy. There is now protection of title so that no one may call their work one of the arts therapies or refer to themselves as an arts therapist unless they have undertaken an approved course of training that leads to a recognised qualification. These training courses are taught at Masters level by universities (see Resources).

This means that we need to be careful of how we describe our creative groupwork and I am pleased that I thought of this title at the time. There is no legislation concerning creative drama in groupwork, which is a practical approach but it is not therapy. It may well be therapeutic and have a therapeutic effect on participants.

Overall, I am pleased to say that there is much more acceptance by medical staff of the creative arts in the realms of 'mental ill-health' and 'learning needs' and a greater understanding that it can have a primary effect on people's brain development. Small children in particular benefit from a creative playful relationship that will help them develop resilience and confidence.

Many of these techniques can be adapted for work with children, as I have always said – it is time to find the treasure!

New acknowledgements

I have many people to thank for stimulation, support and sources during the preparation of this book. At the beginning I must thank my PA Sue Hall for her constant attention and contributions to this manuscript.

I am very appreciative of my children and their spouses and grandchildren who have taught me such a lot about creativity and play.

Special dear friends including Åse Minde, Alida Gersie and Ann Cattanach, all the A people, have been supportive and stimulating in work and play.

My husband Peter is my dear friend and wonderful fun to be with.

Sue Jennings

Glastonbury 2010



Introduction to the Second Edition

Drama for all

Although many readers will be working in clinical settings such as hospitals, others will be involved in the increasing use of community rather than institutional care. There will also be those who work in the educational field. In all of these areas the working climate has been undergoing rapid and often drastic change. Both personnel and equipment are more scarce; and professionals must function as best they can in the context of limited resources.

This book reflects such changes and does not assume that resources are limitless. It is an optimistic book in that it aims to make things possible.

Drama can help all of us, if we choose to explore its potential. For example, it may enable us to acquire the clarity and conviction which we need in the debating group, the administration meeting or with management. It is intended that this book should reduce the historical gulf between 'us' and 'them', between the givers and the receivers, by acknowledging the potential in drama for ourselves and all the people with whom we work.

A book is no substitute for training and experience, particularly in a dynamic medium such as creative drama. Therefore, the reader is urged to take courage and experiment, to seek advice (and, of course, supervision), and to learn by 'reflective action'. It is *not* advisable simply to use these pages as a working manual.

How to use this book

Part I of this book should be read in its entirety before selecting material from Part II. What has been attempted is to provide pointers, to draw attention to issues which may not yet have been addressed by people intending to practise, to share some of the author's considerable accumulated knowledge of the subject, and to stimulate the reader's own innate creativity. The guidelines given in the following chapters will encourage users to try things for themselves and take some risks, so that new ideas and techniques may emerge.

The exercises listed in Part 2 will undoubtedly provide the basis for many group sessions. However, group leaders should discuss and plan and generate their own variations on exercises and games. Above all, there is much to be gained from careful thought before each session, and by reflection during and after the event. Guidance on how to use the exercises in Part 2 can be found on page 33.

A word of encouragement

This book has been written because I believe that everybody is potentially creative, whether worker or client. Some of us have to discover or rediscover our own creativity; and some of us are tired or jaded. Others are daunted when faced with groups that are too large, with clients who have multiple needs and with constantly diminishing resources.

Working with this book won't change your budget. However, it could give you some new energy and sense of worth so that you go on with inspiration.

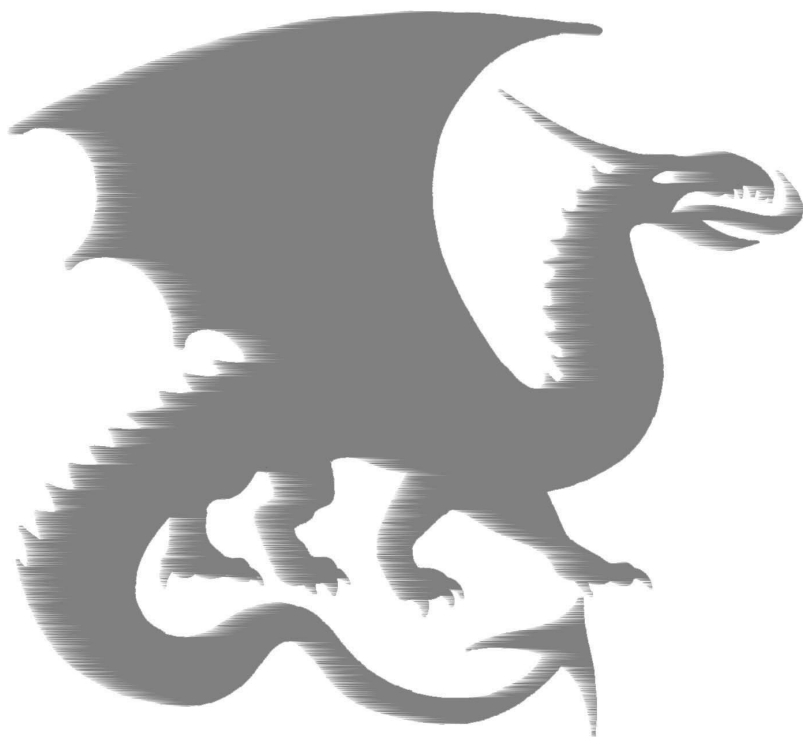
Remember that creativity is catching. If you can feel creative and

spontaneous and above all hopeful, the people you work with will also experience these feelings.

Creative drama is an adventure and, like all adventures, has inherent risks and dangers. Nevertheless it can also be playful, enriching – and sometimes magic.

Go slay the dragon and bring back the treasures!

Sue Jennings



Introduction

A significant proportion of readers of this book will be professionals who are already familiar with running groups of various kinds. Others may have used drama-related activities such as role play with clients in their own field of work. There may also be those who would very much like to venture into the use of drama, but who have as yet lacked the courage to try it.

Many features of groupwork such as group dynamics are broadly similar, no matter what the setting, and it is not proposed to discuss general issues here. However, a creative drama group may differ in certain respects from other therapeutic or social skills groups; and it is the distinctive nature, scope and underlying philosophy of such work that will be considered in this opening chapter. Drama has been used for the purposes of healing, education, spiritual enlightenment and ritual for many centuries in the Western world (viz. early Greek theatre). In other cultures ritual still plays a most important role.

Specific application of therapy through the medium of drama began to take shape in the early 1960s, when mime, movement and improvisation were found to produce encouraging results with groups of people with learning needs and people with mental ill-health. The approaches adopted were so favourably received that nurses, therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers became increasingly interested in the potentialities of drama. Teachers have also explored drama within education, in particular special education, with comparable success, for example, among low achievers. Two fields of work have now emerged, namely Social Theatre and Dramatherapy, each generating new ideas and research. The rationale of this book and the ideas put forward derive

from many years of practical experience in both these fields. The reader who is relatively unfamiliar with these activities may wish to refer to the Bibliography. It is hoped that the increasing number of dramatherapists will also find value in this book. Although it is not written for a specific profession, emphasis is placed on *good practice*, which in turn should be the aim of any worker using creative drama with groups. While the author would like to see trained dramatherapists working alongside other professionals in a whole range of settings, such an ideal situation is still relatively rare. Furthermore, the application of drama in groupwork spreads beyond the remit of a single profession. Many share the philosophy that 'doing' (ie action) is an important way of bringing about change. Sadly, we tend to divide people into the doers and the thinkers. This book, however, is about doing *and* thinking, or 'reflective action'. It is intended to circumvent the professional boundaries of different disciplines and to refer to areas which are of common concern to all who work with people.

Why drama?

In the past, the use of drama in groupwork has either been considered too 'dangerous', and therefore to be avoided at all costs, or else it has been used as a Friday afternoon filler when nothing in particular has been planned. A variation on the latter is the 'Drama is good for you' approach, in which such activities have been used almost as one might prescribe a daily dose of laxative. There exists some notion that drama will do you good but no one stops to ask the question – why? In the following sections there will be an opportunity to ask such questions in order to refine our practice and be selective in its applications.

Creative drama is intrinsic to human development as we can observe in the early reactions between mothers and their newborn children (Jennings, 2009). We imitate expressions within hours of being born and continue to 'dramatise' our situation through dramatic play.

However, drama also needs to be understood alongside theatre where we can see stories and plays that touch our souls. Live theatre cannot be superseded by films or television. The human interaction that can happen between audience and performers can bring about insight and change in ways that often surprise us!

Empathy and security

Whatever the context or composition of the group, two factors will always apply. First, while training in this work increases confidence and improves the range of skills, a leader's attitude and ability to empathise are always of paramount importance.

Second, a well run group has, by its very nature, great therapeutic potential: within it, members can find a sense of community, security and support. Here, they may explore, take risks, increase their understanding of self, build confidence and also make changes. Creative drama in a group setting can be a means of finding out about the unknown whilst, at the same time, having an equal value in reinforcing the known.

About the author

Sue Jennings grew up as a dancer and actress before developing a strong interest in drama and theatre as therapy. She has been working in this field for over 50 years and she has established training courses in the UK, Romania, Czech Republic and Greece. She studied postgraduate social anthropology at the London School of Economics and School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) and completed her doctoral research with the Temiar peoples of Malaysia (published by Routledge as *Theatre, Ritual and Transformation: The Senoi Temiars*, 1994).

Sue has written more than 25 books, seven of them with Speechmark. Sue still works as a trainer and supervisor and conducts play therapy and dramatherapy consultations.

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Part 1

The Scope & Possibilities of Creative Drama in Groupwork

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1 Exploration of Structure and Roles in Group Drama

Structure

Social psychologists have observed that we organise our lives in a dramatic structure or framework. We can view ourselves and others in a series of scenes and episodes, some of which have a consciously predictable structure, such as when we organise a celebration or a formal meeting. Such scenes have a conscious 'test' and usually the 'roles' are prescribed. Each scene has its 'key actors', a 'supporting cast', and a known ending.

There are other scenes which do not appear to be predictable – chance meetings; informal gatherings; daily interactions with the family. However, on examination we find that many of these scenes can have predictable elements including an unacknowledged 'sub-text', 'roles' which may be inflexible, and a seemingly inevitable ending.

During the course of certain creative drama exercises, a formal and less formal structure of interaction can be explored by members of the group.

Embodiment-Projection-Role (EPR)

EPR is a very useful developmental structure that can be used with any type of group and ensures that you follow a developmental progression in the groupwork. EPR follows the same developmental sequence that takes place in child development from birth to 7 years. The first 12 months of a baby's life is mainly physical and sensory (Embodiment); everything is experienced through the body, whether it is large movements or tiny eyelash flutters. Sensory and

dramatic play between mothers and babies form the healthy core of the attachment relationship. Around 13 months the infant becomes more interested in the world beyond the body in terms of objects and substances (toys, sand and water, messy play), progressing to puzzle play, drawing and painting, doll and puppet play; all forms of projective play (P). At around 3–4 years old we can observe that children start to go back into themselves again and instead of projecting roles and stories through the puppets, they play the roles (R) themselves (see Bibliography for further information). This brief illustration shows the importance in the sequencing of Embodiment-Projection-Role and how we can use this sequence to structure our sessions: starting with movement and physical warm-ups, then moving on to drawing and painting and then to playing roles.

Roles

There is sometimes a reluctance to admit that we constantly engage in role playing. It is the word 'playing', perhaps, that makes us feel it is not *real*. Or is it that being in a role somehow implies that we are not being ourselves?

In fact, each one of us adopts a variety of roles; indeed, it is important to remember that we develop the capacity to role play from a very early age – about ten months. It is most significant that we become, as it were, 'mobile in character', even before we become 'mobile in body'. Our role play is further developed through play in childhood and through experimentation in adolescence, whilst also being shaped by the family and outside world.

On reaching adulthood, each individual has embraced a variety of roles which together form our role repertoire, by means of which our external and internal worlds are related.

In creative drama groups, individuals may be found to have difficulty in making connections between these internal and external facets.

Others may have developed rigid and fixed roles in early life; or else inappropriate roles have emerged, often through inadequate or faulty 'modelling'. Drama not only helps us come to terms with our everyday life and facilitates exploration of our inner life, but it also enables us to transcend ourselves and go beyond our everyday limits and boundaries.

Through various forms of dramatic structure and dramatic role play the group leader aims to help group members achieve some of the following:

- *expand* the limits of their experience and stimulate their artistic and aesthetic sense
- *uncover* the predictable structures that trap people in unhelpful behaviours and find some creative alternatives
- *redevelop* appropriate roles through practice and remodelling until they become more natural and less conscious
- *encourage* the extension of role repertoire, ie, a range of roles that are appropriate to different situations
- *create* new possibilities for experiencing scenes in unusual or unprescribed ways
- *discover* ways of connecting internalised responses with external behaviour, and vice versa.

The basic premise for the above section is that we all have potential for some change – of life, of love, of vision – given the opportunity and the right kind of support. One way in which to explore these possibilities is through drama, for which *everyone* has potential – although they may not be aware of it.

2 The Focus of Drama Work in Groups

Those who venture into drama work with groups naturally hope that their approach will produce creative results and encourage expression, while also perhaps bringing about new insights and enabling members to accomplish tasks. However, as described in 'Models of Practice in Dramatherapy' (Jennings, 1983), a specific focus tends to emerge, largely determined by the type and needs of the group members. Three fairly distinct types of focus can be identified. These are described below and form the basis for advice offered in later sections. The exercises in Part II have also been classified according to these categories although many of the activities can be used to achieve different objectives simply by presenting them in a different way, thus making them suitable for more than one of the following types of group.

Focus on Creativity and Expression

The emphasis in such a group is placed on the creative development and aesthetic experience of the participants. Drama activities can include movement, mime and improvisation; puppets and masks; and text and story work. Members may also be encouraged to focus on performance, such as seasonal celebrations. Productions should avoid becoming competitive, but it is sometimes valuable for creative experiences to be shared with a wider audience.

Apart from giving creative and aesthetic enjoyment, a group of this nature provides stimulation, encouragement and a heightened experience of self. The work also increases an individual's confidence through development of the imagination and the tapping of

undiscovered potential. Furthermore, it improves communication and encourages cooperation (an important social skill), for members have to work together to create an improvisation or production. The leader's role as facilitator is most important: a balance has to be struck between allowing the group's creative energies to meander without any sort of direction, and imposing the leader's own opinions and ideas as to how the activity should develop.

Creative drama groups have potential with many sorts of people, whatever their age and circumstances.

Focus on Tasks, Skills and Learning

In a group of this nature, the behaviour and skills of everyday life can be rehearsed and refined or modified through the medium of drama in a variety of activities such as role play. Some skills develop as a by-product of creative drama work; other programmes must be specifically designed. Skills acquired may include simple communication or training in the use of non-verbal signs; initiating conversation; or improving conceptual skills like problem solving. Group members can gain experience of decision making and negotiation, and begin to develop some autonomy as well as cooperative skills. This drama work is very goal specific; and it is often developed, for example, in rehabilitation groups in prisons, psychiatric hospitals and children's homes.

The work planned for a group with a focus on 'skills' is likely to form one part of an overall programme of training or education; and in such a group, the leader's role as 'model' is especially important.

Focus on Insight, Self Awareness and Change

Here, the focus is again entirely different. An 'insight-type' group would be set up for the benefit of particular clients such as acute admissions groups and those people in family and marital therapy (or indeed all those groups already mentioned).

Within the context of the group, unconscious processes may be given creative expression by enacting scenes from past, present and future, and sometimes by recreating the themes of dreams and fantasies. The drama activities selected for work of this kind give members an opportunity to explore their own feelings and relationships within the security of the group.

All the work on role play and media skills which may be used by the 'creative' drama group may also be used here. However, it is understood in an 'insight' group that self discovery and change are the aims and that, for this purpose, the group represents 'life', the family or the outside world. Members are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences, and the group also becomes the scenario within which possible changes can be explored. By use of symbolism, certain mental or physical blocks may be resolved through new insights and increased confidence.

The leader will be likely to run such a group as a 'closed' group, namely to make it available only to the original membership who should remain constant in the relatively long term. Depending upon the degree of experience of the leader and the rationale of the group, 'interpretation of experiences' may not be emphasised. Often, gradually emerging conscious awareness of previously unacknowledged difficulties, *without* the use of verbal analysis or interpretation, proves to be of greatest value.