

Dr Sue Jennings

Life Story: I was born into an excentric family of medicine and the arts, and by the time I was 11 I had lived in nine different houses. Not being allowed to go to University, I had various stage jobs as dancer and actor and drama teacher, until the idea of remedial drama popped into my head and then life! I was commissioned to write a book on the subject and Remedial Drama was published by Pitman in 1973.

Eventually I managed to overcome many hurdles and get myself to University: I enrolled at the London School of Economics (LSE) and graduated well with a Diploma in Social Anthropology. However, the subject of anthropology took hold, and I transferred to SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) and registered for my doctorate. I wanted to go to Malaysia and study the Temiar people who had the reputation for being peaceful and non-competitive, and we all went off to the rain forest where we lived for 18 months with the Temiar people. It was during this time that my ideas were beginning to formulate regarding children's play and the importance of attachment through play.

On my return I established the first qualification in Dramatherapy at Hertfordshire College of Art and Design in St Albans. Having spent 8 years at St Albans, it was time for me to move on, the threads of play and storytelling were pulling me in new directions, with an overwhelming urge to work again with children.

!

Contribution to the Field of Play Therapy: Ever since my encounters with the Temiar people, and the extended time with my children, living in a tribal village surrounded by jungle, my focus has been on children. And not only children but babies and pregnant women. We were fortunate enough to be 'adopted' by the tribe, and my new mother was the senior midwife in our area. This meant I, and later my daughter, were able to attend births and to talk with pregnant women, as well as observe toddlers and young children at play.

Although I had not named it yet, the ideas for Neuro-Dramatic-Play were emerging in my wish to change play therapy practice as everyone had conceived it. I had established the developmental paradigm Embodiment-Projection-Role (EPR), many years before in relation to Dramatherapy. Here it was crying out to be incorporated into Play Therapy. I then realised that EPR needed re-examining in relation to sensory play. Enter Neuro-Dramatic-Play (NDP) which filled this deficit with 'water, rhythmic, messy, dramatic and performative play.' (Jennings 2011, Holmwood and Jennings 2025).

The other area that needed addressing was the lack of any developed 'performative play' in Play Therapy; indeed, dramatic play seems to have less attention compared with the time spent in projective play and stories. I observed that there is a

progression from dramatic play to drama between birth and 6 years. At birth it is largely imitative between mother and baby, then at 6 months old a huge milestone when the baby begins 'lets pretend'. Dramatic Play continues to develop until roughly 6 years when it becomes 'drama for real'. I now established the 3rd paradigm: Theatre of Resilience (ToR), which is from 6 years onwards, when a child continues to develop their drama and theatre skills. By including NDP, EPR and ToR, Play Therapist can enrich their practice and expand the choices of intervention with children. NDP is not a therapy unless it is integrated into a therapeutic system. It can be applied with significance by teachers and parents.

I see it as my responsibility in the coming years to try and encourage playful parents. And I hope a new book with encourage that process.

I live alone and still travel extensively to Greece, India, Malaysia, Holland and Romania.

Play Books by Sue Jennings

Playtherapy with Children: A Practitioners Guide. 1993. Blackwell Science
Dramatherapy with Children and Adolescents. (Editor). 1995. Routledge
Theatre, Ritual and Transformation: The Senoi Temiars. 1995. Routledge
Introduction to Developmental Play Therapy. 1999. Jessica Kingsley
Creative Play with Children at Risk. 2003. Routledge/Speechmark
Creative Storytelling with Children at Risk. 2004 Routledge/Speechmark
Healthy Attachments and Neuro-Dramatic Play. 2011. Jessica Kingsley
Working with Attachment Difficulties with School-Aged Children. 2018. Hinton House/ Loggerheads.
Routledge International Handbook of Play, Therapeutic Play and Play Therapy. Co-Editor. 2021.
Managing Social Anxiety in Children and Young People. 2023. Routledge
The Handbook of Neuro-Dramatic-Play. 2025. Routledge
Neuro-Dramatic-Play and Infant Mental Health. 2026 (forthcoming) Routledge
Neuro-Dramatic-Play for Parents. 2025 (Autumn) NDP Books.

This is a selection from over 50 books that I have published regarding Play and Dramatherapy.

Contact: admin@ndpltd.org

Website: www.ndpltd.org