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Introduction

Working with teachers throughout California at conferences and on-site trainings, I've had numerous conversations about how to effectively introduce and sustain the Grammar Wars method throughout the K-12 grades. The workshops generally start off with exercises that put teachers into the vulnerable, learning position of being students. Most, then, are rather nervous at some point, because the new skills, forcibly conducted at a fast speed to promote spontaneity, are practiced publicly.

Once the group of teachers is thirty to sixty minutes into the workshop process, we begin discussing their students and how the exercises might unfold in their classes. It's here that I found the content of *Grammar Wars: 179 games and improvs for learning language arts* doesn't give the answers to the questions most often asked by practitioners.

As a result, *Grammar Wars II: How to Integrate Improvisation and Language Arts* was designed to answer questions brought up by teachers. Besides new games, many of which were invented or inspired by teachers throughout northern California, there are more thorough explanations of several introductory games, along with lists of the productive and defensive behaviors that will show up. I tried to explain the behavioral goals that the exercises are supposed to produce. It is essential that instructors know what defensive behaviors will show up: the obviously negative ones and the subtle ones that only look like nice, polite behavior (you'll be surprised!).

For those who have been trained in performance skills, and those who haven't, there are aspects of improvisation that are uniquely weird. Because the work is done in empty space where you and your partners do not know initially where you are, where your sketch is going, and how it's going to end, it's a big risk. As a result, relationships between students (I call them actors from day one), and between the students and the teacher are critical, and in fact, are the only controllable elements in the process. Because of that important

aspect and the essential need to set a safe emotional platform, substantial time will be spent discussing a process and strategies for "inviting in" all the players.

If you are not a teacher but are reading this book (too much time on your hands?), you might skip over the sections in which we sound like educational practitioners, discussing how people learn. Over the past four or five years, working with hundreds of teachers around the nation and with employees in non-educational organizations in team-building and goal-setting workshops where I use improv as a strategy, I've been learning more and more about learning: how we do it, how we don't, and as a teacher how I can interfere with learning. I'll even give you tips on how to teach badly but get a great annual evaluation from your administrator. If you are an administrator, put this book down now!

Because this is a book with a goal to provide another effective method for teaching with the goal to produce observable, performance-based skills in you and your students, we will also talk about types of learning (memorization, understanding, and application) and measuring evidence of new learning. Now most of you who have been teaching will probably already know everything I'm going to say about testing or assessment in the pages to come; however, when I started seeing teaching, learning, and testing in the research I conducted with colleagues in northern California, many significant "ah-ha's" arrived at my metaphoric doorstep. So, because Grammar Wars can be done badly, and because we are teachers whose product is learning in our students, we need to know what measurements mean and how far along the learning process we are at any moment in the process.

The final important aspect of this text is the section on assemblies and workshops. Teachers asked, "Why Grammar Wars?" The title of the concept sounds like a battle or a competition, and ultimately, that is where a class or ensemble of actors can go with the improv skills and language arts knowledge they develop — public or in-class demonstrations. (I personally like the idea of students for back-to-school-night doing a Grammar Wars demonstration for, or in competition against, the parents to showcase their learning. I love to see the parents' faces when the students are, for instance, performing

scenes requiring the alternating lines to be shifting syntax types. Everyone's having fun, the kids demonstrate learning the parents haven't grasped, and the parents look like foreign exchange students trying to understand an auctioneer.) So if you and your students like the content and process, the section on workshops and assemblies will give you some initial ideas on how to "show" or "travel" your skills. Take your students to work with students from a younger grade, and will your students ever feel like professional actors, and literate ones at that!

Learning can be quite impressive.

NOTE: The publishers felt it best to avoid any sexist connotation or the cumbersome use of "he/she." Therefore, we have adopted the singular use of the pronoun "they" in this book. According to many contemporary authorities, this is now acceptable English usage. *The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th Edition* states, "For the editor in search of guidance in avoiding sexist connotations the following sources are suggested: Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing,* and Dennis Baron, *Grammar and Gender.* Along with these and other authorities, the University of Chicago Press recommends the revival of the singular use of 'they' and 'their,' citing, as do they, its venerable use by such writers as Addison, Austen, Chesterfield, Fielding, Ruskin, Scott, and Shakespeare."