

# Supercharging Classroom Creativity and Motivation

## Transcript of Podcast Episode 336

**Julie Walker:** Hello and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, Julie, this is a podcast that is, I know, near and dear to your heart because as many of our listeners know, your background is in recreation.

**Julie Walker:** It’s true. I love this idea of supercharging classroom creativity and motivation. My background in recreation but also my background as a classroom teacher. And so starting the year off, you know, it kind of has that built in motivation. It’s a fresh, new school year. You’re seeing fresh, new faces. Your school supplies are fresh and new. So this is kind of an easy conversation to have as we’re preparing for mid-August, you know, early September.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yes. Although we do have to give a word of caution about being too nice in the beginning of the school year. I was recently at a conference, and I listened to an excellent talk. It was called “Teaching with Chips.” And of course, you could imagine. What kind of chips are we talking about? Poker chips, corn chips, potato chips, fish and chips. But no, it was teaching with Mr. Chips.

**Julie Walker:** Mr. Chips, oh!

**Andrew Pudewa:** And so it was a little elaboration, if you will, on the very short book *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, which has been in print continuously since it was written and is a interesting window into the world of British boys’ schools from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. And one of the things ... This is a professor who’s giving the talk. He said, you know ... A lot of people say, “Never smile until November.”

**Julie Walker:** Well, and Dr. Dobson says that, and I have a lot of respect for Dr. Dobson. However, I don’t agree with that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yes. Well, I’ve always tried to do that. That way, you know ...

**Julie Walker:** Not smile until November?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Exactly. But sometimes I laugh at my own jokes. So you know, what can you say?

**Julie Walker:** Okay, wait a minute. Just going to interrupt and just say to our listeners: He is lying. He does not wait until November to smile, and we have proof of that, Andrew Pudewa. On

these *Structure and Style for Students* videos, you are smiling the very first day, every single time.

**Andrew Pudewa:** We all make mistakes. Anyway, so if we go into this supercharging classroom creativity ideas, I would just caution people not to try and implement all these ideas right at the same time, but to save them for, you know, the more bleak months when people are a little tired, or the skies are getting darker and things like that.

**Julie Walker:** Okay. Well, we actually surveyed a group of accredited instructors from IEW. These are the instructors who have gone through the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* workshop and completed all the practicum assignments with fidelity. So these were evaluated. They were judged; they were critiqued. They were sent back if they were not correct.

And the teachers resubmitted them; they passed. Many of these instructors went beyond the lowest level, the Registered Level, and actually showed proficiency in classroom teaching by becoming Certified Instructors. Just a big shout out to these people that have actually done the work. So we're not just throwing out ideas from people who don't really know what they're talking about. These are kind of like the cream of the crop of IEW instructors. So ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, what kind of ideas do you have from them?

**Julie Walker:** Well, I wanted to start with Chris. She had actually six different suggestions, but I'm not going to mention all of them because as you say, there's just so many. But she talks about this idea of having her students take turns bringing a joke to class and telling it. I thought you would like that one. So practicing a little bit of public speaking, will they be the student that's selected to be able to bring a joke? That's motivating. That's creative. I like that idea.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yes, but depending on who you're teaching, the age and maturity of students, you probably want to vet these jokes before you just let a kid stand up and tell one. So I ... You know, when I tell jokes, and then there's a student who says, "I've got a joke," I always say this, "Write it down and hand it to me, and if I like it, then either you or I will tell it."

**Julie Walker:** That's good.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So you could segue-way that into a writing assignment. I've actually seen kids who hate writing anything, but in order to earn the privilege of me telling their joke, they'll write it down.

**Julie Walker:** I like that. That's a very good idea. I have one more from Chris I wanted to share. And this would be something that you would do later on in the school year, and that is have pairs of students use all five dress-ups in one sentence that makes sense. Then the groups read these aloud. Now there are six dress-ups unless the because clause has been introduced as an opener, and then you can drop the number six.

I mean, that's very technical, but I just wanted to make sure all of our listeners know that Chris knows what she's talking about. This is a more advanced student. But to use all six dress-ups in a sentence, five or six dress-ups in a sentence, that would be pretty hilarious actually.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yes. And that would be a good activity to do with a partner.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, yeah, definitely. Well, that's what she says.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And the operative words in that are "makes sense."

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. Good. Okay. Well, you have this list as well, Andrew. Any of these that pop out as something that you thought would be good?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, a lot of teachers have taken this idea of earning tickets. And you know, an economic system can be very motivating for certain types of kids. And whether it's a classroom at school or maybe a homeschool co-op type of environment, if you have these tickets or points of some sort ... I think the tickets are nice because you can touch it. You can hold it; you can lose it. It has value.

**Julie Walker:** I did do that when I was teaching in first and second grade. I had a combo class, and we did use poker chips, you know. And that way it was white was one. And that way if I ran out of white chips, I could cash it in for red. And, you know, the kids would show up when they'd have blue chips in their jar.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So, but the idea of then having a midyear or end-of-year way to cash in the chips. Now, most teachers have from time to time spent a little or sometimes a lot of their own money on things for their classrooms. So we're not suggesting an added expense to the teacher, but what's very interesting is how kids are motivated by white elephant items.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, yes, it's so true.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I remember when I was young, there would be a fundraiser at the yacht club, and there would be this stuff that people would bring in that clearly was borderline useless, probably needed to just go into the trash. But they would auction this stuff off. And I remember, you know, saving up my money to go to the white elephant auction at the yacht club.

And I'm sure, you know, my parents were not thrilled with the stuff that I brought back from that because it eventually finds its way into the trash. But there's something enjoyable about being able to buy something that's weird, that is outside the norm, that you wouldn't see at Target. So I kind of like that idea. And then, of course, the idea would be the parents contribute. And this is a great service to the parents because every person I have ever met has stuff they don't need but isn't willing to throw away because it might have value. So if parents would bring in, you know, one or two or ten things that they would like to get rid of and need an excuse, this is a perfect excuse.

And then of course, your students will use their tickets to buy someone else's useless stuff, which they will carry home. And eventually you'll have to throw it away, but it's a recycling in the best sense of the word.

**Julie Walker:** So what do you give tickets for, Andrew?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I don't do tickets. What would you give tickets for? I would say being on time, finding a joke I don't know, getting 100 percent on a paper. And then you could just, I know, have any other things from cleaning the toilets to, you know, being encouraging. I don't know. You have to be careful with economic systems that it doesn't just seem arbitrary or random like, "Whoa, here's Noah. I really like him. Here, Noah. You get a ticket."

**Julie Walker:** Right.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Julie, on the other hand ...

**Julie Walker:** Good. So those are some great ideas. So I have another one that you ... You do this in the *Structure and Style for Students* classroom, but this is a variation of what you do, and that is you start the class with a writing assignment at the beginning of the year. And then at the very end of the year, you give them that exact same writing assignment to see how much they've improved over the year.

And it may not be an enjoyable exercise in terms of motivation, but Janet has a spin on this in terms of creativity. She says:

I have an old desk calendar, which is actually 365 art pictures. (I would love this calendar.) Students pick one in the first day of class and describe it the best way they can when our lessons end, and we've gone through all the units, I give them the same picture to describe again. They're always so pleased with their progress, and it demonstrates specifically how their writing has improved.

So I like the idea of them getting to choose their own picture and then using that same picture again. So it kind of gives that creative way to perhaps motivate them to be able to do this exercise.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, I would do that. Only I wouldn't let them pick the pictures. I would just randomly pick and hand it to them.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, that's true. Yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So that there wasn't any potential for conflict or preferential treatment in terms of "I want that picture."

**Julie Walker:** Well, and then what you would say is they need to say thank you when you hand them the picture. And it would be a lesson on gratitude.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And if they hate the picture, well, that's just Providence giving them a little nudge to be better.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. Okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** This is a very Webstersque idea here. Jeremy, who evidently was teaching in South Korea or maybe still is, has been doing poetry memorization, which, of course, brings joy to my heart. But he said that he made a racetrack where each student had a car. I'm assuming this is like on the wall with paper or something. And as they memorized each poem, their racecar would travel down the racetrack. And this was hanging for all students to see. And this brought out a competitive spirit, and they were motivated to memorize poetry.

So Mrs. Ingham did this with her reading pathway. And the children would start in activities, move to discovery, and then get into the books. And then for every so many short little books they would read, they would go up a step in their little avatar. (She didn't know that word.) That's the one we would use today.

Their little avatar would go up, and so they could see their progress. Webster did a similar thing with a space theme. So he had the solar system, and I guess you'd start at the Sun. I don't know. But for every so many completed compositions, then you would move your little avatar, icon, or whatever to the next planet. And then I can't remember if you were trying to get to Pluto from the Sun or if you were trying to get from Pluto to the Sun, but the idea is you would see that. And so then students would say things like, "Well, can I do an extra writing assignment" so that they could see their little icon move faster.

You know, a lot of people have criticized this idea of publicly comparing progress of students, but it's not really so much comparing students with each other as it is acknowledging effort. And you're not saying that anyone's reading or writing is better than anyone else's. What you are saying is that they have done more of it.

And you know, children are by nature competitive and comparative. So I don't personally have a problem with this kind of thing. And of course, you know, in Mrs. Ingham's day, nobody thought much about any kind of negative emotional impacts on that. But I would guess if Jeremy was teaching in South Korea, he did have, just by nature, very competitive students.

**Julie Walker:** I would think so too. A really simple idea that is almost so obvious it doesn't seem to be worth saying, but yet I'm going to say it. And Nina just says this great advice. And we know Nina. She's very young, but I love that she shares this piece of advice: keep the atmosphere light and energetic by showing personal enthusiasm for what's being taught.

We are motivated, are we not, by these mentor teachers who love what they're doing. And yeah, it could have been a really difficult day. And the kids walk into your class. But to just make a decision to be positive, to be enthusiastic, that just goes a long way to greet those students with a smile. Just reminds me of some of the things you say in your motivation talk.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think we all have that experience of having sat under a teacher who just loves what they're doing, and their love kind of overflows. And you feel loved, and you walk out of there having learned more because the fabric of the experience was just an overall one of exchanging positivity and love.

And it's hard; you know, sometimes it is difficult to muster that higher level of enthusiasm. And you know, I agree with Nina. But you do have to be careful not to feel like every week you have to be more enthusiastic than you were last week. So there's going to be ups and downs there, but you know, that's where humor helps a lot as well.

You know, we've talked about it before in the area of motivation. But for many students to kind of see their writing or their art or poetry or whatever in a formal or more published version, I think it's very motivating. This goes all the way back to Dr. Webster and the *Magnum Opus*. And that was, of course, before there was anything like inexpensive printing or electronic media. But I think he would do it twice a year in some cases, maybe at the end of the first and then the end of the second or certainly at the end of the school year. So it's something that everyone would know about and work toward.

And that is having the opportunity for each student to polish up one more time their favorite writing from that year, whether it was a Unit 3 story, a Unit 8 essay, or anything in between. And then he would actually collect those and bind them into a book called the *Magnum Opus* and put the book in the school library.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, nice.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So then years down the line, younger students would come, and they would see in many cases, their older siblings or older friends of their older siblings who were in the class and were now published. We, of course, can do this in so many more ways. We can create online sites. So for a classroom teacher to create a very simple website and publish student writing, that's a great service to the kids. And then they can send a link to grandma and read each other's stuff and maybe open it up to comment on each other's stuff, moderated, of course.

But that idea for children expanding their audience. You know, one of the things I always talk about, especially with high school students and up but sometimes younger students, is writing is all about audience, right? So this idea that you're writing for someone. And for most kids, they're either writing for a teacher or a parent who's going to give them a grade.

So it gets to be kind of dry and empty after a while. You know, it's like I always say: When you've got a nine year old, and you get all excited about their story and stick it on the refrigerator, that's enough. But when they're twelve, that has very little or even negative appeal. So what is the carry-on from that?

And I think that's publishing. Whether it's online, website ... A school can start kind of a literary journal magazine, ask some local businesses to contribute some advertising or a donation sponsorship, and print it out. And they can give, you know, a dozen copies to everyone. Or a school could do like a whole book at the end of the year and put it in the library, kind of like Dr.

Webster did. So one or more of those showcasing of the students' best work – I think that has a lot of potential value as well. And I see that Marcy mentioned that: a portfolio of polished drafts.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. Well, and so that's either individually by student or as a class or as a school. And of course, I would be remiss if I did not mention our own publication, *Magnum Opus Magazine*, that you can find at [magnumopusmagazine.com](http://magnumopusmagazine.com), but here is some new information for our listeners. We actually publish this, a hard copy of this, periodically.

That makes it a magazine if it's published periodically. Now we don't actually define whether we do that every year or every couple years, but we are planning to publish one this year that will come out in January or February. And so this would be very motivating to your students right now – to get your students to submit, either them personally or through their classroom teacher, some potentially riveting, excellent articles that go into our own published *Magnum Opus Magazine*. And I will say a couple things about that. One is the audience. One of our readers is Dr. Webster, and he's ... can be a little critical of these student submissions. So we want to make sure they're really good. So we want these to be your best work because isn't that what *magnum opus* means – your best work?

I want to mention another idea that was actually submitted by one of our accredited instructors, Kathleen. And she takes that *Magnum Opus Magazine* and has enough copies for her classroom and asks the students to identify the stylistic techniques that are in those articles. And so it's kind of like a treasure hunt.

Can you find the -ly dress-up? Is there any decorations in this? You know, that idea of helping the students discover in other people's work so that maybe they'll be more inclined to include it in their own.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Like a scavenger hunt.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. I like that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. That's good. And of course, you know, this kind of touches on the whole idea of writing contests. So a teacher could probably research options for students of the appropriate age or grade in terms of which writing contests might be available and useful. If you can't find a good writing contest, well, why not start one yourself? Then you have something to do with all those leftover white elephant items.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and if you're looking for a list of writing contests that you could have your students enroll in, you can go to our website: [IEW.com/writing-contests](http://IEW.com/writing-contests). And we have ... Whenever we hear of a writing contest, we put it on there. And you mentioned Marcy. Marcy Harris is one of our own; she is an accredited instructor, but she actually teaches for us in our online writing classes.

And she actually did a blog post about the benefits of entering writing contests. And we'll put a link in our show notes to that and just how motivating that can be to really encourage students to give their best work.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I have noticed in my years of teaching that especially when kids hit about twelve or thirteen and up, it is very hard to cheerlead them into giving extraordinary effort because what they're mostly thinking about is, "I want to get this done so that I can do what I want to do." And I have been frustrated, thinking to myself, "I know this kid could do so much better if he would just try harder." But how do you make that happen? But man, you get kids in a contest, whether it's, you know ... I experienced this with National History Day, speech contests, things where there's going to be this kind of external judgment. They will work ten times harder for a contest than they will just for, you know, a grade or to make a teacher or a parent happy.

So I think we can very often capitalize on that desire to compete. There's positive peer pressure. There's the unknown; there's the excitement. And you know, even entering, for a student it gives a feeling of accomplishment even if you don't win. But as Marcy pointed out, IEW students do very well in contests because they have the tools. What motivates any of us to strive to do our very, very best at some particular time is worth always thinking about.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. Well, Andrew, I think this has been very helpful for our instructors who may be at the beginning of the school year as we are in the Northern Hemisphere or those who are in the thick of things that ... because we have many listeners who are in the Southern Hemisphere and are in their wintertime right now.

I do hope that this was helpful to you, dear listener, and would always welcome your feedback, your questions, your comments at [podcast@IEW.com](mailto:podcast@IEW.com). So thanks for listening.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Thank you.

**Julie Walker:** Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Google podcasts, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at [IEW.com/podcast](http://IEW.com/podcast). Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.