

## *However Imperfectly, Part 2*

### **Transcript of Podcast Episode 343**

**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.

So Andrew, last week we introduced this: your talk “However Imperfectly.” There are seven points in this talk, and in the back of my mind I wasn’t really sure we were going to be able to get through it all in one session. And guess what?

**Andrew Pudewa:** We didn’t.

**Julie Walker:** We didn’t.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, that’s not surprising, given the fact that I barely get through the whole thing in the hour I’m supposed to at a conference.

**Julie Walker:** Right. Exactly.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And I personally ... I really like those conferences that have enough leeway where I can go five, ten minutes over, and nobody’s banging at the door, “Get out; the next thing ...” But I do like to respect people’s time, and on our podcast we really have to since you have determined the ideal length of a podcast is a twenty-minute walk around the neighborhood.

**Julie Walker:** Twenty to thirty minutes. And so sometimes we fudge a little bit, but yep, that’s when I listen to our podcast, re-listen to it because, of course, I’m listening to it right now.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I don’t think I’ve actually ever listened to one of our podcasts all the way through.

**Julie Walker:** We have tens of thousands of loyal listeners, Andrew. It’s kind of overwhelming to me when I think about that, but I digress.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So last week we covered ...

**Julie Walker:** The first four.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay, well, just quickly refresh people. What were those four? The first one is it’s hard not to do to your kids what was done to you.

**Julie Walker:** The second was process is more important than product.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. Process over product, good.

**Julie Walker:** And the third one ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** All kids are different. That was the “duh.”

**Julie Walker:** Yes. And the fourth one—that kind of got us going on a little bit of a tangent, but I think I enjoyed the conversation—was progressive education doesn’t necessarily mean progress.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. The whole word *progressive* does not guarantee progress although I forgot the joke.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, the joke. Okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. It’s really a good joke. And it’s if pro is the opposite of con, then what would be the opposite of progress?

**Julie Walker:** Congress, right? Yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Which only works in the US because you know, other English speaking countries have parliaments, so I don’t know what they think about that.

**Julie Walker:** Right.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But everyone likes that joke.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, it’s true.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So we’re on Point #5.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. And Point #5 is about college and career readiness isn’t.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. That is an idiom that I have come to really hate even more, I think, than the idiom “critical thinking,” which in and of themselves are not bad ideas. I mean, if you understood critical thinking and discussed it properly, it wouldn’t be this kind of nasty thing that it has become for so many people.

Same thing with this idea of college and career readiness. Well, who wouldn’t want their students to be ready for a college and/or career? What irks me ... and I love that word *irksome*. I think the first time I realized what a great word that was is when I was reading *Jane Eyre* with a bunch of kids, and I realized how useful this would be in their lives.

Anyway, what’s so irksome to me is that the idiom was essentially, I think, created or at least popularized by the College Board in their great and fascinating, insomnia-curing book called the *Test Specifications for the Revised SAT*, wherein they believe somehow that this test is going to,

then, force high schools to somehow force students to somehow acquire the skills that will prepare them for a college or career.

**Julie Walker:** Right.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But it doesn't take very long for people to contemplate. Okay, aside from basic competencies such as being able to read, understand, remember something, make simple inferences as well as to be able to do basic math, right, what are the real skills that are beneficial to people when they go into a higher education or a professional or even a trade kind of environment?

So I like to play this mental game with people, say, okay, just stop for a minute. And pretend that you are a person who has to either teach high school graduates, or you are a person who has to hire and supervise high school graduates. Maybe you are, right? Maybe some of our listeners are actually in that position right now.

If not, pretend that you are. Right? So you're a teacher in higher education, or you are a supervisor of high school graduates in some business somewhere. Would you please tell me what are some of the things you would like this person to come to you with, in terms of being ready? Well, what do you think people say?

**Julie Walker:** Cheerful attitude.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Attitude.

**Julie Walker:** Showing up on time.

**Andrew Pudewa:** On time, punctuality.

**Julie Walker:** Keeping their commitments, like I will do my homework on time.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Integrity. Yeah.

**Julie Walker:** Just willingness to be inquisitive and have humility to learn.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Humility is huge, right? Teachability. And you usually get stuff like that before anyone talks about something like reading ability. Communication is up there. It's very high – communication skills.

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

**Andrew Pudewa:** But in a way, people are almost thinking about general communication, which'd involve being able to talk to each other.

**Julie Walker:** Playing nice with others.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Having a vocabulary appropriate to the need, or math. So character always trumps academics. Virtually no one has ever said algebra, right? No one has ever said knowledge of biology. Now there may be certain situations, but you can teach people stuff like that. What is really hard to teach a grown-up kid are all those intangibles, all those character, all those things that are kind of more who they are.

That's what dictates how successful they'll be. And the idea that somehow the College Board is going to force this to happen in schools through tests and curriculum is a complete disconnect with reality. And then I usually will follow up and say, "Where do people learn attitude, punctuality? You might even say *work ethic* if you want to go broader. Humility and teachability. Where do people learn those things?"

**Julie Walker:** Well, and I would imagine that they would say first and foremost in the home. But I do think that a good teacher can absolutely inspire their students to be, to have those qualities.

**Andrew Pudewa:** A good teacher will, and we saw that, I think, in you know, reading Gatto and looking at him as a very exceptional teacher. I mean New York City teacher, the New York State Teacher of the Year twice. All sorts of awards. And then, you know, he gave this speech, basically saying the only way I could become Teacher of the Year is to break every rule in the system.

But we do see those special teachers, and I think we, you know, all of us who came through public schools could look back and name one or maybe two, possibly three teachers out of the whole twelve, fifteen years of having teachers that we can remember. There often are a few that contributed to that. But I would argue it's almost like the soil from the home has to be good soil for those seeds to take root well, at least in most cases.

So I don't know that we can count on a great teacher to make up for a lack of the soil of character that is formed generally at a fairly young age. And so, you know, to the degree that a society places family and home at a high level of importance, I think they will get better people out of their schools. As a society marginalizes the importance of families and homes, the schools will never on a social scale be able to make up for that.

**Julie Walker:** Point #6 is it's really about you, not them.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, this is one of Oliver DeMille's seven keys of great teaching. And I have spoken on those seven keys I think maybe better than DeMille did when he was doing talks, but I've learned a lot from contemplating these seven keys. And one of them is that teaching is really about you, not them. Now we tend to be very reactive. It's as though, you know, oh no, we've got kids now. They're school age. We have to do something.

We react to them, and then we create, you know, systems or programs or institutions to deal with them, whereas—and I guess this is very idealistic; it's not practical in an easy sense—but there's a truth behind the idealism. So John Senior wrote a couple books, one called *The Death of Christian Culture*, one called *The Restoration of Christian Culture*.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, that's good.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And yeah, the second one is way more hopeful than the first one, and this was back in the nineties. Right? But he also wrote a book that was never published, of which I got a bootleg copy, called *The Idea of a School*. And John Senior taught in the Pearson Integrated Humanities Program at the University of Kansas in the late seventies and eighties. And so he wrote this book, *The Idea of a School*, and it's not possible. You could never do it.

But one thing about ideals is that they give you something to strive for. Right? So we have American ideals of freedom and equality and opportunity. We often as a country or as individuals or subsets of communities – we fall short of the ideals. But that doesn't mean they're not good ideals to strive for.

So he said this: First and foremost a school is a faculty of friends, and they attract students. So the students come to the school by the principle of attraction because of the zeal that this faculty of friends have about learning stuff. So you know, you're thinking, okay, there's a bunch of people who get together and read books and have fascinating conversations.

And then there's younger people who say, "Wow, I'd really like to be a part of that." And that is the ideal of a school, and it probably goes back to, you know, someone's concept of "the academy" that we attribute to maybe Plato and Aristotle in the ancient, ancient times. We don't know what that was like, but ...

So how do we create that attraction for learning? And it starts with us. So I point out to parents and teachers: if you are intellectually excited, if you're learning, and you're enjoying what you're learning, if you are well rested, and you have your energy levels up, and this goes all the way to physiology, like sleep and diet and exercise.

But it also extends to mental and spiritual readiness. If you're in good condition, your teaching will go well. Right? No matter what you do, you probably teach well. And the opposite is true. If you are in bad condition, if you are tired, if you are not ... You know, if your nutrition is not supporting your mental and physical energy, if you are feeling lethargic, if you are not interested in what you're doing, you will not teach well no matter how good your lesson plans are, right?

And you know, I think we believe that somehow the trick to teaching well is to have good materials and good lesson plans, and that's called preparation. And then you can walk in and read a script, and everybody learns. Well, I think most teachers who have any experience with that will realize, no, that's not the key.

That may be helpful, right? It's helpful to have good plans, but if you yourself are not ready, then things don't go well. And I've had days when I was simply tired, crabby, uninterested, almost resenting having to do it because I just wasn't happy. And thinking after that class or the day, it would have been better for me just to kick these kids outside and go play Ultimate Frisbee all day than to sit in my class.

But I've had on other days the opposite experience where I thought, wow, that was such a good conversation. That was such a good class. There was laughter; there was learning. They didn't want it to be over. What was the difference? It wasn't the stuff. It was me. It was my condition. So you know, how do moms, teachers, tutors ... How do they get in good condition?

And that is really the subject of a talk I created a couple years ago. I don't know if we've done a podcast or not, but it was called "Culture, Curriculum, Care, and Community," I believe. At least those were the four themes that I was winding together. So you know, that can be unpacked a lot. But what is that care?

Care. *Carus. Caritas.* They're not necessarily cognate in Latin, but I think there is an element where charity and love and caring for both students and for the self as the teacher – it's really very connected, which brings us to Point #7.

**Julie Walker:** Well, can I just sneak in one analogy? And you and I hear this all the time when we fly: "If those masks come from the top, put the mask on yourself first before you help your child or anyone who's acting like a child." That's what I often hear. But yeah, that whole idea ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** Because you fly Southwest, and they make jokes all the time.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, they do. Well they ... Yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** You know the funny thing is I fly so much; I haven't heard those announcements for years.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, what are you doing?

**Andrew Pudewa:** I'm just not aware of what they're saying.

**Julie Walker:** You're not tuned in to it ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** Because I don't care enough to hear it for the two thousandth time. But you're always interested to see what will the Southwest flight attendants say that might make you chuckle. So they're using a principle of good teaching that other airlines don't. In fact, what's interesting now is on larger planes where they have the video screens built in, they don't even have the flight attendants give you the safety instructions. They just play a video, which makes it even easier to completely disregard.

**Julie Walker:** Of course, yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Even though it's right in front of your face, you still hold up your magazine or keep your earbuds in and listen to your audio book or whatever.

**Julie Walker:** Well, it doesn't sound like they care enough, which, of course, now we can talk about seven, which is ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** Love. And you know, it's hard. We all believe that we love our students. You would not last a month teaching anybody anything ever if you did not believe that you love your students. But as we find out in various aspects of life, sometimes through marriage, but often – believing that you love someone is not necessarily translating into active love. And that idea of active love – it is much, much more important, powerful, meaningful, long lasting. And when I say *active*, what do I mean? I guess by showing through both actions and words and intangibles.

And I always ... I love that word *intangibles* because I always think back to Mrs. Ingham. And she talks about the things that are happening invisibly in the classroom environment are sometimes more important than any of the things that you would see on the walls or on the papers or in the books or ... right? And I would say that I have had three great people who influenced my life very, very significantly, the first being Dr. Suzuki, whose first book was titled *Nurtured by Love*, which is a book, you know, ostensibly about music education.

But I wish every parent in the world could read it. And it's a short little book. So that book, *Nurtured by Love*. And then his next book, *Ability Development from Age Zero* – that was about talent education and all that, which we could do ten podcasts about if we wanted.

But from Suzuki, I felt this incredible love. And what that was, wasn't ... It was smiles. It was instruction. It was humor. But more than anything, I got this deep level of confidence that he believed in me. And it wasn't specific to me. He believed in everyone. He believed in every child and every teacher and every parent that they could be great.

And I'll tell you: it really does something for you as a young person. I was there, twenty-two to twenty-five years old. When you meet someone who believes in you just almost absolutely, there's nothing that compares to that. You know, I think that that translates often into marriage, right? And there are hard times in marriage, and everyone goes through it, and you know, a husband and a wife when it gets down to the very end of stuff: "But do you believe in me?" Right? And if you don't, it's going to be hard to make it last.

And I would say that of all the incredibly wonderful things that my wife has done for me, probably the hardest for her but the most meaningful for me is that she believed in me. And we need to translate that into our teaching for our children and our students.

The second very great person that I had the opportunity to spend time with was Glenn Doman. He was one of the founders of the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential, and I spent three years there working with the families of brain injured children. And you know, brain injury: very general term for everything as extreme to totally paralyzed and blind and deaf to so mildly autistic you wouldn't really notice unless you knew what you were doing, what you were looking at, and everything in between: Down syndrome, particularly LAD Down syndrome.

And Glenn had this too. He had the absolute belief that parents love their children enough to make the sacrifices necessary to help fix that kid's brain. And not only did he believe that they would do it; he believed that they could sustain that level of commitment for a lifetime, for decades.

And that was just contagious, and really the whole staff there at the Institutes were living and out picturing Glenn, Glenn's faith in parents to some degree. And so it was like I was living in this whole world where people had this incredible belief and love, very active love showing. Not just kindness to be kind, right? But showing kindness because of the deeper level of love.

And it was a remarkable place. And you know, I often think back. I was so profoundly happy there that I would've stayed forever, but there were some family crises, things that were more important than my career, whatever that was at the time. And so I did leave after three years, but it was so formative. I would not be who I am today. I would not think the way I think if I had not been there. And then I also think, well, I mean, these family crises were very hard at the time. But I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing right now if I hadn't kind of been forced to leave there.

Because I was so happy. I was so happy. I don't know if I would've been happy forever, but I was unhappy to leave. But you know, we have higher responsibilities. And then the third person really was, I would say, the Inghams, and I would say Mrs. Ingham as the head of the trinity of Inghams. But her daughter, Shirley George and then, of course, her nephew, Dr. Webster – they kind of exist in one trinity of one person in a way when it comes to this idea of greatness. But Mrs. Ingham was truly a great person.

You'd listen to her talk, and you just kind of felt like, wow, I'm a better person just for being near her. And I would say to listeners, especially young listeners, when you meet a person and you get that feeling like I am a better human being just by sitting near this person, just by hanging out with this person ... There's something that's beyond what they're saying.

There's something beyond what they're doing. There is some emanation. And you know, not to wax to ... what would you call it? Supernatural. But there are some people who are able to project their spirit in a way that when it touches you, you're just enriched. And it's very, very hard to pinpoint any one thing, but if you meet someone like that in your life, cultivate that relationship.

Because I would say of these three people, Mrs. Ingham, Glenn Doman, and Dr. Suzuki, they all fell into that category of just being remarkably able to infuse their spirit into your aura, and there's this exchange of something intangible.

**Julie Walker:** Right. There we go. There's that word.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And that's what I would call this type of love that is the key to teaching well.

**Julie Walker:** Wow. I just, I feel like we should all applaud. That was amazing.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, no, you don't have to applaud. I mean, it's, you know, the experience that I've had. And unfortunately, sometimes the most important things are the hardest to wrangle into English words and sentences. And I think, you know, many people have had experiences like this.

**Julie Walker:** Yes.



**Andrew Pudewa:** And I guess at my stage in later life, getting old as I am, I see the value of that more and more. And I don't know that I know anyone of that same level of intensity that loved me with that level of intensity, that loved everyone. But there are people on my periphery, and I say, "Okay, I want to be with that person." And I guess I hope to some degree that there are people who feel that way about me even though I'm not going to go on anyone's top three list, I'm sure, but ...

**Julie Walker:** Well, listeners, we've been talking for the last couple weeks about Andrew's talk and article and book called *However Imperfectly*. Just a reminder of what I said at the last episode: If you want a copy of this book, you can buy it from us; you can get it on Amazon, or you can become a Premium Member, and then you get a free copy when you are a free member.

There's a coupon for it, and this is the physical book. And actually my book that I have in front of me now is autographed by you, Andrew. So listeners, you can get your book autographed by Andrew as well.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, we're in our second printing now.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. You know? Yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And not to say, okay, you should buy my book. You know, it's ... I don't really own anything in that book. It's really part of my experience that has been built by so many people over so much time, including you. I would not have written some of that stuff if I had not become first friends and now coworkers.

But you know, I would hope that it's valuable enough that people would consider buying some copies for people that they think would benefit. I know my problem is when I read a book, I think, "Oh, I want to give this." And I'll go buy three or four copies, give them all away, and then I accidentally give my own copy away. And then I have to go buy one, and then I end up buying more.

But there are maybe half a dozen books that I've bought at least half a dozen copies of because, you know, when you find something of deeper value, you are kind of compelled through charity, through generosity to want to share that with people. So I don't know, maybe we should have a case discount.

**Julie Walker:** Thank you, Andrew.

**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.